

END-TIMES ISSUES



#84 Commandment #4 – Applying the Sabbath today.

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

A N D B E Y O N D I

THE SABBATH

What does it mean for us today?

✧ We are under the New Covenant. ✧

But we can learn from both Old and New Testaments!

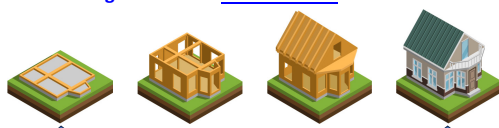
- The **Fourth Commandment** represents a **category** of commands, instructions and examples (like *all* the commandments do). Even if something doesn't *directly* apply to us, we can still learn from it.
- The Old Testament provides us with a wide range of commands, instructions, and examples, from which we can learn how to live.
 - ✧ However, there are also certain obligations that are directly connected to the *Old* Covenant, and are not part of the *New* Covenant.
 - ✧ We can still learn from them – not as *obligations*, but as *principles, explanations, pictures of New Covenant realities, etc.*

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- We can consider all that **Scripture** says: ① Passages that use the word "Sabbath," as well as ② passages that don't, but which still describe Sabbath principles.
 - ✓ EXAMPLE: When teaching Gentiles, the apostle Paul often taught about Sabbath practices (= Fourth Commandment principles), but almost *never* used the word "Sabbath."
- **LAST TIME:** We looked at the issue that people tend to focus on: "What *day* is the Sabbath?" We noted that the day is *not* an issue in the New Testament (at least for Gentiles; perhaps for everyone). This is because we need to pursue God more than we need to pursue a day!
- **TODAY:** "What does the Sabbath mean to us?"
 - ✓ Today, we will focus on passages that use the word "sabbath." Next time, we will look at passages that *don't* use that word.
 - ✓ We need Scripture to show us how to *apply* what it teaches. We need to say what it says, and keep silent where it is silent.

Building the Sabbath concept for today.

It all begins with the **FOUNDATION**: Genesis 2:2-3.



You need to start HERE
If you want to end HERE

- The Sabbath: Linked to Creation, and based on God's own actions.

And by the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on that day **He rested from all His work**.

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on that day **He rested from all the work of creation** that He had accomplished.

Genesis 2:2-3 (BSB)

This "rest concept" was defined by God; and reintroduced to Israel.

- Adam and Eve witnessed this event. It would have influenced the conduct of people *forever*, if *sin had not entered the world*.
- Sin's influence would cause people to not want a weekly reminder of their total dependence on God. Ignoring this weekly reminder would eventually cause it to be forgotten – the same way people are trying to forget it today.
- God re-introduced the concept to Israel, pointing out its connection to his own actions 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)

- For God, this rest from creating would never end. For people, rest would become a weekly opportunity to change focus *from* daily activities to the God who created them.

The Sabbath concept is also linked to redemption.

- Initially, this focus was on Israel being brought out of Egypt and out from slavery to Egypt's gods, for the purpose of serving the Creator God.
- Eventually, the *spiritual* aspect of redemption became the main focus (with the *physical* aspect being like a "picture" of the *greater* concept). In the New Testament, this concept is usually called "salvation."

"I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians... I will **redeem** you ..."

[He] **redeemed** you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Exodus 6:6b; Deuteronomy 7:8b (BSB)

- As before, this focus emphasizes *our need for God* – not only to exist (as created beings), but also: ① to be saved from the consequences of our sin, and ② to be changed so that we can once again focus on God, in the way we were created to do it.

The two basic reasons for this focus on God, as taught in the Old Testament:

- ① **Rest:** We are created beings, and need to *rest* from our daily activities, and *focus* on God, because he is our creator.
- ② **Redemption:** We are sinners – rebels against God – and he offers to save/redeem us.

Without the Sabbath concept, we forget our connection to God, just like people from the past did.

- We become slaves to work and to various other activities.
- Since the Sabbath concept deals with our *ongoing* need for God, continued ignoring of it (as demonstrated by our *actions*, not by what we *claim*) leaves us in danger of great loss – perhaps *eternal* loss.

It is important to remember that, under the New Covenant, God *embeds* his laws *in our hearts and minds*, so that we *want* to do God's will. If those desires are not there, and *continue* to not be there, we have reason to question whether or not the change ever took place.

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God gave us the Sabbath concept for an important reason!

First of all, God owns the Sabbath.

- Because God made and defined it, it belongs to him. In several places in the Old Testament, he calls them "my Sabbaths."

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)

"Tell the Israelites, 'Surely you must keep **My Sabbaths** ...' "

Exodus 31:13a (BSB)

- Jesus (God in human form) tells us that he is Lord (master) of the Sabbath. He owns it; he has authority over it.

Then Jesus declared,
"The Son of Man is **Lord of the Sabbath**."

Luke 6:5 (BSB)

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God made it... not because *he* needed it, but for *our* good!

- God made the Sabbath for *us*! It's a *gift* from the God who knows our needs *better than we do*. It is for our *good*, not to repress or harm us, or even to force us to do "religious activities."

Then [Jesus] said to them, "The **Sabbath** was **made for people**, not people for the **Sabbath**."

Mark 2:27 (NET)

- In Nehemiah's day... during a time of prayer and praise to God (and of repentance from sin), they acknowledged that God's commandments (including the Sabbath) were *good*:

"You provided [our ancestors] with just judgments, true laws, and **good statutes and commandments**. You made known to them your **holy Sabbath** ..."

Nehemiah 9:13b–14a (NET)

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- Israel was told that their attitude toward the Sabbath would influence their attitude toward God, and would influence how God blessed them.

"If you **keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath** and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you **call the Sabbath a delight** and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then **you will find your joy in the Lord**, and **I will cause you to ride in triumph** on the heights of the land and to **feast on the inheritance** of your father Jacob."

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 58:13-14 (NIV)

As a *nation*, some of their blessings were *physical*. In the New Covenant context, our blessings, as *individuals*, are often *spiritual*. We still learn from what God told Israel, even though our application will be different.

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- It's a reminder – "sign" – of our dependence on God for holiness.

"Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so **they would know that I the LORD made them holy**. ...

Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then **you will know that I am the Lord your God**."

Ezekiel 20:12, 20 (NIV)

- It's easy to *say* we are dependent on God. But our *actions* show our *actual* values. *Hearing* what the Bible says is NOT the same as *doing* what it says – as the people of Ezekiel's day demonstrated:

So My people come to you [= Ezekiel] as usual ... and **hear your words; but they do not put them into practice**. Although they express love with their mouths, their hearts pursue dishonest gain. Indeed, you are to them like a singer of love songs with a beautiful voice, who skillfully plays an instrument. **They hear your words but do not put them into practice**.

Ezekiel 33:31-32 (BSB)

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**It's more than just performing a ritual!
To benefit from the Sabbath concept,
we need to have a right heart attitude.**

- **Who gets the blessings?** Under the Old Covenant, certain blessings related to the Sabbath were *unavailable* to some (such as, foreigners, or people who had certain physical limitations/defects). In contrast, the New Covenant is connected to greater blessings that are available for *all*!
- **Under the Old Covenant:** In Isaiah 56:1-7, we see that the blessings of the Sabbath were *connected* to concepts such as *justice and righteousness, avoidance of evil, holding fast to God's covenant, etc.* Though keeping the Sabbath was a requirement, these *other* things – not Sabbath *rituals* (though necessary) – demonstrated one's loyalty to God (or lack of it).
- **Under the New Covenant:** The same is true *for us*. The pursuit of holiness is more important than "church-going" (though worship with other Christians is also important).

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We are not to despise the Sabbath the way Israel did!

(Whether we call it "the Sabbath," or "Worship Time," or something else.)

- **They considered it an inconvenience.** They impatiently waited for the Sabbath activities to be over, so that they could return to their rest-of-the-week activities. (In their case, this included exploiting others for personal gain – see vs. 4-6.)

"When will the New Moon be over,
that we may sell grain? ← (The MONTHLY celebration.)
When will the **Sabbath** end,
that we may market wheat?" ← (The WEEKLY celebration.)
Amos 8:5b (BSB)

(Jesus tells us that we can't love BOTH wealth and God – Matthew 6:24.)

There is *more* to life than work and every-day activities!
Life does not center around us, our interests and our occupations.
It centers around *God*, the *source* of life and of all that is good!

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- **They turned it into a burdensome ritual.** By Jesus' day, the religious leaders had turned "Sabbath keeping" into a long list of rules and regulations – far more restrictive than what Scripture taught.

✓ The issue isn't whether or not they had "good intentions." Rather, it's the final outcome of what they did that mattered: In the end, it was as though people were made for the Sabbath, instead of the Sabbath being made for people (the *opposite* of what Jesus said, in Mark 2:27).

✓ They even used their rules against *Jesus*!

Because of this, some of the Pharisees said, "This man [= Jesus] is not from God, for **He does not keep the Sabbath.**"
John 9:16a (BSB)

REFERS TO THEIR RULES,
NOT TO THE BIBLE.

- (They also came up with methods for getting around certain Sabbath regulations, when they didn't want to do them.)

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Certain types of WORK are permitted (and sometimes required) during times of Sabbath REST!

- Though the religious leaders recognized that certain types of work could be permissible, they had developed a complex set of Sabbath regulations that were *not* found in the Bible. These regulations clouded the issue; and in the end, caused many things *permitted* by Scripture (or sometimes even *required*) to no longer be recognized as such.

How do we know if a "work" is more important than Sabbath "rules"?

- There is a "hierarchy" or order of priority in moral issues.
- Under normal conditions, there will *never* be a conflict between our obligations. But we live in a world that has been messed-up by sin – and because of this, conflicts sometimes *do* exist.
- Be aware that, if you *choose* to sin, you may sacrifice any *good* options. It could become a matter of minimizing the resulting *sin*.

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What is this "hierarchy"? Here is the basic order of priority:

- When there appears to be a conflict between obligations, look for a *higher* priority obligation, and follow that.

1. **Love for God** – which involves obedience and moral purity.
2. **Love for neighbor** – doing what is good for others (especially for those who can't pay you back).
3. **Other obligations** – includes *religious activities*; obligations due to one's circumstances (and/or promises made).
4. **Matters of freedom** (personal choice).

• **Anything sinful** – is NOT to be considered an option.

- Here is a situation that illustrates a contradiction: The religious leaders told the apostles to NOT tell others about Jesus.

WHO SHOULD I
PUT FIRST? GOD
OR PEOPLE?

ANSWER:

But Peter and the other apostles replied,
"We must obey God rather than men."

Acts 5:29 (BSB)

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You can honor God by these WORKS on the day of REST!

1. **Religious duties** – i.e., fulfilling duties related to the worship of God; other necessary expressions of obedience to God.

(a) The Law that God gave to Israel contained regulations that *required* the priests to work each week on the Sabbath. Two examples:

- ✓ Various sacrificial offerings – Numbers 28:9-10; also 2 Chronicles 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Nehemiah 10:33.
- ✓ A special bread offered to the LORD – Leviticus 24:8; also 1 Chronicles 9:32; 23:31.
- ✓ As Jesus says, doing this type of work was *not* sin.

Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple **break the Sabbath** and yet are **innocent**?

Matthew 12:5 (BSB)

- ✓ **Today:** We do not have these temple duties. But we might relate this principle to the activities of a pastor or worship leader, etc.

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(b) Certain other practices were necessary (for obedience to God), even though they were *not* a part of worship or of standard "Sabbath duties." These obligations might, or might not, occur on a Sabbath.

- ✓ For Israel, this included the practice of circumcision. This had to be done on the *eighth* day after birth, regardless of what day of the week that might be.

But because Moses gave you circumcision, you circumcise a boy on the **Sabbath** (not that it is from Moses, but from the patriarchs).

... a boy can be **circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses will not be broken**, ...

John 7:22-23a (BSB)

- ✓ Jesus uses this fact to argue that, if it is OK for Sabbath regulations to be broken for *this* matter, then breaking Sabbath regulations for even *greater* matters should also be permissible (John 7:21-24).

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You can honor God by these WORKS on the day of REST!

2. Necessary work – i.e., emergencies; essential care for animals; eating food (unless you are fasting); things that *can't* be postponed.

(This category and the next ("Acts of Mercy") may sometimes seem to overlap. Some of the Old Testament examples that Jesus gives could be used to support the validity of either of these categories.)

- (a) People and animals need to eat and drink! In some situations, this might require work that *could not* be done in advance.
- ✓ Jesus' response, when the religious leaders condemned him for "loosing" (healing) a crippled woman who was bound by Satan for 18 years ...

"You hypocrites!" the Lord replied. "Does not each of you on the **Sabbath** untie his ox or donkey from the stall and **lead** it to water?"

Luke 13:15 (BSB)

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- ✓ The religious leaders condemned Jesus' disciples for picking kernels of grain and rubbing them (to remove the husks), before eating them. (The leaders misapplied the regulations that prohibited the *harvesting* of crops on the Sabbath.)

One Sabbath Jesus was passing through the grainfields, and His disciples began to **pick the heads of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat them**. But some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the **Sabbath**?"

Luke 6:1-2 (BSB)

Jesus pointed out that, even in the Old Testament, religious practices could be disregarded *when there was a genuine need*. (In this case, "love for neighbor" took precedence.)

Jesus replied, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, took the **consecrated bread** and gave it to his companions, and ate what is **lawful only for the priests to eat**."

Luke 6:3-4 (BSB)

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- (b) A situation where unplanned "work" was necessary:

- ✓ The healed man needed to take his mat with him, when he left the place where he had been healed! (Otherwise, he would lose what he needed to sleep on!) But the religious leaders condemned him – and did not care that he had been healed!

Then Jesus told him, "Get up, **pick up your mat, and walk**."

Immediately the man was made well, and he picked up his mat and began to walk.

Now this happened on the **Sabbath** day, so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "This is the **Sabbath**! It is **unlawful for you to carry your mat**."

John 5:8-10 (BSB)

(Unlawful? It wasn't even an actual command in the Law... but an exaggerated misinterpretation that the religious leaders had created.)

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- ✓ The healed man "worked" because it was *necessary* for him to take his mat with him. His work was made necessary because of *Jesus'* "work" of healing him – which was an act of *mercy*.

... he [was] breaking the **Sabbath** ...

John 5:18b (NLT)

- (c) Just a reminder... even *God* works on the Sabbath!

- ✓ His work of *creating* is completed; he has rested from doing it. But there are other works that he *continues* to do...

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the **Sabbath**, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.

In his defense Jesus said to them, "**My Father is always at his work to this very day**, and I too am working."

John 5:16-17 (NIV)

- ✓ Not only is God at work, taking care of creation, but he is constantly at work in the lives of his people (Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:6).

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You can honor God by these WORKS on the day of REST!

3. Acts of mercy – i.e., expressions of love and concern for others.

These acts of mercy are not necessarily "emergencies" or immediate needs (such as mentioned in the previous category).

- (a) Acts of mercy demonstrate *God's* priorities. Jesus acknowledges this, when he quotes the Old Testament:

"If only you had known the meaning of '**I desire mercy, not sacrifice**,' you would not have condemned the innocent."

Matthew 12:7 (BSB)

WHAT JESUS QUOTED

For **I desire mercy, not sacrifice**, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6 (BSB)

In saying this, God was *not repudiating* the religious activities (such as sacrifices). Rather, he was expressing the *priority* of love (mercy) over such activities – when a person was unable to do *both*.

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- (b) Jesus performed several healing miracles on the Sabbath. Examples: He healed...

- ✓ A man with a shriveled hand – Matthew 12:9-14.
- ✓ A woman who had a deformed back (bound by Satan for 18 years) – Luke 13:10-17.
- ✓ A man with dropsy (swollen arms and legs) – Luke 14:1-6.
- ✓ A man who had been an invalid for 38 years – John 5:1-18.
- ✓ A man born blind – John 9:1-41.

- (c) Each time, the religious leaders found fault with him. As far as they were concerned, he was *working*. (They ignored the *mercy* aspect.)

But the synagogue leader was indignant that Jesus had healed on the **Sabbath**. "There are six days for **work**," he told the crowd. "So come and be healed on those days and not on the **Sabbath**."

Luke 13:14 (BSB)

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- (d) Yet even the religious leaders acknowledged that certain types of work – acts of mercy – were permissible! (It's just that Jesus wasn't going by their *invented* rules, or *misrepresentations* of God's rules.)

He replied, "If one of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the **Sabbath**, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!"

Matthew 12:11-12a (BSB)



What should we conclude? We should evaluate things *properly*!

These various expressions of "work" are good and legitimate, when done on the Sabbath!

"Stop judging by outward appearances, and start judging justly."

John 7:24 (BSB)

"Therefore **it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**"

Matthew 12:12b (BSB)

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SUMMARY: What should we conclude?

- **We are 100% dependent on God**, for our existence, as well as for our salvation. The Sabbath concept (or Fourth Commandment principles) shows us how to *react* to this dependence.
- **We owe God part of our time.** We don't have to call it the "Sabbath," but the Sabbath concept teaches us how to fulfil this debt.
- **It is our duty to honor and glorify God at all times.** The difference between the day devoted to God and the rest of the week is one of focus.
 - ✓ In one case, we love God and neighbor, while we are having a greater focus on working with God's *creation*. In the other case, we love God and neighbor, while we are having a greater focus on the *Creator* who made us.
 - ✓ In *all* matters, it's a *daily* desire to seek first God's kingdom (Matthew 6:33), and to pray that God's "name" (= God and everything about him) will be considered "hallowed" (treated as holy and special, Matthew 6:9) – not just in *our* lives, but in *all* the world.

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- **The Sabbath concept is a holy and special gift from God**, giving us an opportunity to escape from the slavery of a day-after-day work life. It's an expression of God's commitment to his people. He gives it to us as a time of rest and refocus – and as a reminder of the *future* eternal rest, which we can enjoy even now, to a limited extent.
- **The Sabbath is a time of redirecting our focus** away from ourselves, and back to the One who is the source of meaning for life – our Creator and Redeemer. It reminds us that there is more to life than just work. To state it another way, there is a *different* kind of "work" that we also need to enjoy: the "work" of *love for God*, which enables us to correctly understand the nature of *love for neighbor*.
- **The "day" we treat as special does not have to be any specific day.** It could even be the whole week! Yet since the time of Christ, the focus of most Christians has been on the day of Christ's resurrection – which was on the *first* day of the week (Sunday).

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Sabbath differences, under the Old and New Covenants.

- **Under the Old Covenant, Israel, as a nation, had a command** to honor the Sabbath. This command was *external* to the people, and was needed in this form, to control even the lives of unsaved individuals living in the nation.
- **Under the New Covenant, people, as individuals, do not need a command** to have a Sabbath focus. God has embedded, *in the hearts and minds* of his people, the awareness of their need for God, and the desire to honor him. *God's people know their need for God, and want to fulfil that need, using the means that God provides* (as described in Scripture).
- We have focused mainly on Scripture passages that mention the Sabbath concept. Much of the New Testament contains commands, instructions, and examples that have the *same* focus... but without using that word. The apostle Paul has much to say *to the Gentiles* about having a focus on God... but he does so without the word "Sabbath." We plan to look at some of these next time.



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Our MISSION!

CELEBRATE the Sabbath concept!

REJOICE in God!

And

If you want to **WORK** on the Sabbath...



There are plenty of good works we can do, as we celebrate God and his works!



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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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