

END-TIMES ISSUES



#74 Commandment #4 – God is faithful; Israel is unfaithful.

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God made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God kept his promises which brought the nation of Israel into existence.

- ★ Israel exists because of God's promise to their ancestors, not because of any merit in the nation itself. *It will never be due to anything good in the nation of Israel. Rather...*
- ★ It is for the sake of God's own reputation that he would: ① create the nation of Israel (as he promised), and ② not destroy them (as they deserved) – for most of the time, they were in constant rebellion against God.

Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me ... Then I resolved to pour out My wrath upon them and put an end to them

But I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out.

Ezekiel 20:13-14 (BSB); several examples of this are found in Ezekiel 20.

In all of this, God remains faithful. (It was Israel who chose to sin.)

- **For God's promises to be completely fulfilled:** Israel will have to become loyal to the true God, and forsake all other gods – the gods of the nations.
- ✓ This hasn't happened yet; but it will, because God has promised that it will... under the New Covenant.

What does it mean to "forsake all other gods"?

- It's not just an act of walking away from an "idol" – a statue.
- It involves a rejection of the *society that centers itself around that idol*.
- When Israel left Egypt, they needed to reject not only the physical slavery, but also the values and conduct of the Egyptian culture (which were determined by the nature of their idolatry).
- Throughout Israel's history, they would need constantly reminded to not follow the ways of the world (= the nations that surrounded them), because they were so prone to imitate them.

God described Egypt as "the house of slavery" (sometimes translated as "the land of slavery"). In a sense, they belonged to Pharaoh, so they were like slaves in his "house."

... be careful not to forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Deuteronomy 6:12 (BSB)

"We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand."

Deuteronomy 6:21b (BSB)

- In Egyptian culture, the Pharaoh was thought to be the embodiment of an Egyptian god. To serve the Pharaoh meant serving the Egyptian gods.
- ✓ Ironically, this is what the Israelites so often longed to return to! (They quickly forgot the *reality* of what life had been like.)

When Israel left Egypt...

- Their hearts kept returning to Egypt. This was their *ongoing* attitude:

But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

Acts 7:39 (BSB)

- ✓ Examples of this attitude, while they were in the wilderness: Exodus 14:11-12; 16:3; 17:3; Numbers 11:5; 14:3-4; 21:5.
- ✓ It didn't stop there, in the wilderness. Pursuing the ways of other nations and disloyalty to the true God has *almost always* characterized their attitude.

There were two aspects to their slavery.

- Physically, they had been slaves in Egypt and were brought out by God (because of his promise to their *ancestors*).
- They also had to leave spiritually. They had to reject Egypt and its culture, in order to make their redemption from slavery complete. Without this spiritual dimension, they never really left Egypt.

- Many in Israel never escaped the *spiritual slavery* of Egyptian culture.
- ✓ Though their *bodies* left Egypt, their *hearts* remained there. So their lives were characterized as constantly rebelling against God.
- ✓ They trusted what they *imagined* Egypt offered them *more than they trusted God!*
- ✓ They were offered redemption and rest in the Promised Land ... but instead, they died in the wilderness.

For who were the ones who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was God angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would never enter His rest? Was it not to those who disobeyed? So we see that it was because of their unbelief that they were unable to enter.

Hebrews 3:16-19 (BSB)

★ What Israel needed to do is the *same thing* that we need to do. ★

- If we want to follow Jesus, we need to reject the world and all that it represents. (Its idols are not always *physical* idols.)

- ✓ We can't pursue the world and what it offers.

Then Jesus said to all of them, "If anyone wants to come after Me, **he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

Luke 9:23-26 (BSB); similar statements in Matthew 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-38

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- ✓ Following God is *incompatible* with clinging to the world.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, **the love of the Father is not in him.** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not from the Father but from the world.

The world is passing away, along with its desires; but whoever does the will of God remains forever.

1 John 2:15-17 (BSB)

- ✓ The entire "world system" is controlled by the devil – *and this should influence our attitude toward it.*

We know that we are of God, and that the whole world is **under the power of the evil one.**

1 John 5:19 (BSB)

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How can they (and us) avoid the world's *eternally-fatal* trap?
The answer has to do with the *Fourth Commandment*

(which deals with our focus on God).

- This commandment is 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)

- Our focus on it is *also* based on what God does in REDEMPTION.

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)

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DOESN'T
DEUTERONOMY 5:15
REFER TO A **PHYSICAL**
DELIVERANCE FROM
EGYPT?

HOW CAN
THAT APPLY
TO ME?

IT'S ACTUALLY
MORE THAN
THAT.
CONSIDER
THESE THREE
ISSUES!

1

First of all ...

Note the historical context. The Deuteronomy passage was spoken near the end of Israel's journey to the Promised Land. In the previous almost-40 years, they had learned much about the nature of the Sabbath.

Examples:

- Exodus 31 tells us some of what they had been taught. (More about this later.)
- Though the Deuteronomy 5 passage uses the term "brought out," many other passages define this "bringing out" as an act of *redemption*. (See also: Issue 3, below.)

10

Second ...

2

God often uses *physical* things (items, actions, events, etc.) to teach about *spiritual* issues – and *Israel knew this*.

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- There may be a connection or correlation between the two. The physical and the spiritual may involve parallel concepts that work together.
- The one ("physical") may teach about the other ("spiritual").
- A physical object or action may be used as a "sign" – a reminder that points to something else. (This "something else" would be the more important matter.)

EXAMPLES:

A

The Sabbath itself illustrates this. It is both a "sign" (= a *physical* act) and a "covenant" (a promise by God of a *spiritual* benefit) – Exodus 31:12-17. We will look further at this later (see below).

[MORE EXAMPLES] →

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B **Manna** illustrates this. The *physical* food teaches us about our *spiritual* dependence on God. (This example is also directly connected to the Sabbath concept.)

- In the future, we plan to look more in-depth at this example. But here are two passages that illustrate these things:

He humbled you, and in your hunger **He gave you manna** to eat, which neither you nor your fathers had known, **so that you might understand that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**

Deuteronomy 8:3 (BSB)

He fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers had not known, in order to humble you and test you, **so that in the end He might cause you to prosper.**

Deuteronomy 8:16 (BSB)

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C Even **physical slavery** was used to teach about a more serious issue:

- ✓ Jesus used the concept to warn people about *sin*.

Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, I tell you, **everyone who sins is a slave to sin**. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:34-36 (BSB)

- ✓ The apostle Paul used the slavery concept to illustrate *two types of "masters"* (good vs. bad ones).

I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in **slavery to impurity and to escalating wickedness**, so now offer them in **slavery to righteousness leading to holiness**.

Romans 6:19 (BSB); see vs. 15-23.

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3 The **third issue** (concerning redemption and the Fourth Commandment) **is this ...**

★ We should consider *the people* Moses said this to. ★

⇒ They **claimed** to follow God.

- They **claimed** they were going to be faithful to the covenant – though many would later abandon it. [Doing this is a serious matter, because those who reject the truth they have been given will experience a much worse *eternal* judgment.]

⇒ They **had been told** the nature of the Sabbath. (Described below.)

⇒ They **were warned** that *changed hearts* were *also* needed.

- On numerous occasions they were told that they needed to change their attitude, to love God with all their hearts, etc.

And you must **love** the LORD your God with all your heart...

Therefore, **change** your hearts and stop being stubborn.

Deuteronomy 6:5a; 10:16 (NLT)

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⇒ They **also knew** that the covenant they had made with God was *conditional*:

- Those who rejected it *lost* the blessings that were only available to those who obeyed it.
- By rejecting the covenant, they would receive the curses – judgments – that were promised for disobedience (in addition to *eternal* judgment).
- They were *clearly* warned about what would happen, so they had *no excuse*.

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that **the LORD your God brought you out** of there ...

Deuteronomy 5:15a (BSB)

- God brought them out *from* slavery to Egypt and its gods *to* freedom under the Creator God. The Fourth Commandment would enable them to *stay* in that relationship, *if they were willing to obey it*.

15

- **Some only wanted *physical* deliverance, without trusting the God who freed them. They would die and their freedom would end...**

Today, if you hear His voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did at Meribah,
in the day at Massah in the wilderness,
where your fathers tested and tried Me,
though they had seen My work.
For forty years I was angry with that generation,
and I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known My ways."
So I swore on oath in My anger,
"They shall never enter My rest."

Psalms 95:7b-11 (BSB)

This is a warning to all. Even those who might appear to have "rest" in this present life... if they refuse to follow the true God, their "rest" will come to an abrupt end. They will *never* enjoy *eternal* rest.

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Could things have been different for Israel?

Only if they had learned the meaning of the "Sabbath" concept, and joyfully obeyed the Fourth Commandment.

- God told them the significance of the Sabbath – the *spiritual* aspect – soon after he gave them the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). This is found in Exodus 31 (= summarized below; quoted on the next page).

THIS IS WHAT THEY ALREADY KNEW... AND REJECTED:

The need to recognize the Sabbath's **HOLY NATURE** (= "sanctified").

- They were **God's** Sabbaths, based on *his* work of creation.
- The people needed to view the Sabbaths as holy *to them*, because they were holy *to God*.

The Sabbaths were a **SIGN** and a **COVENANT** – ① a *reminder* that God was the source of holiness, and that God was *their* God; and ② a *promise* that God would make them holy.

(Those who *refused* to recognize the Sabbath's holy nature and their own need to pursue holiness were to be put to death.)

17

They *knew* that deliverance from Egypt involved *more than* just the moving of *bodies* from one location to another! They needed a *change from* following their old ways *to* a pursuit of holiness.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'Surely you must keep **My Sabbaths**, for this will be a **sign between Me and you** for the generations to come, so that you may know that I am the LORD who **sanctifies** you. Keep **the Sabbath**, for it is **holy to you**. Anyone who profanes it must surely be put to death. Whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but the seventh day is a **Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD**. Whoever does any work on **the Sabbath day** must surely be put to death.

The Israelites must keep **the Sabbath**, celebrating it as a **permanent covenant** for the generations to come. It is a **sign between Me and the Israelites** forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

Exodus 31:12-17 (BSB)

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Two themes summarized ...

One of the reasons for being given the Fourth Commandment was because *God redeems people*.

- For Israel, this included *physical* redemption from slavery; but that was a mere "picture" of the more serious slavery he offered to redeem them from: *Slavery to sin*.
- Those who ignored this more serious slavery never actually became free.

In this Deuteronomy expression of the Fourth Commandment, we see illustrated something that commonly occurs throughout Scripture: God uses *physical* things (objects, actions, etc.) to teach us about *spiritual* matters.

In the future, we plan to illustrate this with God's provision of *manna* (in Exodus 16). God uses manna to teach us a variety of important issues – including something about the Sabbath.

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What about us?

WE can expect our "Sabbath" to be different in some ways, because we are under the *New Covenant*. But there are many parallels between what Israel experienced and what we see in the New Testament.

- There were many *fake* "followers of God" in Israel – which parallels the *fakes* who are present in churches today.
> *In both cases, their hearts are still in the world.*
- Many in Israel seemed to be unconscious of their *need* to rely on God – the need to *cling* to him for holiness (even though they were often told about their need).
> *This is just like many in churches today.*
- Many in Israel seemed to see no reason for *doing what was necessary* to meet that need (in the way that God said it needed to be met) – nor to *take the time* to do so.
> *This is just like many in churches today.*

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◆ Our Mission ◆ To remember:

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES!

➔ That's the only reason *any* of us have hope for eternity!
But it's also a *warning* to those who despise his holiness.

God's promises go *far beyond* the "physical" – which often has only *temporary* value.

GOD OFFERS US TIME!

➔ To pursue holiness, and to change our focus – *away from* daily activities, and *to* God.

Wise use of this time is the means God has chosen to *enable* us to pursue these things.

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GOD HAS GIVEN US AN OPPORTUNITY TO PURSUE HOLINESS!

We began looking at this Fourth Commandment by reviewing what some of the historical catechisms had to say about it. The Heidelberg Catechism (quoted below, in the *left* column) summarizes quite well some of the things *we* can do, in our pursuit of holiness – *doing it the way God tells us to do it!*

Q. What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?

[Catechism:] [How we can do this:]

A. First,	[<i>Pursuit of holiness for life.</i>]
that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained,	Encourage the teaching and learning of God's Word.
and that, especially on the festive day of rest,	Set aside a special time for focusing on love for God and neighbor...
I diligently attend the assembly of God's people	Meet with other Christians, with the following goals: [next page]

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[Goals when meeting with other Christians.]

to learn what God's Word teaches,	Learning God's Word, allowing it to change our values and conduct.
to participate in the sacraments,	Participating in the "Lord's Table" – remembering what Jesus did for us.
to pray to God publicly,	Group prayer.
and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.	Expressing love for Christians who are in need.

Second,

[*Application of holiness in life.*]

that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways,	Turning away from sin (a daily objective).
let the Lord work in me through his Spirit,	Living under the control of the Holy Spirit.
and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.	Having even now a foretaste of what God has in store for us in eternity.

Source: Heidelberg Catechism [left column in table] – <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/HeidelbergCatechism.pdf>

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