

Some thoughts on the
fourth Commandment

The Commandment

Ex. 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Deut. 5:12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 14 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. 15 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.

A word from Isaiah

*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;*

Isaiah 58:13-14

Abraham Heschel

He [sic] who wants to enter into the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal of embezzling his own life. He must say farewell to (work) and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul.”

Sabbath Keeping

*You can only hope to understand
Sabbath if you take the time to
understand the context in which the
command was given.*



As One Peculiar Commandment

- ✦ *The instruction to keep Sabbath is found within the 10 Commandments.*
- ✦ *It is the fourth commandment, and acts as a “hinge” between the 3 before which are about the God of Israel, and the following 6 which are about living as a “neighbor” to those around you.*

The Commandments begin . . .

*Ex. 20:1 Then God spoke all these words:
2 “I am the LORD your God, who
brought you out of the land of Egypt, out
of the house of slavery;”*

A Quick Recap of the story

- ✿ *Pharoah most powerful of men . . .*
- ✿ *Controlled the Nile.*
- ✿ *Great power*
 - ✿ *Yet filled with Anxiety - scarcity.*

A Quick Recap of the story

- ✿ *Entire socio-economic system was a pyramid scheme in which many toiling workers produced the wealth which trickled up through the managers and to the top of the pyramid where Pharaoh enjoyed surplus wealth.*

The socioeconomics of Egypt...

- ✿ *Create a system of insatiable consumption, and cruel exploitation, so that the top of the pyramid would have more than it would ever need.*
- ✿ *They are making bricks in order to build “storehouse cities” for the grain. [Pithom & Ramses - cf. 1:11] It is **never** enough . . .*

The socioeconomics of Egypt...

- ✿ *The workers are “oppressed” and are “forced” to produce more and more bricks. The Egyptian managers were “ruthless in all the tasks they imposed on them.”*
- ✿ *When Moses suggests that the workers be given time off to worship God - Pharoah replies:*

The socioeconomics of Egypt...

- ✦ *5:5b “...you want them to stop working!” 6 That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, 7 “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ 9 Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words.”*

A System With NO rest!

- ✿ No rest for Anxious Pharaoh who is sleepless in his anxiety that there will never be enough.
- ✿ No rest for the Egyptian managers who are caught up in a system of cruel and unreasonable production cycles.
- ✿ No rest for the workers who must make the bricks to build the storehouses for grain they will never eat.

With God's help they escape . . .

- ✦ *20:3 Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6 but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." 7 So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. 8 The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do."*

This New God has peculiar commands...

- ✿ *Not interested in production (bricks)!?*
- ✿ *Interested in covenant (relationships with God & neighbors) characterized by mercy, steadfast love, and faithfulness (see Deut. 34:6-7).*
- ✿ *At the heart of this new relational God is REST.*

Exodus 20:11 makes clear that:

- ✿ *This God is NOT a workaholic.*
- ✿ *That this God is not preoccupied with squeezing out the fullest productivity possible in creation.*
- ✿ *That this God knows that the well-being of creation and of humanity does not depend on endless work!*

Choosing the God of Exodus

- ✿ *Is to choose Restfulness over Restlessness.*
- ✿ *It is to let go of the sense that we are “not enough yet.”*
- ✿ *And that we do not possess enough yet....*