

THE KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding the Bible's story, Jesus' importance, & Our place in God's plan



Lesson 41: The Fourth Command- Honor the Sabbath Day
FBC Webb City-Dustin Burdin

Introduction

We have explored the first three commandments.

- (1) Give God your total allegiance & devotion {no other gods...}
- (2) Only worship God in ways He has commanded {make no idols...}
- (3) Speak of God with the respect and honor He deserves {do not take God's name in vain}

In this lesson we examine the Fourth Commandment (4th Word). This will be the last of the Commandments that deal with a person's relationship with God directly. The remaining six deal with person-to-person relationships.

The Fourth Commandment: Honor God's Sabbath

Exodus 20:8-11

God wanted His Kingdom people to have a day set aside as holy. Remember, *holy* means set apart for God's use. There was to be a day set aside and treated completely different than the other six days.

God said, "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." *Remember* means to keep it in your mind. Make it a point to honor the Sabbath day as holy. The English word Sabbath is from the Hebrew word pronounced *Shabbat*. Sabbath means to rest, to cease.

Verses nine through ten God specifically says they are to conduct their customary work for six days. On the seventh day, they are to rest from their customary work. Notice in verse ten it reads in the English Standard Version (ESV), "but the seventh day is a Sabbath *to* the Lord your God." The ESV and the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) truly translate this in a manner that catches something in the Hebrew. The preposition *to* is important. Many other translations use the word *of*. "But the seventh day is a Sabbath *of* the Lord your God." *Of* is probably not the best word to use.

In Hebrew this is a preposition that means *for* or *to*. I stress this to point out that God said to Israel the point of the Sabbath is it is a **day to be focused on the Lord**. It is a Sabbath *to* or *for* the Lord your God. We see from this idea that God shared one of the intentions of the Sabbath Day's rest was for Israel to dedicate a day to focus on their worship and devotion to the Lord.

God was essentially saying they needed to pause their busy work week and cease all of their normal busy activities of life and have a day to be focused just on Him. God could have commanded six days of Sabbath and only permitted them one day of labor.

However, God was gracious and allowed Israel to carry on about their business for six days and only give up one day dedicated to God.

Why do you think God wanted a day where they stopped the normalcy of life and focused on God?

There is a practical element to this command. We are prone to get busy and stack up obligations in our lives. God created us to be people who work and are busy for His Kingdom. However, due to sin, we are prone to make our lives all about our work and accomplishments. God wanted Israel to always have a pause in their week to make sure they were keeping God as the priority.

God stresses that no one is to do any customary work on the Sabbath. Not an Israelite, their children, their slaves, nor a traveler in their lands is to work on the Sabbath Day.

In verse eleven we see the idea of a seventh day rest is seen as far back as when God first created everything. God over the course of six days. On the seventh day, He rested. God wants Israel to see that even the manner in how God created in six days and rested on the seventh set the tone that the seventh day is not to be treated as a common day. It is set apart as holy to/for the Lord.

God did not need to rest on the seventh day because He was tired. He rested in the sense that His work He set out to do at creation was complete. He could cease from His work because the work was over.

From this we learn the Sabbath Day had a two-fold purpose. It was first and foremost meant to be a day set aside to focus on God and worship God. We understand this idea from looking at verses like Leviticus 19:30 and 26:2 which say, “You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.”

The phrase, ‘reverence my sanctuary,’ shows us God’s primary focus for the Sabbath was to be a day of focused worship to the Lord. We can think of this as the Sabbath Day was meant to be a day for Israel to **refocus** on their devotion and worship to Yahweh.

It was not just a day of worship; it was also meant to be a day of recovery. “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the foreigner, may be refreshed” (Exodus 23:12).

Why do you think God wanted to make it a law that people and their animals rest for one day in the week?

We can summarize the idea of the Fourth Commandment as **Refocus** and **Recovery**. Israel was to always ensure they kept their focus on God. They needed a holy day to refocus and worship the Lord for who He was and what He had done for them. They also needed a day to recover from their labor.

The fourth commandment really says, honor God with **your time**.

Let's look at **Exodus 31:13-17** for a warning about breaking the Sabbath Day Law.

God warned that a person would be put to death if they violated the Sabbath Day law. It was established as a sign between Israel and Yahweh. He had made them holy, sanctified them, and they were to take one day a week to honor God by ceasing their normal labor. This again was to get them to always take time and remember what God had done for them and worship Him rather than continue to be busy and move on forgetting about God.

Does the Sabbath Day rest mean a person could do nothing on the Sabbath? Not exactly. We need to remember that the priests had daily duties to perform in the Tabernacle and at the altar. These never stopped, even on the Sabbath. What about eating on the Sabbath? Of course, that would be acceptable. What about watering and feeding their farm animals? Of course, this would be agreeable as well.

The idea of no labor on the Sabbath seems to be non-essential labor. There is a kind of work that is essential to perform for the sake of maintaining basic needs for living, such as eating and drinking. These types of 'works' would be ok on the Sabbath. The issue God was addressing is that they stop their routine and honor the Lord on this day.

To love God is not to have a lazy day one day a week; rather it is to focus on doing his will specially on one day a week—to worship, learn, study, care, and strengthen the spirit.¹

Jesus and the Sabbath

The Jews of Jesus' day had turned the Law of Moses into something it was not meant to be. They created extra laws on top of the real laws just to make sure the real laws were not violated. The Sabbath Day became a hot button topic and Jesus often found Himself in the religious leaders' crosshairs over His treatment of the Sabbath Day.

The Jewish scholars developed the Sabbath Day's journey law. It said that a Jew could not travel beyond a certain distance on the Sabbath Day, even to chase after their

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 460.

animal. If they did so, it was considered 'work' and in violation of the Fourth Commandment.

They developed this from Exodus 16:29. When God gave the manna, He told them to not leave their homes on the Sabbath Day. They were to gather two days' worth of manna on the sixth day to get through the sixth and seventh day. Then, they took into consideration Numbers 35:5. This verse said that the Levites were to be given pastureland that extended in a 2,000 cubit radius from a city's limits. 2,000 cubits is approximately 1,000 yards.

The Rabbis formed an interpretation that said one could not journey more than 2,000 cubits from the city's limits on the Sabbath Day, or else it was in violation of the Fourth Commandment. This highlights for us how legalistic the Jews of Jesus time had become about the Law of Moses. Perhaps they had good intentions and wanted to make sure to never violate God's Law, but it became a heavy burden placed upon the Jews.

With this in mind, we look at some instances of Jesus and the Sabbath Day coming into conflict with the Jews.

Jesus 'Worked' on the Sabbath

Luke 13:10-17

Jesus healed a demon possessed woman in a synagogue on the Sabbath. The leader of the synagogue became angry over this and told all the sick people seeking healing to seek this *work* on the six days that work is permitted but not to on the Sabbath.

Jesus challenged this thinking by calling them out. He reminded them that even on the Sabbath Day they ensure their farm animals are watered and fed. Why should they care more for their farm animals on the Sabbath than a person, created in the image of God?

Mark 2:23-27

Jesus' followers were accused by the Pharisees of violating the Sabbath for plucking grain and eating it. Jesus reminded them how David ate the priest's showbread from the Tabernacle when it was technically not lawful for him to do so. The point is the Pharisees were picking and choosing where they applied the law and when they wanted to use the law as a weapon against people. They turned the Sabbath (and the rest of God's Law for that matter) to hold control over the people.

Jesus says something profound, as always. He informs them, they had the Sabbath backwards. The Sabbath was created for man's benefit. Man was not created to serve

the Sabbath's benefit. The Pharisees had become focused on honoring the *Day* of the Sabbath and not the *Lord* of the Sabbath.

The Son of God was the master over the Sabbath, not the Pharisees.

This shows us an important idea. The Law of God was given for their benefit. God did not create people so He could hang a heavy Law over them. God created people to love Him and be with Him. The Law was meant to help people know how to relate to God and love Him in a way that truly pleased Him. We could say, people were not created for the Law, the Law was created for people to know God and live for God's glory.

Jesus explained to the Jews of His day that the Sabbath Day's rest did not mean literally nothing could be done or else God is angry. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Jesus taught on the Sabbath. Jesus saw to it people's needs were met on the Sabbath. Jesus ate and drank on the Sabbath.

[Jesus, the Eternal Sabbath Day Rest](#)

Hebrews 4:1-13

Hebrews makes several theological points drawing upon Old Testament ideas and stories. Its focus is on explaining how Jesus Christ is the point, purpose, and greater fulfillment of all the Old Testament themes.

For examples, the High Priests were important, but Jesus has a greater priesthood. The old covenant mediated at Mt Sinai through Moses was good, but Jesus mediates a better new covenant.

Hebrews also uses the Old Testament idea of Sabbath rest to explain a very significant point about Jesus.

In Hebrews 4:1-13, we read that God has promised to give His people rest. In the Old Testament they were promised rest in the Promised Land. However, the first generation of Jews that came out of Egypt, failed to enter God's rest due to their unbelief and rebellion. Their children were permitted to enter the Promised Land of rest. However, Hebrews points out this was not the true meaning behind God's promised *rest* for His people.

Much of Old Testament Israel did not heed God's voice. They made life harder on themselves because of their sin and rebellion. However, God did not stop calling out to them. Hebrews makes the point that God intended to give His people rest, not just here on earth, but for all eternity. Rest from what? Rest from their self-effort to save themselves.

Jesus is the Sabbath Day rest God provides His people. What does that mean? When a person puts their faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, they have *entered God's rest*. They have ceased from their labor of trying to earn their salvation. They rest in God's salvation through faith in Jesus. Jesus provides an *eternal* Sabbath Day's rest.

Hebrews 4:9-11 explains God meant to provide a true eternal Sabbath Day's rest through His Son. A person must make every *effort* to ensure they have entered God's Sabbath Day rest through faith in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The Sabbath was meant for the benefit of people. People were not designed to benefit the Sabbath. God rested on the Sabbath showing He had completed His six days of creation. This set the example for people to engage in their normal work duties for six days but have a day of rest and recovery on the seventh.

The Sabbath Day command was meant to cause the Kingdom people to refocus and recover. Refocus their devotion and worship to God while recovering from their customary labors of the week.

Let's summarize the first four commandments.

- (1) Give God your total allegiance & devotion {no other gods...}
- (2) Only worship God in ways He has commanded {make no idols...}
- (3) Speak of God with the respect and honor He deserves {do not take God's name in vain}
- (4) Set aside the seventh day to refocus and recover {keep Sabbath Day holy}

Honor God with your allegiance. Honor God with your worship. Honor God with your speech. Honor God with your time

God began the Ten Commandments with four rules that explained to Israel how they are to relate to God.

In the next section we will focus on the last six commandments that deal with how a person relates to their neighbor.

At the end of the Ten Commandments, we will take time to ask the question, how much of the Law in the Old Testament must a Christian keep today?