

Keeping Sabbath
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Deut 5:15

(BHS)

וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי-עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
וַיֹּצֵאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם
בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה
עַל-כֵּן צִוָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:

(NIV)

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt
and that the Lord your God brought you out of there
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.
Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you
to observe the Sabbath day.

The first word, from *zakar*, means “remember,” as in “Zechariah.” *Ebed* is “slave” or “servant” as in “Obadiah.” You will note that “Egypt” is based on, “the land of *Mizraim*.” In line 3, *hazaq* means “mighty” as in “Hezekiah.” Note in line 4, “upon thus” or “for this reason.” This logically connects what follows with what precedes. Line 5 begins, “to do”—which NIV aptly renders “to observe.” You see that “Sabbath” is a direct transliteration of the Hebrew.

As you know, Israel was commanded to rest from their labors one day out of seven. But why? Here in the Fourth Commandment the reason is spelled out. It has to do with salvation. It is about being delivered from harsh servitude in Egypt. The Sabbath weekly reconnected Israel with their new state of rest—in contrast to their previous condition. That is why it was commanded. “Remember” is the operative word. Remember what you were, and (implied) celebrate the rest you now enjoy.

The Rest of God is a state of being. It is graciously given and cannot be earned. God won Israel by defeating Pharaoh. Israel had no active role in that struggle. They were the prize to the victor. The book of Hebrews reflects on this

and makes the point that the true Sabbath Rest is a state of being that one enters by believing the gospel (Heb 4:11).

I believe that in this age of grace, anyone who hears the gospel and believes in Jesus automatically keeps the Fourth Commandment, by entering this Rest. Having thus kept the ordinance in Christ, it becomes our weekly delight to gather with God's people to worship (Isa 58:13).

As you know, the Ten Commandments were written by the very finger of God on tablets of stone. But here is the kicker: we have two versions. One is found in Deuteronomy 5. The other is Exod 20:11, which gives an alternate rationale for the Sabbath, "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh."

Although they are quite different, we believe that both Exodus and Deuteronomy are faithful and authentic to the sense of what was actually written on the original slates. Personally, I believe that each adaptation reflects the same spiritual truth of the tablets' words. Thus I reason that the two versions are actually just two ways of saying the same thing; they both assert the same truth since they are based on the same stone master copy.

By this analysis, "In six days God created then rested the seventh," makes the same spiritual point as, "God rescued Israel from slavery with a mighty hand." God rested after creating, in a (timeless) day without evening and morning, and declared this new condition to be holy. This is to assert that the goal of all creation—and all God's people—is to move into this eternal Sabbath Rest. Israel's deliverance from slavery is another great picture of that. This is why they kept Sabbath. The penultimate meaning of the days of

creation in Genesis is that through the gospel of Jesus the church today enters into this Rest. We rest from meritorious works as Israel rested from Pharaoh's tyranny. Similarly, Paul connects God creating light on the first day with the light of the gospel shining in our hearts (2 Cor 4:6). So Creation Week begins pointing to the illumination of the gospel (according to Paul) and ends by pointing to our ongoing rest in Christ (according to Hebrews).

Do you believe in the Days of Creation? In other words, are you resting in Christ? Are you resting from keeping the law? From believing you can earn heaven? The Sabbath should lead you to Jesus. And in him, of course, you find that you want to be better, to live better, to put off what doesn't belong.

Today we believe the gospel—we rest in Christ from meritorious works—and paradoxically must strive and labor to be faithful. But the final, ultimate meaning of the Sabbath is yet to be seen. Jesus will return for us, and then we will enter into his consummate Rest.

Then we will know the Sabbath fully and completely, and what the days of creation are straining toward. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!