

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

“The Fourth Commandment”

“Observe the sabbath day to 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 of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.”

The repetition of the Fourth Commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, having been previously witnessed in Exodus 20:8-11, allows Bible readers not only the opportunity to compare and contrast the perspectives of each—but also to evaluate the thoughts, observations, stresses, and conclusions of different commentators. Indeed, our appreciation of the institution of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, would be limited if Deuteronomy 5:12-15 is not probed for its significance.

There are some differences in the version of the Fourth Commandment appearing in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, when compared with Exodus 20:8-11. Conservatives, who believe in a Mosaic origin of the Torah or Pentateuch,¹ are likely to explain these differences on the basis of the setting portrayed in Deuteronomy, with Ancient Israel being prepared to enter into the Promised Land, and not Israel at Mount Sinai as previously recorded. Differences between these two versions of the Fourth Commandment, may also be explained on the basis of different theological stresses. More liberal examiners, adhering to the JEDP documentary hypothesis,² may be prone to explain the differences between Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15, with this version of the Fourth Commandment originating from the so-called D source or Deuteronomist, likely from the period of the Josianic reforms (cf. 2 Kings 22:8ff).

5:12 This edition of the Fourth Commandment opens with the admonition, “Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you” (NJPS). The statement *shamru et-yom haShabbat* (שָׁמְרוּ אֶת-יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת), “Safeguard the Sabbath day” (ATS) or “Keep the sabbath day” (KJV), is different from what appears in Exodus 20:8, which has “Remember the sabbath day.” A theological explanation, comparing and contrasting these two statements, might argue, among other interjections, that to “remember” the Sabbath is to focus the attention of a person on God as Creator, and that to “observe” the Sabbath is to focus attention upon the necessity for rest, which is something that the Israelites scarcely received in Egypt (v. 15). And with this in mind, the different venues of Israel at Mount Sinai and Israel preparing to enter the Promised Land, would further account for some differences of emphasis in the Fourth Commandment.

In the Talmud, though, it is witnessed how the differences between Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:12, are thought to have come about because God spoke both of them at the same time: “‘Remember the Sabbath day’ (Exo. 20:8) and ‘Keep the Sabbath day’ (Deu. 5:12) were pronounced in a single act of speech, an act of speech that the mouth cannot express nor the ear take in” (b.*Shevuot* 20b).³ J.H. Hertz, reflecting more of a Twentieth Century Orthodox Jewish perspective in his *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, instead indicates how “Tradition explains that the latter {remember} refers to the positive precepts in connection with the Sabbath, to its sanctification by wine, prayer and Sabbath joy; whereas ‘observe’ the Sabbath means refraining from any desecration through labour by self or dependents.”⁴

¹ If necessary, do consult the entry for the Book of Deuteronomy, appearing in the workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

² Patrick D. Miller, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Deuteronomy* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), pp 79-81; Ronald E. Clements, “The Book of Deuteronomy,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al. *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 2:331-332.

³ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

⁴ Hertz, 766; also Scherman, *Chumash*, 969.

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Richard Elliot Friedman, who holds to a source-critical view of the Pentateuch in his *Commentary on the Torah*, notably does not posit different sources as being the cause of differences between Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:12. Friedman instead looks to two different emphases being present, detailing, “Many have commented on the two words. The most basic explanation may be that the two are both necessary and complementary: In the mind, one must remember it. In actions, one must observe it.”⁵ A conservative evangelical Christian commentator like R.K. Harrison, draws the conclusion for Deuteronomy 5:12, “Moses used a stronger term here because he was exhorting the people to observe God’s commandments.”⁶

Noting that *Shabbat* is to be a holy and sanctified institution, Jeffrey H. Tigay focuses attention on “The fact that Sabbath observance is an emulation of God’s activity and an acknowledgment of His creation of the world explains why observing it honors Him. It explains, too, why the Sabbath command is the longest in the Decalogue and why it is sometimes paired with the prohibition of idolatry: like the latter commandment, observing the Sabbath is one of the quintessential expressions of loyalty to God.”⁷

While all readers tend to be in agreement that keeping the weekly Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), is something that would make Ancient Israel distinct—and consequently Jewish observance, albeit somewhat strict, of the Sabbath throughout religious history has provided a noticeable level of distinction—the original distinction of Sabbath observance actually came out of there not being any similar institution in the ancient world. P.C. Craigie observes, “The word sabbath is a noun related to the verb *shābaṭ* [שָׁבַט] meaning ‘cease, rest.’ Although cognate forms of this verb are found in other Semitic languages, there is no clear evidence of a *sabbath day* (or of time construed as a week) apart from the Israelite tradition. Thus the fourth commandment once again established a point of distinction between the religion of Israel and that of her neighbors.”⁸

5:13-14 The distinction of the Sabbath as an institution is surely present in how, “Six days shall you labor and accomplish all your work” (v. 13, ATS), as it is different from the previous six working days. The Sabbath as an inclusive institution, which is to benefit the broad community of Ancient Israel, is further elaborated:

“[B]ut 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, or your manservant, or your maidservant, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you” (v. 14, RSV).

It is to be fairly recognized how the Sabbath is hardly something established by God, for the sole benefit of ethnic male Israelites. Friedman draws attention to how “The text does not mention ‘your wife.’ One might take this to be male-chauvinist, but I think that, in this case, it is the opposite. The text mentions daughters as well as sons, and it mentions females as well as male servants here (and elsewhere: Deut 12:12,18). Therefore the words ‘you and your sons and your daughter’ must be understood to be directed to both men and women, husbands and wives, in the first place.”⁹

What tends to be piqued in contemporary Messianic discussions over the Sabbath, is the place of the *ger* (גֵּר) or sojourner, defined by HALOT with “**protected citizen, stranger**.”¹⁰ The *ger* is often concluded to represent the place of the non-Jew in today’s Messianic movement. In the view of Tigay, “This reminder to include resident aliens in the Sabbath rest is comparable to

⁵ Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, 582.

⁶ R.K. Harrison, “Deuteronomy,” in *NBCR*, 214.

⁷ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 68.

⁸ P.C. Craigie, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 157; also Duane L. Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy 1-11* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 118.

⁹ Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, 583; also Tigay, 68.

¹⁰ HALOT, 1:201.

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Deuteronomy's exhortations to include them in religious celebrations (16:11,14; 26:11). Such reminders are necessary because of the aliens' vulnerability and the likelihood that their needs would be overlooked. The motive given for the Sabbath in Exodus 23:12 is indicative of the low status they might hold as well as the Torah's solicitude for their welfare."¹¹ The sojourner or *ger*, a non-Israelite, but resident within the community of Israel, was to observe the weekly Sabbath.

The presence of how "your ox, your donkey, and your every animal" (ATS) were to be given a Sabbath rest, must not be overlooked, either. Hertz states, "Care and kindness to cattle are of such profound importance for the humanizing of man that this duty has its place in the Decalogue."¹² Some, to be sure, have posited various hypotheses regarding why different groups of persons and animals appear in v. 14, but that is not the intention of the commandment. The intention, as Christopher J.H. Wright puts it, is that "The sabbath commandment is specifically for the benefit of the whole working population, animal as well as human."¹³ Harrison further observes,

"The humanitarian emphasis of this verse is an additional reason for sabbath observance. There is no need to devise complicated explanations of the origin of such amplifications of the original commandment. They are exactly such as would arise naturally in the mind of a fluent speaker, especially in the light of years of experience of trying to guide his people in the proper observation and the extent of meaning of the fourth commandment."¹⁴

Given the broad-sweeping categories of people in Ancient Israel who were to have a Sabbath rest, the category that tends to get more attention than any of the others, are actually the slaves mentioned in v. 14: "so that your male and female slave may rest as you do" (NJPS). Noting *kamokha* (כְּמוֹכָה), "as well as you," Hertz asserts, "The slave is to have the same right to his Sabbath-rest as the master. Sabbath-rest thus proclaims the quality of master and man."¹⁵ The *ArtScroll Chumash*, while summarizing some traditional Jewish perspectives on Deuteronomy 5:14, actually draws the conclusion that the slave in Israel was to keep the Sabbath the same as any other person:

"The term *slave and maidservant* of this commandment refers to non-Jewish slaves, who are required to observe the commandments. Consequently, the Torah stresses that they must observe the Sabbath *like you*, i.e., not only are they forbidden to desecrate the Sabbath for their masters, they *personally* must observe all the Sabbath laws (*Ramban to Exodus 20:10*)."¹⁶

So how important is the weekly Sabbath or *Shabbat* for those in God's community? Patrick D. Miller thinks that "Neither Jewish nor Christian existence can be maintained as a vital reality without sabbath sanctification....The Sabbath is set to provide the reality of freedom, celebration, and rest for everyone, especially for those who might not easily find it."¹⁷ Certainly the philosophical influence of Deuteronomy 5:14, and the Sabbath needing to be observed by all in Ancient Israel, cannot go unnoticed. Wright astutely describes,

"The sabbath was thus one part (arguably the most important part) of OT law's concern for workers, and especially for those most at risk in the world of work...Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister from 1957 to 1963, is reported to have described the sabbath as the first and greatest worker-protection act in history."¹⁸

5:15 In Exodus 20:11, the significance of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* is drawn from the narrative of God's Creation of the universe (Genesis 2:1-3), but in Deuteronomy 5:15, the institution of the Sabbath is drawn from the Exodus: "You must remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and *ADONAI* your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an

¹¹ Tigay, 69.

¹² Hertz, 767.

¹³ Christopher J.H. Wright, *New International Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 75.

¹⁴ Harrison, in *NBCR*, pp 214-215.

¹⁵ Hertz, 767.

¹⁶ Scherman, *Chumash*, 970.

¹⁷ Miller, 83.

¹⁸ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 76.

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outstretched arm. Therefore *ADONAI* your God commanded you to keep *Yom Shabbat*” (TLV). Is this difference the result of two separate sources being employed for the Pentateuch, or are there different theological emphases present for the origin of the Sabbath?¹⁹

Frequently throughout the Book of Deuteronomy, Israel’s deliverance via the Exodus is appealed to so that the population might keep God’s Instruction (15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22). That those who keep the Sabbath are to remember the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, would surely serve as a reminder of how such slaves never received any weekly day of rest—and such rest was to be extended to all strata of human and animal within the community of Israel. Hertz concludes, “The Israelites in Egypt slaved day after day without a rest. By ceasing from toil one day in seven, they would distinguish their work from slavery. And in their new life in the Promised Land they were to avoid imposing on others what had been so bitter to them.”²⁰ Wright emphasizes that the Sabbath conveys a message not just to those delivered by the Exodus and their descendants, Israel proper, but that it speaks to those from the world at large who would come to know of such an Israel and its God:

“The sabbath thus has the nature both of a creation ordinance and a redemptive sign, and in both respects it directs human minds to the living God. As a creation gift it has relevance to all human beings; as a sign of redemption it has particular relevance to God’s people, who exist for the sake of the rest of the nations. Thus, in Isaiah 56:2, 4, 6, it features in the description of those foreigners who would choose to identify themselves with Israel and with Israel’s God.”²¹

Is there a huge difference between Exodus 20:11 making the Sabbath a Creation ordinance, and Deuteronomy 5:15 associating it with the Exodus? Tigay, who would hold to various critical presuppositions surrounding Deuteronomy, actually does state, “These references are not mutually exclusive but serve different functions: Exodus explains the origin of the Sabbath, while Deuteronomy explains its aim and offers a motive for observing it.”²² Craigie is keen to detail how there is no independent people of Israel without the Exodus, and how the Sabbath functions to recognize how Israel is a people freed from servitude:

“The Exodus from Egypt marks in effect the creation of God’s people as a nation, and the memory of that event was also a reminder of the Israelites of their total dependence upon God. Whereas at one time the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, with no appointed day of rest from their continual and monotonous labor, God’s deliverance made them potentially a nation, and the sabbath was to function as a day of rest in which the deliverance from the former bondage could be remembered with thanksgiving.”²³

Further in 1 Corinthians 10:1, writing a mixed audience of Jewish and non-Jewish people in Corinth, the Apostle Paul would assert, “I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (NRSV). While the heritage of the Exodus and deliverance of the Sabbath is part of Jewish Believers’ Biblical and cultural inheritance, it is also something that positively affects the spiritual inheritance of non-Jewish Believers, as a part of their inclusion within the people of God.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 application There is actually some interesting discussion witnessed among Christian commentaries on Deuteronomy, on how the Fourth Commandment seemingly applies to Christian people. There are, in the Twentieth and Twenty-First centuries, various Christians who would disregard the seventh-day Sabbath as being applicable in the post-resurrection era, and regard it as being a relic of the Old Testament, relegating it to the pre-resurrection era. Others, as is witnessed, would apply the Fourth Commandment to either a new “Sunday Sabbath” or their observance of the first day of the week as “the Lord’s Day.” At least in

¹⁹ Scherman, *Chumash*, 971 offers a list of reasons for the Sabbath proposed throughout Jewish history.

²⁰ Hertz, 767.

²¹ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 75.

²² Tigay, 69.

²³ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 157.

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this writer's case, his family's mixed Reformed and Wesleyan heritage were affected by the kinds of sentiments you will see expressed, on the transference from a seventh-day Saturday Sabbath to a new "Sunday Sabbath."²⁴ While he believes in the post-resurrection era continuity of the seventh-day Sabbath, we do need to still understand the logic of many Christians friendly to a Sabbath-principle, and recognize that their arguments are not rooted in any kind of "sun worship" or solar veneration, as elements within the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement may insinuate. Many, thankfully, are favorable to the keeping of at least what would be considered to be a *Sabbath*.

J.A. Thompson is reflective of the view that the seventh-day Sabbath and the common Christian observance of the first day of the week, are not to be directly associated with one another, but instead with Sunday Church representing a new institution for a new period of salvation history:

"This commandment has posed many problems for the Christian. Jesus' statements (Mk. 2:27, 28) that the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath, and that He, the Son of man, was Lord of the sabbath, removed the law for ever from the unwholesome restrictions of the rabbis. The Christian observance of Sunday is, of course, not an observance of the seventh day but of the first day, and hence is in the nature of a new commandment based on a new covenant. It is nevertheless the 'fulfillment' of the old. The first day provides opportunity to commemorate the resurrection of Christ which made possible deliverance from the bondage of sin (*cf.* verse 12), and the renewal of life by way of a new creation (*cf.* Ex. 20:10, 11)."²⁵

This quotation usefully summarizes the issues worthy of reevaluation from the Apostolic Scriptures, as they involve various Sabbath conflicts between Yeshua of Nazareth and Jewish religious leaders, and some of the issues of the timing of His resurrection from the dead (discussed further).

In his resource in the *NIV Application* series, Daniel I. Block makes some pertinent points about how Christians approach the Ten Commandments, and in particular, the Sabbath. He details how if contemporary Christian people want to genuinely hold the Ten Commandments in high regard, that they are required to keep the institution of the Sabbath in high regard as well. Block considers that the Sabbath-principle has not been abolished, usefully stating how the transition to Sunday took place in the Second Century C.E. after the time of the Apostles, and that the Messiah Himself indeed was faithful to observe it. He summarizes,

"[I]f one accepts some terms of the Decalogue as normative for Christians, one must accept them all...This includes the seventh-day Sabbath. Some argue for the normativeness of the 'Ten Commands' as a guide for Christian behavior, but then remove the Sabbath ordinance as an exception, claiming this to be part of the ceremonial law that ended in Christ. However, this approach is indefensible...The seventh-day Sabbath ordinance is embedded in the Decalogue as a fundamental principle of covenant relationship, along with the prohibition of any other gods, of murder, and so on. One may not treat it differently from the rest....

"Nowhere does the New Testament declare the seventh-day Sabbath passé in Christ. On the contrary, Jesus (*e.g.*, Luke 3:16) and the early disciples observed it (Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4)....

"It seems that by the first half of the second century AD Christians increasingly gathered to worship on Sunday, though many continued to observe the Sabbath on Saturday...They did not abolish the Sabbath; as the seventh-day Sabbath was the sign of the covenant for Israel (*cf.* Ex. 31:17), so the first-day Sabbath became the sign of the new covenant for Christians..."²⁶

Wright's approach to the institution of the Sabbath, focuses more on how a rest from labors, forces people to focus on God, turning away from themselves and their human ability to create apparent "idols":

²⁴ Consult the previous discussion in Chapter 7, "Our Weekly Shabbat."

²⁵ J.A. Thompson, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 117.

Also Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al. *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 3:55, 56 who concludes that the seventh-day Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week or Sunday.

Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 158 draws the conclusion that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday per a thematic association between Israel's Exodus from Egypt, and the new life free from sin that is available in Yeshua the Messiah.

²⁶ Daniel I. Block, *NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), pp 172, 173.

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"Human beings were created to live and work in the earth. Alienated from God as the source of our fulfillment and rest, we endow work and the whole economic enterprise with a significance beyond its God-given role. Work itself and the material produce it generates can then become an idol to be served without the limitation of God's own higher claim on our lives. In fact, it can come to dominate the whole of life and to define our very being ('you are what you do'), thereby usurping the God in whose image we are made. This idolatrous potential is particularly evident in our 'workaholic' and 'economaniac' society. The command to rest from work on the sabbath day forces a pause in this compulsive process and reminds us that time, like the earth itself, belongs to God, as does everything by which we are able to create wealth (cf. Deut. 8:17f.). The sabbath is thus a further bulwark against idolatry, building the claims of the primary commandments into the ceaseless regularity of daily life itself."²⁷

Generally speaking, when the issue of the Sabbath is positively contemplated by Christian examiners, what tends to be focused upon is the need for modern people needing rest and refreshment from a hectic-paced life of work. Duane L. Christensen actually approaches the significance of the Sabbath from an opposite direction, affirming how Western people have more time for leisure in the late Twentieth Century (writing 1991) than they ever have had before. Christensen stresses that leisure, though, is not the same thing as a Sabbath rest:

"It is...an established fact that leisure time is increasing. Closing time comes earlier and the four-day work week is already a reality for some. We no longer speak of 'Sunday' but 'the weekend'—and frequently of the 'long weekend' in which holidays are deliberately moved to extend our leisure time. Low-cost tours and recreational vehicles make southern climes and exotic places available to most. It appears that the message of the sabbath has been victorious. Those who refuse to accept the rhythm of working time and leisure time are flying in the face of one of the most sacred laws of modern society.

"A closer look, however, suggests that other changes are taking place as well that call for a fresh look at the principle of the sabbath rest in modern society. In many cases increased free time does not bring us time for rest and celebration. In fact there are those who experience dread of free time because it brings with it boredom and loneliness. There are also strong pressures to turn leisure into a new time of activity, often under the guise of a hobby, which in reality sometimes becomes a new type of 'servile labor' that stifles communication within families. Excellence in sports, as both participants and spectators, becomes obsession. Some seem to settle for little more than the 'dreariness of dragging through the weekend with the help of TV, fast-food meals, a few beers, and "extra" sleep..."²⁸

The Sabbath is to be a time uniquely dedicated to God, and not to self. While God indeed does want His human creations to enjoy the blessings of the world He created for them, and do so by taking legitimate leisure time and vacations—the weekly Sabbath is not to be viewed as such a vacation. The weekly Sabbath is to be a time of abstention from labor, and a time to be consecrated as holy and sacred unto Him. So, it should hardly be a surprise why gatherings for worship and study of the Scriptures, are what emerged within Judaism as being normative for *Shabbat*. Indeed, the most significant way that people honor the weekly Sabbath, is in spending some significant time in association with the local community of God's own.

While Judaism can be credited with honoring the Fourth Commandment far more than Christianity, the thought of Miller on the Sabbath—which from his perspective would be a "Sunday Sabbath"—being a symbol of redemption, cannot go overlooked:

"The sabbath is a concrete symbol that God's saving grace is what redeems human life rather than any or all work. The sabbath is a regular time to stop striving and reaching, to stop trying to justify oneself before God and everybody else; it is a time to remember having been set free and accepted in the ultimate sense and to know that the chief end of life is not found in any human work or accomplishment but only in glorifying and enjoying God. As such, the sabbath is an implicit but important pointer toward the reality of justification by faith."²⁹

Today's Messianic people have many different reasons for why they keep the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, ranging from wanting to be obedient to God's Word, to Messianic Jews honoring it a part of their background, to non-Jewish Believers wanting to be reckoned as a part of

²⁷ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 74.

²⁸ Christensen, 119.

²⁹ Miller, pp 82-83.

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the Commonwealth of Israel. Most critically, as Deuteronomy 5:12-15 would direct, **it should be for each of us to connect with the God of the Exodus, who promises the ultimate rest in His Son, Messiah Yeshua, for those who have been delivered from the bondage of sin** (Hebrews 4:1-10).