

END-TIMES ISSUES



#70 Commandment #4 – Where did it come from?

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1

WHERE DID THE SABBATH CONCEPT COME FROM?

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
Exodus 20:8 (BSB)

SCRATCHING FOR ANSWERS EXCUSES.

I DON'T CARE WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS! IT CAN'T BE TRUE!

SURELY THERE'S SOME OTHER EXPLANATION!

- We live in a world that rejects the Bible, and tries to explain-away just about *anything* it says.
- They'll invent *any* excuse or story they can, in an attempt to discredit the Bible's message.
- The origin of the Sabbath – and even the seven-day cycle – is no different.

2

"Maybe they invented a seven-day cycle, based on the *seven* planets – I mean *five* planets, the sun and the moon!"

"Maybe it came from Babylonia, where a similar-sounding word ("*shabatum*") designated the 15th day of the month!"

"The 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th days of the month were considered *unlucky* for the Babylonian king. Maybe the Jews adopted this practice, but turned them into days of *blessing*!"

"Maybe it came from some ancient lunar festival, related to the phases of the moon; and they adapted it to their own use!"

⇒ Any excuse they can dream up, even if it makes the ancient Israelites sound primitive, superstitious and not very smart.

"THEY MUST HAVE COME UP WITH IT THEMSELVES!" ⇒ They'll say *anything*, as long as it gets God out of the picture!

3

So, WHERE did the "Sabbath" concept come from?

★ It came from God. It's simple as that. ★

The answer is *easy and straightforward*.
But the world doesn't want to accept *anything* that might suggest that the God of the Bible is actually the God who created all things, and the God who will someday be our judge.

[In six days] the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.
By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.
Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.
Genesis 2:1-3 (NIV)

4

⇒ Beginning with God's actions, this concept "seven" would often have special significance.

- ✓ This doesn't mean that the number "7" is *always* special. Sometimes, it might be a number with no significance.
- ✓ At other times, it might symbolize something special, might indicate completeness or perfection, or perhaps might serve as a pattern for something.
- ✓ This doesn't mean that numbers have magical qualities or hidden meanings (ideas that were invented much closer to the time of Jesus' birth).

• The word "*sabbath*" did not come into use until much later. Its first mention in the Bible is during the time Israel was in the wilderness, and God was providing them with manna for food. (They could have known the concept before that.)

[Moses] told them, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of **complete rest**, a **holy Sabbath** to the LORD.' "

Exodus 16:23 (BSB)

5

- From the beginning, the number "7" often had special significance.
- ✓ **Genesis 4:15, 24** – God said he would avenge anyone who killed Cain *seven* times more. Later, one of Cain's offspring killed someone and claimed that *he* would be avenged *seventy-seven* times.
- ✓ **Genesis 7:2-3** – *Seven* (or seven pairs) of each type of clean animal was taken into the ark, in preparation for the Flood.
- ✓ **Genesis 7 and 8** – The number *seven* (and seventeen) is mentioned several times during the Flood chronology.
- ✓ **Genesis 41** – The number *seven* was a recurring theme in Pharaoh's dream – which Joseph interpreted.
- ✓ **Exodus through Deuteronomy** – The number *seven* was associated with some of the symbolism in the tabernacle, the sacrificial practices of Israel, and other aspects of Jewish life.
- ✓ [This type of connection is found scattered throughout the Bible.]

6

• The number "7" (or the "seventh day") – connected to worship?

- ✓ In the book of **Genesis**: The focus is on the history of various people, not how they worshipped.
- ✓ Sacrifices and worship did exist in the early days of the human race, but there is no direct reference to the "seven" concept. So ultimately, we cannot really make any claim *for* or *against* such a connection.
 - ❖ **Genesis 4:3-6** describe offerings that Cain and Abel made to God.
 - ❖ **Genesis 4:26** mentions a time when people began to worship ("call on") God in *groups*.
 - ❖ **Genesis 8:20; 31:54; 46:1** give some examples of sacrifices being made.
- ✓ In **Exodus**: The connection between the seventh day and worship becomes quite important, but it is usually described in terms of the "sabbath" concept.

7

⇒ **God's initial seventh-day rest and the "Sabbath" day of worship.**

- God connects the two. (In both of the following passages, it is *God* who is speaking.)

Remember the **Sabbath day** by keeping it holy. ...
For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, but **on the seventh day He rested**.
Therefore the LORD blessed the **Sabbath day** and set it apart as holy.

Exodus 20:8, 11 (BSB)

And the LORD said to Moses,
"Tell the Israelites, 'Surely you must keep **My Sabbaths**, ...
Keep **the Sabbath**, for it is holy to you.
... for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, but **on the seventh day He rested** and was refreshed.'"

Exodus 31:12-13a, 14a, 17b (BSB)

- There are several other passages that emphasize resting on the seventh day. Examples: Exodus 16:30; 23:12; 34:21; 35:2; etc.

8

⇒ **God also takes "ownership" of these weekly Sabbaths. He calls them "my sabbaths"** – plural – because they were to be repeated *weekly*.

- This phrase occurs about 15 times, most often:
 - ✓ In the books of **Moses (Exodus and Leviticus)**: Emphasizing the obligation to do it, with the command often surrounded by other commands. (This may indicate: 1) equal importance, or 2) "if you break the one ... you'll most likely break the others.")
 - ✓ In **Ezekiel**: God gave his Sabbaths to them, and they have an obligation to keep it. They rejected God's command and desecrated the Sabbath, and they were punished because of it. Even so, the obligation to keep the Sabbaths remains.

I also gave them **My Sabbaths** as a sign between us, so that they would know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. ...

You have despised My holy things and profaned **My Sabbaths**.

Ezekiel 20:12; 22:8 (BSB)

9

⇒ **Other types of "sabbaths": Further applications of the Genesis 2:2-3 concept.** In addition to the weekly Sabbaths, God gave Israel a few other practices that also occurred in *cycles of seven*, or were related to the Sabbath concept of "resting". *

- ✓ The *seventh* event in these cycles could also be called a "Sabbath." (Or sometimes the *first* and *eighth*.) This meant that there might be more than one Sabbath during the space of one week! Or, *two* Sabbaths could occur on the same day!
- ✓ The day after Jesus' crucifixion was a Saturday (Sabbath); but it was also the first day of the Passover feast – also a Sabbath.

It was the day of preparation [when Jesus was crucified], and the Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies hanging there the next day, which was the **Sabbath (and a very special Sabbath)**, because it was Passover week).

John 19:31a (NLT)

- * (The Sabbath concept of "rest" does *not* mean "inactivity." We will examine this issue in the future.)

10

• The seventh-year Sabbath – the "Sabbatical year."

- ✓ Every seventh year, the land was to be given a rest. No planting and harvesting of crops. God would provide.

For six years you may sow your field and prune your vineyard and gather its crops. **But in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land—a Sabbath to the LORD.**

Now you may wonder, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not sow or gather our produce?' But I will send My blessing upon you in the sixth year, so that the land will yield a crop sufficient for three years. While you are sowing in the eighth year, you will be eating from the previous harvest, until the ninth year's harvest comes in.

Leviticus 25:3-4, 20-22 (BSB)

- ✓ Also: ... the poor among your people may eat from the field and the wild animals may consume what they leave.

Exodus 23:11b (BSB)

11

• The "Jubilee" – an extension of the seventh "Sabbatical year."

- ✓ This would be the 50th year – an *extra* year of rest for the land (with God providing food for the people).
- ✓ In addition to the extra "rest" for the land (which would improve its fertility), debts were cancelled, land that had been sold would be returned to its original owner, and Hebrew slaves would be set free.

And you shall count off seven Sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so that the seven Sabbaths of years amount to forty-nine years. ... So you are to consecrate **the fiftieth year** and proclaim liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be **your Jubilee**, when each of you is to return to his property and to his clan.

Leviticus 25:8, 10 (BSB); more details in later verses.

Apparently, Israel ignored the Sabbatical year and Jubilee regulations. One of the reasons for their 70-year exile was so that the land could have the **rest** that they had failed to give it – 2 Chronicles 36:21.

12

• Festival Sabbaths.

- ✓ These did not necessarily occur on Saturday (the *seventh* day of the week). They were considered special "Sabbaths," because they involved rest and cessation from work – and like the *weekly* Sabbath, they were to be considered *holy*.
- ✓ Some of the regulations for these Sabbaths were *different* from the weekly Sabbath regulations.
- ✓ Unlike the *weekly* Sabbaths, God did not call these *his* Sabbaths. The offerings for these festival Sabbaths were to be given "in addition to the offerings for *the LORD's Sabbaths*" (Leviticus 23:38b, BSB).
- ✓ **These Festival Sabbaths include:** 1) Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the first and last days), 2) the feast of Weeks (Pentecost, the 50th day after the Passover), 3) the Feast of Trumpets, 4) the Day of Atonement, and 5) the Feast of Tabernacles (the first and last days).

This shows us that the word "Sabbath" did not always mean "Saturday."

13

• The Eternal Sabbath.

- ✓ This is based on a promise in Psalm 95.
- ✓ God offers us a type of rest that the hard-of-heart in Israel failed to attain. "Today" means *anyone* at the time they hear this invitation.
- ✓ This concept is based on "God's rest" (in Genesis 2:2-3), and is a reference to the "rest" we have in Christ.

Today, if only you would hear his [= God's] voice,
"Do not harden your hearts [as Israel did in the wilderness]..."

So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.'

Psalm 95:7b-8a, 11 (NIV)

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters **God's rest** also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:9-11 (NIV)

14

• Observations.

- ✓ The *eternal* Sabbath is in a category of its own. It's not something we celebrate or do. It's one of the results of salvation that is made possible by God.

Concerning the *other* special Sabbaths:

- ✓ When compared to the *weekly* Sabbaths, these other sabbaths are quite different in nature. God does not claim them as "*my* Sabbaths," as he does with the weekly Sabbath. (The distinction is also made in Leviticus 23:38, where only the *weekly* Sabbaths are called "the LORD's Sabbaths.")
- ✓ God did not need these Sabbaths – any of them. They were made *for the people*. It was a time of rest and refocusing *for the people*. What Jesus said about the seventh-day (weekly) Sabbath could apply to all of them:

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Mark 2:27b (NIV)

15

• Do these special Sabbaths apply to us?

- ✓ We can learn from them, and in some cases, there might be some principles or actions that could influence the way we live.
- ✓ But as far as actually *doing* them:
 1. Some of them were fulfilled in what Christ did (in his death and resurrection), and are no longer needed.
 2. Some require the presence of the temple (which no longer exists).
 3. Some probably require participation on the *national* level (which *cannot* happen, when nations do not follow the true God).
- ✓ The New Testament does not tell Jews to *stop* doing them; but it says that Gentiles are not to be *required* to do them.
- ✓ By the time that Israel and the temple were destroyed, it became rather impossible to do them. In this matter, we have to trust God's providence, that, if they were necessary requirements today, he would not have removed the means needed to do them.

16

OUR MISSION:

To GROW in understanding the Sabbath concept.

- ✓ **The eternal Sabbath:** We can look forward to, and pursue it by the way we live. To do this, we need to pay attention to the warning we find in Hebrews 4:9-11.
- ✓ **The other special Sabbaths:** We can learn about them, and possibly apply some of what we learn to our lives. Understanding them can also help us to have greater appreciation for what Jesus accomplished for our salvation.
- ✓ **The weekly Sabbath** is special in ways that the others are not. There is a lot more to learn about this weekly Sabbath concept – and how it applies (or doesn't apply) to us. But the very fact that *God* treats it as special – and even claims that it belongs to *him* – indicates that there is great significance to it.

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Credits

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