

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Perhaps the most recognizable aspect of the seventh-day Sabbath is that it is a day of rest, as is plain from the meaning of the word. While physical rest is important, sleep is not the focus. In all regards, the Sabbath-rest is a cessation from WORK:

EXODUS 20:8-11 “Remember **the Sabbath day**, to keep it holy [*the seventh-day Sabbath is a holyday*]. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* **you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger** who *is* within your gates. 11 For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and **rested the seventh day**. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

The Hebrew word for *work* here is *m<sup>l</sup>a'kah* (H4399). It means occupation, employment, and work (but “never servile” work—Strong’s). In the literal sense, it means engagement in any business, occupation, profession, or trade that is a source of livelihood. The command of “no work” is used for the seventh-day Sabbath. The prohibition against work is quite extensive, covering just about every living thing<sup>1</sup>:

DEUTERONOMY 5:14 but **the seventh day is the Sabbath** of the LORD your God. *In it* **you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.**

“No work” applies to everyone including family, servants, foreigners, and animals. If servants are not even allowed to perform work, then “no work” seemingly forbids all that can be construed as work by man or beast. But to ensure this is the correct understanding, it is important to take a deeper look.

The four holydays of the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Day of Trumpets, and Feast of Tabernacles have the command “no servile work.” It is translated from two Hebrew words *abodah* (H5656), meaning *bondservant* followed by the same word used for the Sabbath command, *m<sup>l</sup>a'kah* (H4399), again, meaning *work*. Together, they are translated “no servile work.”

However, understanding the difference between “no work” and “no servile work” is difficult from word meanings alone. They do not differentiate whether “no work” more or less restrictive than “no servile work.” The key, however, is found within Scripture.

The seventh-day Sabbath and all the holydays are either under the prohibition of “no work” or “no servile work” except for one. For the Feast of Unleavened Bread,

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<sup>1</sup> Also Exod. 20:10; 23:12.

both terms are used and this provides the key to understanding the differences. Notice the command in the chapter where God proclaims His feasts:

#### NO SERVILE WORK (DUB):

LEVITICUS 23:6-8 ‘And on the fifteenth day of the same month is **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. 7 ‘**On the first day** you shall have a holy convocation; **you shall do no [servile] work on [H5656 = `abodah = bondservant + H4399 = mla'kah = no work]** it. 8 ‘But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. **The seventh day shall be** a holy convocation; **you shall do no [servile] work [H5656 = `abodah = bondservant + H4399 = mla'kah = no work] on it.**’

Scripture plainly designates both the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as “no servile work” (*`abodah + mla'kah*). However, these same holydays were classified as “no work” days when the Law was given at Mount Sinai—but with an exception:

#### NO WORK (DUB):

EXODUS 12:16 ‘On **the first day** [of the Feast of Unleavened Bread] there shall be a holy convocation, **and on the seventh day** there shall be a holy convocation for you. **No manner of work [H4399 = mla'kah = no work] shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you.**

The exception to “no work” here is that food preparation is allowed. This is the only place where both “no work” and “no servile work” are applied to the same days. Moreover, neither is it mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy, the “Second Law,” where Moses made a few minor clarifications just prior to the ancient Israelites crossing the Jordan. In other words, the timing and context are the same for Leviticus 23: 6-8 and Exodus 12: 16. That means that the singular exception of food preparation to “no work”, then, is the key for defining both since the Bible never mentions any exceptions for “no servile work”:

#### BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS:

**NO WORK** = *mla'kah* (H4399)—forbids **all work** by everyone—family, servants, foreigners, and animals.

**NO SERVILE WORK** = *`abodah* (H5656) + *mla'kah* (H4399)—forbids all work EXCEPT for **food preparation**.

Obviously, “no work” is the most restrictive because no one, not even animals, is allowed to perform any kind of work. “No servile work” is the same except that food preparation is permitted.

Having established the meaning of “no work” and “no servile work,” the question now is which apply to each of the holydays? The following lists each holyday; however, even though the two holydays of the Feast of Unleavened are “no work” days, the exception of food preparation places them into the “no servile work” category:

#### NO WORK HOLYDAYS:

- Seventh-Day Sabbath

- Exod. 16:29; 20:9-10; 23:12; 31:14-15; 35:2; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:13-14.
- NOTE: *The seventh-day Sabbath is a holyday—Lev. 23:3.*
- The Day of Covering (Atonement<sup>2</sup>)
  - Lev. 16:29; 23:28, 30-31; Num. 29:7.

NO SERVILE WORK HOLYDAYS (FOOD PREPARATION IS ALLOWED):

- 1st & 7th days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread
  - 1st Day: Exod. 12:16; Lev. 23:7; Num. 28:18.
  - 7th Day: Exod. 12:16; Lev. 23:8; Num. 28:25.
- Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)
  - Lev. 23:21; Num. 28:26.
- Day of Trumpets
  - Lev. 23:25; Num. 29:1
- 1st & 8th days of the Feast of Tabernacles
  - 1st Day: Lev. 23:35; Num. 29:12.
  - 8th Day: Lev. 23:36; Num. 29:35.

The Law of God is purposeful and intentional; therefore, there must be reasons for the two different work restrictions. While there are likely other explanations, there are differences in what the holydays portray when grouped according to “no work” and “no servile work.” While not absolutes, Scripture paints an interesting picture of why one set of holydays prohibit food preparation and the other does not.

Begin with the days that are “no servile work” and, for the moment, omit the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That includes the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), the Day of Trumpets, and the 1st & 8th days of the Feast of Tabernacles. These are observances that picture God bringing children into His Kingdom or executing vengeance upon the wicked of the world.

The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) is the late spring small wheat HARVEST of firstfruits of the saints into God’s Kingdom. In fact, it is called “the Feast of the Harvest [of] the Firstfruits” and “the Feast of Weeks of the Firstfruits of the wheat Harvest.”<sup>3</sup> The next holyday is the Day of Trumpets, which specifically focuses on the VENGEANCE of God as that “Day of the LORD’s vengeance.”<sup>4</sup> Finally, the Feast of Tabernacles is the early autumn main wheat harvest, part of the “Feast of Ingathering,”<sup>3</sup> representing the final great HARVEST of mankind into the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Trumpets, and the Feast of Tabernacles could be called JUDGMENT days—judgments of eternal life and eternal death.

“No work,” on the other hand, was commanded for the seventh-day Sabbath and the Day of Covering. What is the focus of these days? God saving people from bondage and slavery! Notice what God commands about the seventh-day Sabbath observance:

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<sup>2</sup> It is the Day of Covering, not Atonement. Refer to the [Sabbath Thought 2025-08-30 Day of Atonement or Day of Covering](#) or the [Bible Study Atonement—Covering Sin](#).

<sup>3</sup> Exod. 23:16; 34:22.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. 34:8; 61:2; Jer. 46:10.

DEUTERONOMY 5:14-15 but **the seventh day is the Sabbath** of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 And **remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there** by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

The seventh-day Sabbath was instituted for the ancient Israelites as a remembrance of God liberating them from bondage and slavery in Egypt.

Now look at the Day of Covering. The Great Tribulation and Vengeance of God are future events that bring terrible destruction upon the world. During those days, many will be enslaved and imprisoned by an evil world under the control of the Beast and False Prophet. After God takes His vengeance upon them, He then liberates these captives from the bondage and slavery:

PSALMS 107:2-5, 10, 13-14 Let **the redeemed [captives liberated after the Day of the LORD]** of the LORD say *so*, whom **He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, 3 and gathered out of the lands**, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. 4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate *desert by the way*; they found no city to dwell in. 5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. 6 Then **they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them** out of their distresses. ... 10 Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons *captive*— ... 13 Then **they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses**. 14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces.

This is what the Day of Covering portrays—rescuing the survivors of the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD. These captives cry out to God to be saved and He hears them. Like the seventh-day Sabbath, it is a day that God liberates the surviving captives from bondage and slavery.

What about the heretofore unmentioned Feast of Unleavened Bread? While the 1st and 7th days during this feast are “no servile work” days, they were first given a “no work” command along with an exception. That is interesting because the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a memorial of the actual ESCAPE of the ancient Israelites *from* bondage and slavery in Egypt:

EXODUS 12:17 ‘So you shall observe **the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt**. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

So, the seventh-day Sabbath and Feast of Unleavened Bread are inextricably linked to God rescuing His chosen nation of ancient Israel from bondage and slavery. This same theme occurs during the fulfillment of the Day of Covering as it portrays God saving people from bondage and slavery after the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD’s vengeance. Therefore, **the seventh-day Sabbath, Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Day of Covering could be called LIBERATION days—liberation from bondage and slavery**.

But what do 'Liberation Days' have to do with "no work" that prohibit food preparation? The PROVIDENCE of God. No one who is just liberated from bondage and slavery can survive on their own for very long. People in the Nazi death camps during WW2 were intentionally starved and many died. All of them needed food and water even after being liberated and that had to be supplied by others—the European Allied Forces.

Similar conditions occurred after God liberated the ancient Israelites from Egypt—they needed food and water. A short time after escaping into the wilderness from the Egyptians, God gave them manna:

EXODUS 16:14-15, 22-26 And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, *as fine as frost on the ground.* 15 So when the children of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, "**What is it [manna]?**" For they did not know what it *was*. and Moses said to them, "**This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.** ... 22 And so it was, **on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread [manna]**, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. 23 Then he said to them, "This *is what* the LORD has said: "**Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath** to the LORD. Bake what you will bake *today*, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.' " 24 So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. 25 Then Moses said, "**Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath** to the LORD; today **you will not find it in the field.** 26 "**Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.**"

God provided manna for six days and on the sixth day gave them twice as much to sustain them through the seventh-day by which they learned that "no work" meant no food preparation on the Sabbath—they had to do it in advance. God also provided water for them. One such instance was recorded in Numbers 20:1-13. So the seventh-day Sabbath with its "no work" command also prohibited food preparation because it was a reminder that the people relied upon God for provisions. This will also be the case for the people liberated as portrayed by the Day of Covering:

JOEL 2:18-19 Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, and pity His people. 19 The LORD will answer and say to His people, "**Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them;** I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

ISAIAH 49:9-10 That You [*the LORD*] may **say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,'** to those who *are* in darkness, 'show yourselves.' "**They shall feed along the roads,** and their pastures *shall be* on all desolate heights. 10 **They shall neither hunger nor thirst,** neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He [*Jesus Christ*] who has mercy on them **will lead them, even by the springs of water** He will guide them.

The surviving captives liberated after the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD are fed by God as He brings them to Jerusalem! Again the seventh-day Sabbath AND the Day of Covering are "no work" holydays. The Sabbath is a reminder that the ancient Israelites relied upon God for their food and water after being liberated

from bondage and slavery in Egypt and the Day of Covering is a portrayal of God providing for the survivors of a destroyed world that He liberates in the future!

When the ancient Israelites fled Egypt, they only brought with them enough unleavened bread to essentially last the journey from Egypt to the wilderness across the Red Sea. This is the memorial of the days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

EXODUS 12:39 And **they baked unleavened cakes** of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for **it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt** and could not wait, **nor had they prepared provisions [for the journey]** for themselves.

While lack of food was not an immediate issue during their flight out of Egypt, part of the remembrance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is that they had just enough food to leave. Shortly after that, they would be in dire need of food and water as emphasized by the statement “nor had they prepared provisions” for a long journey.

So the “no work” holydays are memorials or portrayals of God liberating people who were/are in bondage and slavery AND providing them food and water during those times. That is why “no work” prohibits food preparation!

**SUMMARY:** The seventh-day Sabbath and Day of Covering are holydays with a “no work” ordinance that prohibits food preparation. These days represent God liberating people in bondage and slavery and providing them the necessary food and water!

Avoiding food preparation on the seventh-day Sabbath and the Day of Covering, which is obviously a day of fasting for most<sup>5</sup>, is a reminder of God’s merciful promises to provide for our needs, just as Jesus said:

MATTHEW 6:31-34 “Therefore do not worry, saying, **‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’** or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 “For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For **your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.** 33 “But **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.** 34 “Therefore **do not worry about tomorrow,** for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.

So, not only are there differences between “no work” and “no servile work,” there is meaning and purpose behind God’s commands if we will seek them!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about fasting, refer to the booklet [Fasting—Afflicting the Soul, Humility, & Prayer](#).