

The Sabbath



Week Three

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Isaiah 58:1–14



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THE GATHERING TIME

After the movement splintered into various factions in the years following the Great Disappointment, God chose to use the Sabbath to reunite His believers. We cannot ignore the influence of the Seventh-day Baptists on this movement. One prime example is Rachel Oakes Preston, who shared the Sabbath truth with Pastor Frederick Wheeler. When Pastor Wheeler embraced the Sabbath message, a small Sabbath-keeping congregation formed in Washington, New Hampshire, where the first Sabbath-keeping Adventist church still stands today.

Thomas Preble, another influential Baptist, was the first Millerite-Adventist minister to advocate for the Sabbath in print. Sadly, he only kept the Sabbath for three years, but his pieces made a huge impact. Joseph Bates read one of his tracts, accepted the truth, and in early 1845 became arguably the most important advocate for the seventh-day Sabbath. Bates authored his own Sabbath tracts, which convinced James and Ellen White to keep the Sabbath as well. Preble's tracts also reached Marian Stowell, a fifteen-year-old living in Paris Hill, Maine. She accepted the Sabbath and shared the tracts with her brother Lewis and J.N. Andrews, who was also fifteen years old. Both young men accepted the teachings she shared.

The origins of Sabbath keeping within the Adventist movement are humble, but perhaps that's what lends it the most power. God used people from wildly different backgrounds, geographical locations, and ages to illuminate a vital truth—a truth that defined the movement and that has since spread to every corner of the world.



inScribe

Write out Isaiah 58:1–14 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out a portion of the primary passage. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

Why do you think the Sabbath was chosen as the truth to unite the early Advent believers? Why this doctrine and not another one?



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THE CORE REASON

The Seventh Day Baptists believed that truth was self-revelatory—that people would eventually hear about it because it was the truth. They didn't actively preach about the Sabbath for this reason. In contrast, the Advent believers saw the Sabbath as not just an alternate day for worship but an issue that would have major significance in the end times. This view was first expressed by Joseph Bates, who connected the seventh-day Sabbath to Jesus' final work in the heavenly sanctuary using Revelation 14:9–13 and Revelation 11:19. He expressed this connection as follows: the judgment takes place in the Most Holy Place of the Sanctuary, where the ark of the covenant is kept, and the law of God, which includes the Sabbath, is kept within the ark. The believers realized that to ignore the Sabbath would lead to ignoring God's law, the temple in heaven where the law is kept, and the judgment taking place in that temple. Each of the Ten Commandments were at the heart of God's temple in heaven, but the Sabbath commandment carried special significance because it was the commandment that had been forgotten by so many.

Just like the Sabbath needed to be restored when the Adventist church was founded, it needed to be restored in Isaiah's time, too. When Isaiah wrote our key passage (Isaiah 58:1–14), he was fervently calling both Israel and Judah back to the true worship of God after years of wandering after idols. There are many appeals, solemn messages, and warnings throughout the book, and chapters 57 to 59 in particular are a call to reformation—for Israel to return to God, rediscover the true spirit of personal religion, and forsake sin once and for all. The Sabbath was trampled again during the 1,260-year prophecy (A.D. 538–A.D. 1798), when the papacy was at its strongest and declared Sunday to be God's holy day. Isaiah 58 gives hope that the Sabbath will be restored to its rightful place at the end of time.

Isaiah 58 compares and clarifies true and false fasting. The chapter begins by exposing the hypocritical and self-absorbed motives behind Israel's fasting (vv. 3, 4). This is contrasted with what God expected from them: a life of joyful service motivated by love that culminates in the weekly observance and experience of the Sabbath. This chapter shows that keeping the Sabbath while failing to relieve oppression and serve those in need is not true worship. The Sabbath that God wants to restore in the last days is a wholistic Sabbath experience that involves selfless service, not just a debate about Sunday versus Saturday. God isn't just looking for people who keep the right day; He's looking for people who keep the Sabbath the right way.

Sometimes we can get caught up doing what's right for the wrong reason. Isaiah 58 is an appeal to embrace the Sabbath for all the right reasons—to make it a priority to share God's blessings with hurting people. May God help our homes, schools, and churches rediscover the deeper significance of the Sabbath.

AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

Isaiah 58 highlights aspects of the Sabbath that Revelation later expands on. It's both a rest and a test of our love for God and our motives in worship, service, and obedience. Faithfully keeping the Sabbath every week at the expense of other weekend opportunities demonstrates our commitment to prioritizing God over every other consideration. Through our Sabbath keeping, people can see that our devotion to God takes priority over sports, parties, work, or even family. Keeping the seventh-day Sabbath rather than another day shows the trust that we put in the supremacy of God's Word above every form of human tradition and authority.

Unfortunately, it doesn't seem like Israel really caught on to what Isaiah was trying to teach them about the true meaning of the Sabbath since they reacted with hostility when Jesus healed on the Sabbath many years later (Luke 14:1-6; John 5:1-18). God's end-time people also need to relearn the basics of Sabbath keeping, such as its full meaning and how we can correctly experience it so we can explain its significance to others.

God desires us to be authentic in all we do. The Israelites had lost that authenticity, especially when it came to the Sabbath. They were busy doing the external (Is. 58:3, 4), which is often the skeleton or structure of religion, but they had allowed their actions to become the sum total of their faith. They had become blind to the reality of who they were, and that lack of self-awareness is the greatest deterrent to the authenticity God seeks.

Isaiah 58:6, 7 introduces a solution that provides the spiritual antidote to their dead, empty forms of religion. This solution, a new fast, includes an outward-focused ministry that Israel had neglected. Their homes were to be places of healing for the oppressed, the hungry, the outcast, and the poor. Jesus reiterated many of the same points to His disciples in Matthew 25, where He emphasized the importance of how they treat "the least of these." Ellen White's commentary in *The Desire of Ages* says, "When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering" ([1898], 637). Keeping the Sabbath while neglecting to alleviate suffering and pain is superficial and empty in God's eyes; it means nothing to Him.

Verses 13 and 14 directly address practical Sabbath keeping by mentioning three things we should avoid doing on the holy day: engaging in idle talk, seeking our own pleasure, and going our own way. In short, don't be selfish. The Sabbath is about making loving service to God and others a habit, for it is this kind of Sabbath keeping that pleases God, and it is this kind of Sabbath keeping that will change our hearts and root out sin.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this week's passage?
What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

In what ways does the practice of just going to church, sometimes all day, and sitting and listening to services not constitute real Sabbath worship?

If Isaiah 58:3, 4 were written personally for you today, what types of religious service would be listed in place of fasting?



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What relationship do the following verses have with Isaiah 58:1–14?

Genesis 2:1–3

Exodus 20:8–11

Isaiah 66:22, 23

Mark 3:1–6

Micah 6:8

Matthew 25:31–46

Ezekiel 20:12, 20

Hebrews 4:10

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Isaiah 58:1–14.

TO GIVE IS TO LIVE

The Sabbath is truly one of God's best gifts to humanity. It's a period of time dedicated to communion with Him, fellowship with other believers, and selfless service to our Master. Our earthly relationships are very often tested in life, and in the same way, our love for God and commitment to Him is tested through the Sabbath. Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times, and He asks us the same question today through the Sabbath: Do we love God more than the opinions of those who don't share our convictions? Do we love Him more than our family who may not agree with us? Do we love Him more than our jobs and entertainment?

Isaiah highlights that the Sabbath is about living an outward-focused life in which we prioritize loving God and loving others. The lifestyle and worship that Isaiah 58 describes is what Jesus showed humanity when He was on earth. Jesus embodied the true spirit of the Sabbath every time He served others, especially when He chose to heal on the Sabbath.

In Isaiah 58:6, 7, Jesus asks Israel to do eight things to make their light shine. None of these eight things are difficult to do, but that may be the problem. Sometimes we find it easier to do a "tough" task for Jesus than to do an easy task that lies nearby. Christ asked them to feed the hungry and to bring the poor into their houses so that when they prayed, the Lord would answer (v. 9). Sometimes we travel to the other side of the world to tell people about Jesus when we haven't even spoken to our neighbors. Jesus challenges this attitude. When we listen to the cries of the poor and minister to their needs, we're doing for the poor what we hope God will do for us when we cry out to Him. Too often we act like the spoiled child who is very demanding of their parents but unwilling to help with household chores. God is eager to answer our prayers and bless us abundantly, but those blessings will do us no good unless we listen to the needs of others and share God's blessings with them. The true meaning of the Sabbath captures an outward-focused living in which we are open to receiving God's fullest blessings and are eager to share them with those around us.

How we live all week is part of how we worship, for by living in obedience to His will we experience the purest joy. The word "delight" is used twice at the end of Isaiah 58 in stark contrast to seeking our own pleasure. God does not want to restrict our joy; He wants us to experience the delight of true Sabbath keeping that not only nurtures a vibrant connection to Him but also a generous spirit toward others.



inVite

Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.



What is Jesus saying to you through the main text?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

In what ways do we see Jesus finding delight in His own Sabbath experience?

Prayer Response:



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The Sabbath



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of
the chapter, what are some
personal applications you are
convicted of in your life?

What are some practical
applications you must
make in your school, family,
workplace, and church life?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
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THE SABBATH RESTORED

“The Lord commands by the same prophet: ‘Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples.’ Isaiah 8:16. 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 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.

“Again, the command is given: ‘Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.’ It is not the wicked world, but those whom the Lord designates as ‘my people,’ that are to be reprov’d for their transgressions. He declares further: ‘Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God.’ Isaiah 58:1, 2. Here is brought to view a class who think themselves righteous and appear to manifest great interest in the service of God; but the stern and solemn rebuke of the Searcher of hearts proves them to be trampling upon the divine precepts.

“The prophet thus points out the ordinance which has been forsaken: ‘Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord.’ Verses 12–14. This prophecy also applies in our time. The breach was made in the law of God when the Sabbath was changed by the Roman power. But the time has come for that divine institution to be restored. The breach is to be repaired and the foundation of many generations to be raised up. (Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* [1911], 451–453.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



Preble was instrumental in early Sabbath history, yet only a few years later he stopped keeping the Sabbath. How can we avoid this same outcome?

The Whites kept the Sabbath only after reading Bates' tract on it. What does this tell us about how God lead His movement into truth?

How can we avoid our own pleasures but still call the Sabbath a delight?

Is it ever okay to do the right thing for the wrong reason?

In what ways are we offering something to God through our Sabbath worship that He is not asking for?

How do we balance our need for spiritual nourishment on the Sabbath with our responsibility to serve and provide for others?

Why is honoring God through the Sabbath particularly important for end-time believers?