

The Ten Commandments:

The Fourth Commandment

The Fourth Commandment

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it

- Exodus 20:8-11 (RSV)

The Fourth Commandment

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God, you shall not do any work -- you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 NRSV

The Fourth Commandment

1. *command:*

- remember
- keep holy

2. *details:*

- acknowledgement of six legitimate work days
- 7th day: complete and comprehensive work stoppage for all

3. *rationale:*

- because God rested on the 7th day
- because God freed you from slavery in Egypt

Remembering

remember: involves not mere mental action,
but active observance

- Exodus version: *Zachor*, “remember”
- Deuteronomy version: *Shamor*, “keep”
or “observe”

Talmud:

Zachor: reminds us to celebrate the
positive

Shamor: charges us against violating the
“do not’s”

Sabbath as a Palace in Time

“palace in time” “island in time” “sanctuary in time” “holiness in time”

- keeping the sabbath holy involves separating it from all the other days (which are characterized by the activities of work, productivity, servitude to others), making it an “island in time,” removed from the mainland of the rest of the week
- not all time is our own; the God of all time retains the right to determine how one day should be used

Sabbath as a Palace in Time

“Technical civilization is man’s conquest of space. It is a triumph frequently achieved by sacrificing an essential ingredient of existence, namely, time. In technical civilization, we expend time to gain space. . . . The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.”

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

Sabbath as Divine Gift

Jewish poetic descriptions of the Sabbath:

“The Sabbath Bride” - radiant and beautiful, poetic symbol of charm and purity, object of love and affection

“The Sabbath Queen” - symbol of majesty, beauty and grace

“The sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the sabbath”

- Mark 2:27

Sabbath as Part of the Order of Creation

“God’s resting is a divine act that builds into the very created order of things a working / resting rhythm.” (Terrence Fretheim)

“it is ordained in the very fabric of creation that the world is not a place of endless productivity, ambition, or anxiety.” (Walter Brueggemann)

Sabbath Keeping as Creation Keeping

“Even more, *sabbath-keeping is an act of creation-keeping*. To keep the sabbath is to participate in God’s intention for the rhythm of creation. Not keeping the sabbath is a violation of the created order; it returns one aspect of that order to chaos. What the creatures do with the sabbath has cosmic effects.”

- Terrence Fretheim

Sabbath as a Remembrance of Creation

- the world is not ours
- God is the Lord and Creator of the universe
- reflects our servitude to God

we can acknowledge this by stopping our labors, stopping our manipulation of nature, letting nature run itself

Sabbath as Remembrance of Exodus from Egypt

“manservants” and “maidservants” are freed
from working for their human masters on
the Sabbath

emphasizes our freedom from servitude to
human masters

(should include the “taskmaster” in
ourselves?)

“The very concreteness of sabbath is a sacrament witnessing to the reality of exodus and to the governance of the creator who has broken the restless penchant for productive activity. . . . Sabbath is the daring recognition that with the change of sovereigns wrought in the exodus, such unrewarding expenditure of labor is no longer required.”

- Walter Brueggemann

Sabbath as Egalitarian Institution

rest is for all, rich and poor, master and servant, man and animal

the implicit equality of the Sabbath rest witnesses God's intention that creation should be a community of peace in which all creatures stand in shared rest

Sabbath as Egalitarian Institution

“What is the Sabbath? A reminder of every man’s royalty; an abolition of the distinction of master and slave, rich and poor, success and failure. To celebrate the Sabbath is to experience one’s ultimate independence of civilization and society, of achievement and anxiety. The Sabbath is an embodiment of the belief that all men are equal and that equality of men means the nobility of men. The greatest sin of man is to forget that he is prince.”

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

Sabbath as Protest

Seneca, Roman philosopher: spending every seventh day without “doing anything” wastes one seventh of your life

“We must understand that doing nothing, being silent and open to the world, letting things happen inside, can be as important as -- and sometimes more important than -- what we commonly call ‘useful’”

- Rabbi Gunther Plaut

Sabbath as Protest

Sabbath is:

- protest against worldly concept that value exists only in producing (*world is more than a place of endless productivity*)
- statement that the world is not ours (*remembrance of creation*)
- statement that we belong to no human master (*remembrance of Exodus*)

Sabbath as a Foretaste of the World to Come

envisions the new world order where all the
world's creatures will be at peace with
one another

Jews pray at the end of their Sabbath service
for the Sabbath that never ends

Practice

What as a practical matter must we do to remember, observe the Sabbath, keep it holy?

Worship is not mentioned, but clearly is one means of making the Sabbath “holy”

Practice

fundamentally: must involve:

“periodic, regular disengagement from systems of productivity whereby the world uses people up to exhaustion. That disengagement refers also to culture-produced expectations for frantic leisure, frantic consumptions, or frantic exercise.”

- Walter Brueggemann

Practice

May involve:

- termination of routines
- disengagement from some social conventions
- lowering one's standard of living

Focus: God is the center of our lives

The Parable of the Rich Man whose land produced abundantly (Luke 12:16-29)

The Blessing of the Sabbath

“If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs, then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob . . .

“

(Isaiah 58: 13-14 NRSV)

Footnote: Sun. vs. Sat.

early centuries: Eucharist not related to the Fourth Commandment

- Fourth Commandment: imitate God the creator who rested on the Sabbath
- Sunday: day to celebrate Jesus' death, resurrection

Fourth Century: Emperor Constantine required cessation of all work on Sunday except farming

538 AD Council of Orleans: prohibited servile work on Sunday

- landowners could not require their serfs to work

References

- The Book of Exodus.** Walter Brueggemann. In: The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume I. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994
- Broken Tablets. Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves.** Rachel S. Mikva, editor. Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1999.
- Commandments of Compassion.** James F. Keenan, S.J. Sheed & Ward, Franklin, WI, 1999
- Do We Still Need the Ten Commandments? : A Fresh Look at God's Laws of Love & Changing Perspectives.** John H. Timmerman. Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis. 1997
- Exodus. (Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.)** Terence E. Fretheim, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1991
- God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism.** Abraham Joshua Heschel. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1955.
- To Be a Jew.** Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin. Basic Books, 1972.