

# The Ten Commandments for today

## 4. "Remember the sabbath day"

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**A**LTHOUGH THE sabbath day was a "sign" between God and Israel (Ex. 31:17), the spiritual principles are applicable to us in the twenty-first century. Let us consider, then, the two reasons for Israel remembering the sabbath day.

Firstly, as Exodus 31:17 says, it was a reminder that "in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed". A weekly remembrance of that by Israel on the sabbath day would have served as a witness to the idolatrous nations round about them, and should have reinforced in their own mind their complete dependence upon God. Living in a pagan world, we too need constantly to remind ourselves that the Creation record really was "the beginning", as Jesus demonstrated in his discussion with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3-6). Our acceptance of the simple Creation record is going to mark us out in the time that remains to the coming of the Lord.

The Creation project having been completed, the Lord, we are told, was "refreshed". The sight of His completed wondrous handiwork brought joy to our God. He has feeling for what He does, whether in His plans for Israel (Jer. 31:20; Hos. 11:8,9) or in His reaction to the individual who responds to His gospel message (Lk. 15:7). So Israel should have seen the sabbath as a wonderful, God-given opportunity to enjoy, and be refreshed in the things that really matter; but, more important, they should have seen in that day of commitment to Yahweh a pointing forward to the "rest" of the Kingdom (Heb. 4:9). Isaiah writes:

"If thou . . . call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (58:13,14).

The spiritually minded Jew would have surely seen the need to apply the sabbath day's principles every day. There *was* work done on the sabbath day. If the eighth day of a child's life fell on the sabbath day then that child was circumcised, and

offerings were sacrificed on that day, but these things were commanded by God; it was God's work that was being done. So with us; every day we must endeavour to apply the principles of the sabbath day. Our daily life should be influenced and dictated by God's Word; and by taking on the yoke of Christ we cease from our own fleshly works, manifest "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22) and "find rest unto [our] souls" (Mt. 11:29).

This brings us to consider the second reason for Israel remembering the sabbath day. In Deuteronomy 5:15 we read: "remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day". The day of rest should have been a reminder to Israel of their freedom from the hard bondage of Egypt, and that their nationhood was derived from God. As the psalmist wrote: "Know ye that the LORD He is God: it is He That hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (100:3). Help given to Gentiles was to stem from an appreciation of what God had done for them (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19); thus the real significance of the sabbath was brought out in the daily routine of life.

We have been brought out of spiritual Egypt, and Paul stresses we should never forget that fact: "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh . . . that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye . . . are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:11-13). As with Israel, God has called us for Himself. In the same passage Paul says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (v. 10). From that spiritual relationship our "good works" flow, because they are God-centred, the key element of sabbath day observance.

So, in these two reasons for sabbath observance we have God presented to us as Creator and Redeemer, both naturally and spiritually. Alas, Israel did not fully appreciate the latter. May we not make the same mistake.