


END-TIMES ISSUES



#72 Commandment #4 – Learning from Israel's response.

**A
N
D

B
E
Y
O
N
D
I**

1

THE SABBATH CONCEPT.

It began with **GOD**, who declared the **seventh day** to be special – blessed and **HOLY**.

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 2:2-3 (NIV)

- Adam and his wife were there – the first *full* day of their existence. Until sin entered the world, they would have *never* considered that day to be anything other than *holy*... because that was how the day was defined.
- God included this information in Scripture, so that we also would recognize the day as special.

2

In Scripture, this "day of rest" concept develops in two directions:

- A weekly focus** – mentioned in the Fourth Commandment and many other Scripture passages. This would involve repetition – once every seven days.
 - God created humans to "subdue and rule" over the earth – to learn about it, and to use it and develop it. This is *work* – described as "labor" (serving God and people, and benefitting all creation). And so, after each "holy seventh day," the process of work would start up again, as an *ongoing cycle*.
- An eternal focus** – hinted at in the Old Testament (and fully compatible with it), and further developed in the New Testament (the book of Hebrews). This would be *unending*.
 - This is based on the fact that God did *not* begin to work again on the *eighth* day (i.e., *first* day of the week). It is a picture of our *eternal* rest in God/Christ.

OUR MAIN FOCUS TODAY

3

REMEMBER THIS BASIC PRINCIPLE:

- FACTS** are to influence our thinking.
- COMMANDS** are to influence our actions.
 - EACH** fact or command is to be understood within its context; and this will determine how we are to respond.

- Example of a **FACT** that is to influence our *thinking* (understood within its context): What God does on the seventh day of creation.

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)
- Example of a **COMMAND** that is to influence our *actions* (understood within its context): The Fourth Commandment.

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

Exodus 20:8 (BSB)

4

Last time, we noted that **God** takes ownership of the Sabbath – the seventh day.

- We've saw that: ① God links the seventh day to the "Sabbath" concept given to Israel, and ② he claims ownership of that day.

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)

- Now, we need to remember that the God of the *Old* Testament reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the *New* Testament.

THIS MEANS...

5

JESUS takes ownership of the Sabbath – the seventh day!

- Context: The religious leaders were condemning Jesus' disciples for violating some "Sabbath regulations" that *people* had invented.
- Jesus reminded them of the *true intent* of the Sabbath, and told them the reason he had *authority* to say what he said: He is the Sabbath's Master, its Ruler – it's *Lord*.

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

Luke 6:5 (BSB); see also Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28.

- This is the same *authority* he exercised, when he explained various other aspects of the law, during his "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7).

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, because He taught as one who had **authority**, and not as their scribes.

Matthew 7:28-29 (BSB)

6

So what can we learn about the Sabbath?

First of all, it wasn't to make life miserable!

- In Genesis 2:2-3, we've already seen that God made it a *specialty blessed* day. Until sin entered the world, nobody would have ever thought of it in a different way.
- The Sabbath was made *for our good*. It was made for *us*, not the other way around. Consider what the *owner* of the Sabbath says:

Then Jesus declared, "The **Sabbath was made for man**, not man for the Sabbath."

Mark 2:27 (BSB)

- The Sabbath was one of the *good* things that God gave to Israel. Nehemiah describes some of these things, and in the middle of the list...

You revealed to them **Your holy Sabbath**...

Nehemiah 9:14a (BSB)

IT BELONGS TO GOD!

[HOLY: Special, of great value, sacred, worthy of our attention, etc.]

7

Second, it is a reminder of our need for God!

- It is a *sign*, a reminder of our *need* for God: *He alone is the source of our holiness*.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "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**. ... [and] **a day of sabbath rest, holy to the Lord.**' "

Exodus 31:12–14a, 15b (NIV)

- This observing of the Sabbath was to be a *lasting covenant* between God and Israel, a *permanent* reminder (v. 16); and it had its basis in what God did at the end of the creation week (v. 17).

HOW "PERMANENT" IS THIS "LASTING COVENANT?"

8

The Sabbath: How permanent is this "lasting covenant"?

- There are some who claim that it lasted only as long as Israel lasted *under the Old Covenant*. They point out that word translated as "lasting" (which can also be translated as: *eternal*, *forever*, etc.), doesn't always mean "permanent." In certain contexts, it can come to an end.

We sometimes use this concept in a similar way. For instance, we might say, "I've been waiting *forever* for you to answer my question!" Or, "I stood in line *forever*, waiting for my turn to [do something]."

- The problem is that most people who hold such a view *don't* reach that view based on anything that the specific *Old Testament* passage (or its context) says. Rather, they base it on *their* interpretation of certain *New Testament* passages, and on the *assumption* that there is *no possible way* for the *Old Testament* passage to still be true *as stated within its own context*.

9

How permanent is this "lasting covenant"? (continued)

- Obviously, there *are* changes that occurred with the change in covenants. There are specific things that even the *Old Testament* said would happen. There are things that were *not capable* of continuing.
- But there are also things that the *Old Testament* says *will* happen (especially related to prophecy), that don't fit the views of some people. So they tend to respond by claiming that those things were either cancelled (when the *New Covenant* came), or else were *meant* to be symbolic (even if nothing in the context of those passages indicates it).
- We are not going to argue about this issue. Scripture tells us to "be ready for Jesus' return," not to "know accurately everything about the prophetic timetable." So instead, we will say (to those who claim that the Sabbath has ceased to be a sign and a covenant), that you *still* need to remember your dependency on God for holiness... and respond appropriately – just like Israel was told, when they were given the sign/covenant of the Sabbath. If you do that, you'll be ready for Jesus' return, *regardless* of who's prophetic view proves to be correct.

10

How important was the "weekly Sabbath" for national Israel?

- The *foundational account* in *Genesis* teaches us how we should interpret the seventh day. It applies to the whole human race; and it existed *prior* to the Ten Commandments. Those who claim that the *weekly* Sabbath has *ended* will say that it has been replaced by the *eternal* Sabbath. Others will say that *both* concepts remain valid.
- Before Israel came into existence as a nation:** Scripture does not tell us anything about the Sabbath being practiced prior to the time that Israel was led out of Egypt. We can expect that, even if it was a requirement, most people wouldn't have done it – just like today... and sooner or later, they would have forgotten about it.
- Israel was told to "keep the Sabbath"** (the Fourth Commandment), and that it was to be done "forever," etc. This was to be done by Israel, *as a nation* – not as isolated individuals who just happened to want to do so. Violations of this command were to be punished *by the community* (which, today, we would call "civil government").

11

- The spiritual condition of Israel:** This was not a nation of *saved* people. Over and over again, God told them that they were rebellious, and that they needed changed *hearts*. Their history demonstrates this fact: they frequently rebelled and *few* ever had changed hearts.
- Israel in the land of Canaan,** there is no mention about whether or not they ever obeyed God's command to *punish* people who violated the Sabbath obligation. *But they frequently disregarded God's command* – as they did with all the other commandments.
- When judgment came,** part of the punishment was the *removal* of the *blessing* of the Sabbath – along with all the other blessings that were taken away. *God warned them:* He would stop their celebration of the Sabbath. (This was just one aspect of the massive devastation that would occur.)

"HER" SABBATH DAYS?
COULD THE PEOPLE HAVE SO
TOTALLY CORRUPTED THE
DAYS, THAT GOD NO LONGER
CLAIMED THEM AS "HIS"?

I will stop all her celebrations:
her yearly festivals, her New Moons,
her Sabbath days—all her appointed festivals.

Hosea 2:11 (NIV)

12

- **The Sabbath celebration *did* stop when the judgment came:** This was not an empty threat by God. But it was only one small part of the massive judgment that occurred.

**GOD STOPPED "HER"
CORRUPTED SABBATHS.
HE IS NOT CANCELLING THE
FOURTH COMMANDMENT!**

The Lord has made Zion forget
her appointed festivals and **her Sabbaths**; ...

Lamentations 2:6 (NIV)

- **When Israel returned from exile, the Sabbath was again celebrated.** It was *enforced* by civil government, for there were still many who continued to have unchanged hearts.
 - ✓ They promised to not buy or sell on the Sabbath – Nehemiah 10:31.
 - ✓ The Sabbath offerings would be made – Nehemiah 10:33.
 - ✓ Yet there were still people who chose to disregard the Sabbath. Nehemiah (the governor) would bring this sin to an end, with the threat of punishment – Nehemiah 13:15-22.
 - ✓ Nehemiah himself explains why he did this. →

13

- **Nehemiah rebuked the leaders who *permitted* violation of the Sabbath:** God had told Israel that they *needed* the Sabbath as a reminder of their dependence on God (as stated in Exodus 31). In the long run, ⇒ Israel's violation of the Sabbath ⇒ led to them forgetting their *need* to rely on God ⇒ which led to turning against God ⇒ then to judgment and destruction (= the exile that they had just returned from.)

I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them,
"What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating
the **Sabbath** day?"

Didn't your ancestors do the same things, so that our
God brought all this calamity on us and on this city?
Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by
desecrating the **Sabbath**."

Nehemiah 13:17-18 (NIV)

- **In Jesus' day** the Sabbath was practiced... but it had become encumbered with tradition, rituals, sinful motives, etc. In the end, they rejected the "Lord of the Sabbath"... and were destroyed in AD 70.

14

What about in the future?

- **Scripture *does* mention a *future* temple, sacrifices, and Sabbath Day.**
 - ✓ Many people think a "literal" fulfillment of these things is too "problematic" – especially because of what the New Testament says about Christ *fulfilling* what the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to. Because of the work of Christ, they see no need for a future temple, the sacrifices, or a weekly Sabbath.
 - ✓ These people tend to claim that the verses mentioning these things are symbolic or figurative – that they are "fulfilled" in Christ, or in the church, or perhaps fulfilled "spiritually" in some other way.
 - ✓ Others believe that these things will occur the way the Old Testament passages describe them, and that they *don't* contradict the work of Christ, as described in the New Testament. But some of these things (such as the sacrifices) would take on a *different* significance, because of what Christ has done.
 - ✓ Of course, we can just wait and see. There were many surprises – things happening in unexpected ways – at Jesus' *first* coming, so we shouldn't be surprised if surprises occur at Jesus' *second* coming!

15

- **Ezekiel has much to say about a *future* temple and sacrifices, as well as the *weekly* Sabbaths** (both *past* Sabbaths, and *future* ones).

- ✓ **The Sabbath's purpose:** Ezekiel reaffirmed the fact that the Sabbath was intended to *remind the people of their need for God*.

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

[He also told them...] "Keep **My Sabbaths** holy, that they may be a
sign between us, so that you may know that I am the LORD your God."

Ezekiel 20:12, 20 (BSB)

- ✓ **Israel's *past* conduct (Ezekiel 20):** Israel constantly rebelled against God's laws, and they desecrated his Sabbaths. God warned them of impending judgment; and that judgment eventually came. (Desecrating God's Sabbaths is mentioned in Ezekiel 20:13, 16, 21, 24.)
- ✓ (This rebellion was not new. They had been rebelling against God *even while in Egypt!* See vs. 5-9.)

16

- ✓ **Israel's *present* conduct (at the time Ezekiel was alive):** They continued to rebel and desecrate the Sabbath. Both the people and the leaders were guilty. (Ezekiel 22:8, 26; 23:38.)
- ✓ Here is the guilt of the *religious* leaders. (The guilt of other leaders is mentioned in the context.)

Her priests do violence to My law and profane My holy things.
They make no distinction between the holy and the common,
and they fail to distinguish between the clean and the unclean.
They disregard **My Sabbaths**, so that I am profaned among them.

Ezekiel 22:26 (BSB)

- **Jeremiah also warned them about dishonoring the Sabbath.** In chapter 17, he warns the people to keep the Sabbath day holy, and to not work on that day (including carrying loads) – vs. 19-27. They are given the choice between Jerusalem being "inhabited forever," and a fiery destruction. (They chose the destruction, as seen in the book of Lamentations.)

17

- ✓ **Israel's *future*:** Ezekiel describes a future temple, priests, leaders, sacrifices, what the people are to do, etc. [This is the section of Ezekiel's prophecy (chapters 40-48) that many people insist must be interpreted as figurative or symbolic.]
- ✓ There are numerous instructions for *leaders*, including instructions about the Sabbath Day – Ezekiel 44:24; 45:17; 46:1, 4, 12.
- ✓ Here are some instructions for the *people*, regarding the weekly Sabbaths, as well as the monthly celebrations:

On the **Sabbaths** and New Moons the people of the land
are also to bow in worship before the LORD at the
entrance to that gateway.

Ezekiel 46:3 (BSB)

- ✓ **Is Ezekiel the *only* prophet to mention the Sabbath with a prophetic (future) perspective? NO!** Isaiah also does – if you interpret it "the way it is written." (There are those who will insist that it is merely symbolic, JUST LIKE they do with the Ezekiel passages.) →

18

- **What does Isaiah have to say about the Sabbath?** He has a very significant passage that links the Sabbath to the *new* heavens and earth – and it involves not just *Israel*, but *the entire human race!*

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one **Sabbath** to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord.

Isaiah 66:22-23 (NIV)

Israel failed miserably, and it's easy to condemn them.

But are we any better?

Are our leaders teaching the way of truth – the distinction between holy and common, righteousness and sinfulness, good and evil? And what about ourselves... are we *pursuing* holiness, righteousness and good? Or, do we hear God's Word, and *not* put it into practice – following the *bad* example of Israel (as in Ezekiel 33:31-32), or perhaps the people living in Jesus' day (as in Matthew 7:21-27)?

19

There is another issue that Isaiah mentions.

- **The Fourth Commandment is more than just a "ceremonial practice."** It has to be the expression of the heart. This significance is seen in the following Scripture passage, which shows *God's response* to "fake Sabbath-keeping" – as well as to *other* types of *fake* religious practices.

- The people were doing all the religious activities that God had commanded...

★ but in *their hearts*, they had become like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of **Sodom**;
listen to the instruction of our God,
you people of **Gomorrah**!
"What good to Me is your multitude of sacrifices?"
says the LORD.

"I am full from the burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of well-fed cattle;
I take no delight in the blood of bulls
and lambs and goats."

Isaiah 1:10-11 (BSB)

20

- Religious ceremonies, without a *changed heart*, become nothing more than a "trampling" of God's courts. It totally *offends* God.

- It's not that God was opposed to worship, sacrifices, Sabbath-keeping, and prayer. Rather, *God was opposed to fakeness*.

When you come to appear before Me,
who has required this of you—
this trampling of My courts?
Bring your worthless offerings no more;
your incense is detestable to Me—
your New Moons, **Sabbaths**, and convocations.
I cannot endure iniquity
in a solemn assembly.
I hate your New Moons
and your appointed feasts.
They have become a burden to Me;
I am weary of bearing them.
When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide My eyes from you;
even though you multiply your prayers,
I will not listen.
Your hands are covered with blood.

Isaiah 1:12-15 (BSB)

21

- God didn't tell them to stop doing religious activities. He told them to start doing what was right!
- The only alternative to fakeness is repentance – the same as it is today.

Again, we need to ask:
But are we any better?
(We won't know, until we have learned to see reality the way *God* describes it.)

"Wash and cleanse yourselves.
Remove your evil deeds from My sight.
Stop doing evil!
Learn to do right;
seek justice and correct the oppressor.
Defend the fatherless
and plead the case of the widow."

"Come now, let us reason together,"
says the LORD.

"Though your sins are like scarlet,
they will be as white as snow;
though they are as red as crimson,
they will become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the best of the land.
But if you resist and rebel,
you will be devoured by the sword."

Isaiah 1:16-20a (BSB)

22

OUR MISSION:

- The Fourth Commandment is a recognition of *our need for God*.
- God gave Israel some specific practices to remind them of that need. But the nation desecrated those practices; and eventually, those practices lost their original significance.

Learn from Israel's bad example! (Do the *opposite*!)

- What do we do, to remind us of *our need for God*? Does our "reminder" influence how we live throughout the week?
- In the Old Testament, God claimed a *full day* from each person's week, as belonging to *him*. How much of your life do you give to God?
- How much of your life does Jesus claim to own?

23

Credits

SCRIPTURE

- Scriptures marked "NIV" - Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. (www.biblica.com)
- Scriptures marked "BSB" - Taken from The Holy Bible, Berean Standard Bible, BSB; Public Domain (CC BY NC ND). <https://bereanbible.com/>

PICTURES (original sources; modifications may have been made)

- Brick wall - GDJ / CC0; via [openclipart.org: https://openclipart.org/detail/227630/brick-texture](https://openclipart.org/detail/227630/brick-texture)
- Globe with lit fuse - GDJ / CC0; via [openclipart.org: https://openclipart.org/detail/219655/political-map-east-h-globe-bomb](https://openclipart.org/detail/219655/political-map-east-h-globe-bomb)
- Page divider - GDJ / CC0; via [openclipart.org: https://openclipart.org/detail/296327/page-divider](https://openclipart.org/detail/296327/page-divider)

Presentation - Dennis Hinks © 2025.

24