SABBATH DAY

The Sabbath is a day set apart for rest and spiritual renewal. The importance of Sabbath observance, taught from the Creation and throughout religious history, is reconfirmed in modern scripture and in the teachings of LDS leaders. Fundamentals of Sabbath observance include prayer, gospel study, worship at Sabbath meetings, uplifting family activities, and service to others.

God set the pattern when, after six days of creation labors, he rested on the seventh (Gen. 2:2; Moses 3:2). Following the Exodus, Moses instructed the Israelites to gather double portions of manna on the day preceding “the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord” (Ex. 16:23). Indeed, the word “Sabbath” is derived from the Hebrew shabbath, meaning “to break off,” “to desist,” or “to rest.” The Ten Commandments included the command, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work” (Ex. 20:8–10).

The New Testament is replete with references to the Sabbath. By then, some had lost the spirit of the law and hedged it in inflexible obedience. The Savior reproved them: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Wherefore the Sabbath was given unto man for a day of rest; and also that man should glorify God, . . . For the Son of Man made the Sabbath day, therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath” (JST Mark 2:25–27). Following Jesus’ earthly ministry, the early Christians gathered on the Lord’s day, the first day of the week, in observance of his resurrection (cf. Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10).

Since its beginning, the LDS Church has observed the Sabbath on the first, rather than the seventh, day of the week (for some exceptions in the Middle East, see SUNDAY). The key revelation giving the pattern, scope, and purpose of Sabbath observance came to Joseph Smith on August 7, 1831, a Sunday:

And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day;

For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High; . . .

But remember that on this, the Lord’s day . . . thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy joy may be full [D&C 59:9–13].

Throughout LDS history, leaders have emphasized the importance of Sabbath observance, teaching that the Sabbath is a holy day of worship, on which the faithful renew their covenants with
the Lord, meet and teach each other the things of the Spirit, visit and strengthen the weak and afflicted, and study and contemplate the word of the Lord. While they have avoided arbitrarily specific prohibitions, Church leaders have given clear guidelines, as in this instruction from President Spencer W. Kimball:

The purpose of the commandment is not to deprive man of something. Every commandment that God has given to his servants is for the benefit of those who receive and obey it. . . . The Sabbath is not a day for indolent lounging about the house or putting around in the garden, but is a day for consistent attendance at meetings for the worship of the Lord, drinking at the fountain of knowledge and instruction, enjoying the family, and finding uplift in music and song.

The Sabbath is a holy day in which to do worthy and holy things. Abstinence from work and recreation is important, but insufficient. The Sabbath calls for constructive thoughts and acts, and if one merely lounges about doing nothing on the Sabbath, he is breaking it. To observe it, one will be on his knees in prayer, preparing lessons, studying the gospel, meditating, visiting the ill and distressed, writing letters to missionaries, taking a nap, reading wholesome material, and attending all the meetings of that day at which he is expected. . . . It is true that some people must work on the Sabbath. And, in fact, some of the work that is truly necessary—caring for the sick, for example—may actually serve to hallow the Sabbath. However, in such activities our motives are a most important consideration.

When men and women are willing to work on the Sabbath to increase their wealth, they are breaking the commandments; for money taken in on the Sabbath, if the work is unnecessary, is unclean money. . . . Sabbath-breakers too are those who buy commodities or entertainment on the Sabbath, thus encouraging pleasure palaces and business establishments to remain open—which they otherwise would not do. If we buy, sell, trade, or support such on the Lord’s day we are as rebellious as the children of Israel ["The Sabbath—A Delight," Ensign 9 (Jan. 1979):4–5].

The form of LDS Sabbath observance has evolved through the years, but the principles have remained the same. Of the Church’s first conference meeting, on June 9, 1830, Joseph Smith wrote, “Having opened by singing and prayer, we partook together of the emblems of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We then proceeded to confirm several who had lately been baptized, after which we called out and ordained several to the various offices of the Priesthood. Much exhortation and instruction was given” (HC 1:84). Singing, prayer, SACRAMENT, and teaching—those have remained the fundamentals of Latter-day Saint Sabbath meetings.

For many years, following the organization of the SUNDAY SCHOOL in 1849, Sabbath services consisted of Sunday School in the morning and SACRAMENT MEETING in the afternoon or early evening. Weekly ward PRIESTHOOD meetings were held on Monday evenings, and FAST AND TESTIMONY MEETING on the first Thursday of each month. In 1896, fast day was changed to the first Sunday to make attendance more convenient and less disruptive to members in their employment; in the 1930s, priesthood meeting was changed to Sunday mornings.

Another major change came in 1980 with consolidation of all Sunday meetings into a single time block—generally three hours, including RELIEF SOCIETY, YOUNG WOMEN, and PRIMARY meetings that formerly were held midweek. The change was instituted to save time, travel, and expense; to allow several wards to meet more conveniently in a single building; to strengthen the home by allowing families to spend more time together during the week; and to provide more time for Church members to devote to community service.

In announcing the change, the First Presidency reemphasized the Church’s fundamental principles regarding the Sabbath: “A greater responsibility will be placed upon the individual members and families for properly observing the Sabbath day.” They suggested that each family participate in a Sunday gospel study hour and in “other appropriate Sabbath activities, such as strengthening family ties, visiting the sick and homebound, giving service to others, writing personal and family histories, genealogical work, and missionary work” (Church News, Feb. 2, 1980, p. 3).

The Lord has promised blessings to those who observe the Sabbath as a holy day. In ancient times, he promised to send them rain in due season, help them overcome their enemies, give them peace, multiply them, and establish his covenant with them (Lev. 26:2–9). “And I will walk among you; and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (v. 12; cf. Isa. 58:13–14). In modern times, he has reaffirmed these promises: “Inasmuch as ye
do this, the fulness of the earth is yours” (D&C 59:16).

[See also Meetings, Major Church; Pioneer Life and Worship; Worship.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For a collection of articles treating LDS Sabbath observance, including perspectives on both doctrine and historical practice, see Ensign 8 (Jan. 1978).

WILLIAM B. SMART

SACRAMENT

[This entry is in two parts: Sacrament and Sacrament Prayers. The first part explains the practice of partaking of the sacrament in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the second part gives the history and contents of the sacrament prayers used in the administering of the sacrament.]

SACRAMENT

The word “sacrament” is used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to refer almost exclusively to the Lord’s Supper. The English word “sacrament” derives from the Old French sacrament by way of Middle English; the Old French noun in turn is based on the Latin sacramentum, which denotes a sum deposited by the two parties to a suit (so named probably from being deposited in a sacred place) binding an agreement, oath of allegiance, or obligation. Though the word never occurs in the Bible, the sacrament has come to have a major role in the practices of nearly all Christian denominations. In traditional Catholic and Protestant Christianity, the “sacrament of the Lord’s Supper” is regarded as one of a group of sacraments, whose purpose is to serve both as conveyors of God’s grace and as the outward signs that such grace has been bestowed. The definition of seven sacraments for the Roman Catholic church came at the Fourth Lateran Council, convened by Pope Innocent III in 1215. Protestant reformers, while rejecting most of the sacramental doctrines of the medieval church, retained the notion of sacraments with respect to baptism and the Eucharist.

In Latter-day Saint usage, sacrament designates that ordinance instituted by Jesus Christ as a means by which worthy Saints may renew their covenants with their Redeemer and with God the Father (cf. Mosiah 18:8–10; JCh, pp. 596–97; AF, p. 175). On the eve of his trial and crucifixion in Jerusalem and surrounded by his closest associates, the twelve apostles, Jesus took bread, which he blessed and broke and then gave to them, saying, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Jesus likewise took the cup, blessed it, and then gave it to them, “Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:26–28). The Book of Mormon records that the resurrected Jesus instituted this same ordinance in memory of his body and blood as he showed himself to the righteous of the Western Hemisphere after his ascension from Jerusalem (3 Ne. 18:7; 20:3; 26:13).

Paul notes that the Savior gave a commandment to perform this ordinance regularly, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew [i.e., testify of] the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26). The New Testament indicates that the injunction was observed in the early Christian Church (cf. Acts 2:42; 20:7). To the Saints at Corinth, Paul wrote in plainness of the simple ordinance which he had received from the Lord, stressing that it was done “in remembrance of [Jesus Christ]” (1 Cor. 11:19–26; cf. Luke 22:19; 3 Ne. 18:7).

The time and setting chosen by Jesus for administering the sacrament among his Jerusalem disciples tie this ordinance to the older observances of the Passover, including the bread and A girl takes a small piece of bread from a sacrament tray. “Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:24). Orem, Utah, 1982; courtesy Floyd Holdman.