

END-TIMES ISSUES



#71 Commandment #4 – A special obligation.

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THE SABBATH CONCEPT.

An obligation given to Israel ...

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God, on which you must not do any work...

Exodus 20:8-10a (BSB)

... based on what God did at creation.

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 20:11 (BSB)

✓ Here is another passage in Exodus that has a similar focus: the obligation to "keep the Sabbath":

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 31:14a, 17b (BSB)

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✓ Here is what God did – which is the basis for this command:

[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)

These weekly Sabbaths belong to GOD.

★ God claims ownership of them. ★

- They are his Sabbaths.* They have their origin in his actions – what he did when he created the heavens and the earth.
- He has the right to tell us how weekly Sabbaths should be used! After all, they belong to him.

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)

*(The word "Sabbaths" is plural, because of its weekly repetition. God did not make such a claim on the various ceremonial and land sabbaths that are also mentioned in the Old Testament.)

We are going to look at this "Sabbath" concept.

- Both Old and New Testaments have much to say about the Sabbath.
 - ✓ People have many conflicting viewpoints about the Sabbath – and they tend to let their views "interpret" what Scripture says. (This is often unintended.)
 - ✓ Our goal is to try to avoid this problem, and to understand how the Sabbath concept might apply to us today.
- Probably the best way to get an accurate understanding of the issue is to start at the first mention of the issue, and then work through the Bible, taking note of how the concept develops, and (if applicable) changes that may occur.
- ✓ We will begin with a look at the words and concepts found in four passages – in Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy. (For those who want to look further at the words and concepts in these verses, the *Strongs Concordance* word numbers are included, as a place to start.)

⇒ Scripture passages we will look at today:

(The four main passages that explain the issue.)

- **Genesis 2:1-3** – The original account of what God did on the seventh day of creation.
- **Exodus 20:8-11** – The command, as directly spoken by God.
- **Exodus 31:12-17** – God gives more information to Moses about the significance of the Fourth Commandment.
- **Deuteronomy 5:12-15** – Moses' review of this command, just before the people entered the land of Canaan. It gives us some additional information, but omits the creation account.

CAUTION! Since we are under the *New Covenant*, rather than the *Old* (Mosaic) Covenant, it is possible that some of the instructions found in these passages might not apply to us. But until we understand the issues, we can't accurately evaluate what might be different. Either way (even if we conclude that some things don't apply), we may still be able to learn *principles* that do apply.

Six days of "WORK"

There are three "work concepts" found in these passages.

- **LABOR** – [ʾabad, Hebrew 5647] This word is commonly translated as "serving" someone. When this "service" is directed toward God (or toward a "god"), it may be translated as "worship." [This word is *not* used to describe God's work. God doesn't *serve*... he *creates*.]
- **WORK** – [mʾla'kah, Hebrew 4399] Focuses on "what you do" – your work or craftsmanship. Describes the actions of both God and people.
- **(Something) DONE, MADE** – [ʾasah, Hebrew 6213] The emphasis is on accomplishment. Here, it seems to have more focus on the results.
 - ✓ **Used of God:** to describe his accomplishment of creation.
 - ✓ **Used of people:** to describe their various accomplishments. In the verses we are examining, used to describe "doing" [celebrating, participating in, keeping, observing] the Sabbath.

7

- ✓ **GOD'S WORK** – When God finished his work of creating, he could evaluate what he had done (accomplished).

... God completed His **work** which He **had done**,
... all His **work** which He **had done**.
... all His **work** which God had **created** and **made**.

From Genesis 2:2-3 (NASB)

- ✓ **OUR WORK, BASED ON GOD'S WORK** – The way God worked (as he made/accomplished what he created), is to be our pattern (as we labor in our work).

For six days you shall **labor** and do all your **work**, ...
... on [the seventh day] you shall not do any **work**, ...
For in six days the LORD **made**... everything ...

From Exodus 20:8-11 (NASB)

God could have created all things in a single moment.
But he chose this six-day-work and one-day-rest pattern
for a purpose. (Jesus says it was done for us – Mark 2:27.)

8

- ✓ **CONSEQUENCES** – The fact that God made (accomplished) everything in six days is to be a pattern for the way we work.
- There would be serious consequences for violating this command (i.e., by working on the Sabbath).

... for whoever does any **work** on [the Sabbath], that
person shall be cut off from among his people
For six days **work** may be done, ...
... whoever does any **work** on the Sabbath day must be
put to death.
... for in six days the LORD **made** heaven and earth, ...

From Exodus 31:12-17 (NASB)

- **GOD created**, using words to command things into existence.
- **WE labor/serve**, using what God created, for the benefit of:
1) people, and 2) the rest of creation – the environment, etc. We also do it for 3) the glory/honor of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

9

- ✓ **THE SABBATH, AS SOMETHING WE ARE TO "ACCOMPLISH"** – We are to limit the labor/serving of our work to six days. On the seventh day, we are to change to a different type of activity: observing/doing/keeping (accomplishing) the Sabbath day.

For six days you shall **labor** and do all your **work**, ...
... the seventh day ... you shall not do any **work**
... the LORD your God commanded you to **celebrate*** the Sabbath day.

From Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (NASB)

* (This is the word that refers to doing/accomplishing the Sabbath requirements, translated here as "celebrate.")

⇒ **Caution!** Don't read into the text something that isn't there!

As we observe Scripture passages that describe God as "working" and "resting," don't read into them the concept of tiredness and exhaustion that we might experience! All God needed to do, in order to create the world, was to speak it into existence!

10

When Scripture says: "God rested" ...



11

- Even for humans, work was originally not the exhausting burden that it can be today! Such a condition didn't exist until sin entered the world!

- ❖ This is the source of the painful toil, drudgery and sorrow that we so often experience.

- ❖ Today, these conditions may influence our need of "rest" and "refreshment"; but before sin entered the world, this was not an issue.

"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through **painful toil** you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.
It will produce **thorns and thistles** for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the **sweat of your brow**
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return."

Genesis 3:17b-19 (NIV)

12

One day of "REST"

There are **four** "rest concepts" found in these passages.

- **REST/CEASE** – [shabath, Hebrew 7673] To cease your activity, to reach the end (of something), to be quiet, still; usually translated as "rest" in these passages.
- **REST/STOP** – [nuwach, Hebrew 5117] Rested, settled; the activity has come to a stop.
- **REFRESH** – [naphash, Hebrew 5314] To take a breath, to be refreshed (because the activity has been stopped); to find satisfaction in what was accomplished.
- **A DAY OF COMPLETE REST; A DAY OF SABBATH REST** – [A PHRASE: shabbath, Hebrew 7676 + shabbathown, Hebrew 7677] The complete resting (from our 6-day work week) that is to be done on the Sabbath.

(WE PROBABLY
WON'T SEE MUCH
DIFFERENCE IN
THESE 2 WORDS.)

Since: 1) PEOPLE are the ones who are involved in potentially hard "labor/service," and 2) GOD "creates" by means of words, there will be differences between *our* rest and *God's* rest!

13

[God] **rested** [= he **ceased** to create] on the seventh day ...
... He **rested** from all His work ...
From Genesis 2:2-3 (LSB)

[God] **rested** [= **stopped** what he was doing] on the seventh day ...
From Exodus 20:8-11 (LSB)

... on the seventh day there is a **Sabbath of complete rest**, ...
... on the seventh day [God] **rested** [= **ceased** to create] and was **refreshed**.

From Exodus 31:12-17 (LSB)

[Allow] your male slave and your female slave [to] **rest** [= **stop**] as well as you. [This also applies to animals and foreigners according to Exodus 23:12.]

From Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (LSB);

- **GOD**, on the seventh day, **rested** (**stopped**) from his six days of creating things; he **rested** (**ceased**) from doing his work, and found **refreshment** (**satisfaction**) in what he had done/accomplished.
- **PEOPLE** are to follow his example – to **rest** (**stop**) our six-day activities ... and stop it **completely for an entire day**.

14

What makes the seventh day special?

God's work was completed; it was very good; and it was quite satisfying ("refreshing") to see the completeness and goodness.

God saw all that he had made, and it was **very good**.
And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.
Thus 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** [= **ceased**] from all his work.

Genesis 1:31-2:2 (NIV)

... on the seventh day [God] **rested** [= **ceased** to create] and was **refreshed** [= **found satisfaction** in what he had accomplished].

Exodus 31:17b (LSB)

BECAUSE THIS DAY WAS SO SPECIAL ... →

15

→ **Because it was so special: God would BLESS this seventh day.**

- **BLESS** – [barak, Hebrew 1288]

✓ **When God does it:** He says something favorable, what he says has a beneficial effect on the object of that favor.

✓ **When people do it:** When directed toward **God**, it is an expression of worship, a rejoicing in God's goodness and excellence. (The word will often be translated as "praise.") We bless **people** by words and actions that benefit them.

... on that day He rested from all His work.
Then God **blessed** the seventh day ...

Genesis 2:2b-3a (BSB)

... but on the seventh day He rested.
Therefore the LORD **blessed** the Sabbath day ...

Exodus 20:11b (BSB)

When God *speaks*, things happen. He *spoke* the blessing... and the 7th day became blessed!

IN WHAT WAY did God bless it? →

16

→ **HOW did God bless the seventh day? He declared it "HOLY"!**

- **HOLY** – [qadash, Hebrew 6942 (*action*) and qodesh, Hebrew 6944 (*fact*)] Considered special, of great value, sacred, worthy of our greatest attention; dedicated or consecrated to God. This word is often connected to moral purity (when referring to people).
✓ "Holiness" is contrasted to what is "common" (every-day things) or "impure" (sinful things).
✓ When God declares something to be "holy," our duty is to recognize it as being holy, and to *treat it as such*.
- **WHY IS IT SPECIAL/HOLY?** – Because the job of creating was complete, and it was very good!

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 2:3 (NIV)

17

- **WE ARE TO RECOGNIZE IT AS HOLY ...** because God declared it holy.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it **holy**.

For in six days the Lord made [everything], but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it **holy**.

Exodus 20:8, 11 (NIV)

- **THERE ARE IMPORTANT REASONS for doing this.** TO BE EXAMINED IN THE FUTURE.

"Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you **holy**.'

" 'Observe the Sabbath, because it is **holy** to you.

For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, **holy** to the Lord. ... for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. '"

Exodus 31:13-14a, 15a, 17b (NIV)

18

- ISRAEL WAS TO CAREFULLY FOLLOW GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS (commands) in this matter.

"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it **holy**, as the Lord your God has commanded you."

Deuteronomy 5:12 (NIV);

The Seventh day was special, even before God gave Israel the Fourth Commandment.

The passages we examined fall into two categories:

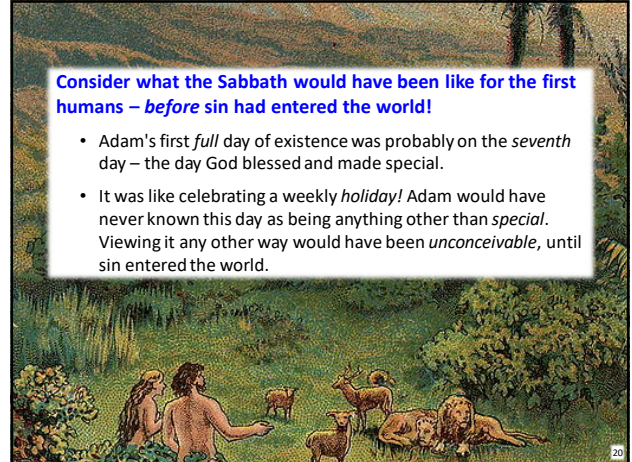
- The **GENESIS** passage: This was addressed to the *entire human race*, **before** sin entered the world.
- The **EXODUS** and **DEUTERONOMY** passages: These were addressed to Israel (a nation) **after** sin entered the world.

Knowing these differences might help us understand our Sabbath obligations.

19

Consider what the Sabbath would have been like for the first humans – **before sin had entered the world!**

- Adam's first *full* day of existence was probably on the *seventh* day – the day God blessed and made special.
- It was like celebrating a weekly *holiday*! Adam would have never known this day as being anything other than *special*. Viewing it any other way would have been *unconceivable*, until sin entered the world.



20

How important is our response?

There are **three** "obligation concepts" found in these passages.

- ① God **commanded** it to be done. – [tsavah, Hebrew 6680] To command, order, instruct – given by someone who has the authority to require it.

- ✓ **THE NEED TO FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS GOD HAS GIVEN.** "Do what God told you to do!"

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has **commanded** you.

Deuteronomy 5:12 (BSB)

- ✓ **BECAUSE OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE:** He delivered you out of slavery. [Here, a focus on Israel. *Our* deliverance is from slavery to *sin*.]

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there ... Therefore the Lord your God has **commanded** you to observe the Sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:15 (NIV)

21

- ② This involved **keeping/observing/guarding** it. – [shamar, Hebrew 8104] To watch over, keep, guard, protect, care for, etc.

- ✓ **IT WILL BE A SIGN/REMINDER THAT GOD IS THE ONE WHO MAKES US HOLY.** We need a constant reminder that we are **totally dependent** on him.

"Say to the Israelites, 'You must **observe** my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.' "

Exodus 31:13 (NIV)

- ✓ **THE SABBATH ITSELF IS HOLY/SACRED.**

Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. ... a day of sabbath rest, holy to the LORD.

Exodus 31:14a, 15b (NIV)

(Because it was so sacred, those who desecrated it were to die.)

22

- ✓ **IT IS A COVENANT PROMISE** (as well as a sign), based on God's own actions. He is our source of holiness. *There is no other way.*

"The Israelites are to **observe** the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.

It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed."

Exodus 31:16-17 (NIV)

- ✓ **A FINAL REMINDER: KEEP/OBSERVE/GUARD IT THE WAY GOD COMMANDED.**

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.

Deuteronomy 5:12 (BSB)

The need to "observe" (watch/guard/protect) the Sabbath: It's *easy* for us to get distracted with life's cares, and with any other distraction that the Serpent may send our way.

23

Humans have had a history of failing to "observe" (watch/guard/protect) things.

This is why Adam failed in the garden.

- ✓ This same word was used when Adam was given the task of "keeping" the garden in Eden (= more like a nature park, than our typical concept of a "garden"). He was to take care of it and **protect** it from anything that should not be there.

Then the LORD God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and **keep** [guard/watch over] it.

Genesis 2:15 (BSB)

- ✓ Adam failed his task, when he chose to follow the Serpent (Genesis 3). Because of that, he was expelled from the garden, and God sent cherubim to **guard** the tree of life [= same word].

[God] drove out the man and stationed cherubim on the east side of the Garden of Eden, along with a whirling sword of flame to **guard** the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:24 (BSB)

24

- ③ This also involved **remembering certain things**. – [zakar, Hebrew 2142]
To remember, recall (and respond appropriately).

- ✓ **THE SABBATH DAY ITSELF IS TO BE REMEMBERED, AND KEPT HOLY/SACRED.** (We easily get distracted.)

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

- ✓ **WHAT GOD DID FOR US NEEDS TO BE REMEMBERED.**

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.
Deuteronomy 5:15 (BSB)

We need to **remember** that we were in a much worse slavery, than just slaves to *people*. We were slaves to *sin* ... and God delivered us from that slavery – Romans 6.

25

OUR MISSION:

Our examination of the Sabbath principle is not complete. But even *now*, we can safely reach the following conclusion:

God's declaration that the Sabbath/seventh day is holy requires an appropriate response from us!

(Our goal is to find out what that response should be.)

We can compare *our* views to what we have observed in Scripture – especially the Genesis passage, which describes the situation in a *sinless* world.

(We haven't yet discovered if the *New Covenant* brings any changes to the concept. So if our views don't match what we've seen *so far*, it doesn't necessarily mean we are wrong!)

26

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27