

The 10 Words, or Commandments, are recounted twice in the Hebrew Bible (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Among the two occurrences only one of the two commandments contains significant changes: the commandment about Sabbath rest. What's different isn't the commandment, but the reason underneath the practice of this weekly day of rest – which was radically unique: only the Israelites took a day off in the Ancient World, no other culture or empire did so.

The commandments are given to Moses and the Israelites as they are journeying from Egypt to the land promised by God, on a pilgrimage from slavery to freedom. The other commandments take the people out of slavery; the Sabbath command takes the slavery out of the people. One day in seven, God says, you stop all work. You do this because you are not to be defined by your output. One day in seven everyone rests, and all distinctions that you erect to define your value and measure your worth disappear -- old, young, rich, poor, slave, free, citizen, foreigner -- you are all simply and completely human beings, alongside one another, all beloved children of God.

Remember: זָכַר : [zakar] to remember. (In an expanded sense zakar means “to be mindful (1), boast bring to remembrance, to to mind, to celebrate, to invoke, to recall, to keep.” It's related to the ancient practice of building memorials, or monuments (think Ebenezers) to mark a memory physically and for the community.

For example such a remembering memorial is recorded in Joshua 4:1-7 <<¹When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua: ² “Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, ³ and command them, “Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.” ⁴ Then Joshua summoned the twelve men from the Israelites, whom he had appointed, one from each tribe. ⁵ Joshua said to them, “Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ ⁷ then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever.”>>

And also in 1 Samuel 7: 12

“[After God answered Samuel’s prayer for help for the people, ¹²Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah, and named it Ebenezer; for he said, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

August 25, 2019

Exodus 20:8-11

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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.

Matthew 11:28-30

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

[While speaking to the people, Jesus said:] ²⁸ “Come to me, all you that are **WEARY** and are *carrying heavy burdens*, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my **yoke** upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my **yoke** is easy, and my burden is light.”

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What word, phrase or image grabs your attention in this reading?**
- **How do you envision rest; as the beginning or end of things?**
- **How do you find rest in God?**
- **How do you need rest in today's life and world?**
- **How does this invitation to a sabbath way of life impact the way we treat each other, what we teach our children, and how we live in the world? How should it?**

Observe - שָׁמַר [shamar]: to keep, watch, preserve. It's related to the notion of a watchman, staying awake, to keep guard at night for protection of oneself, the community, or ones' captives. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the verb is increasingly connected to the covenant, the notion of keeping God's covenantal promise/relationship with Israel. Here the use of the word implies that preserving the Sabbath, by observing and keeping the practice is related to keeping the covenant, preserving the holy, special relationship the God known in the community-creating miracle of the Exodus.

COMMANDED - צִוָּה [tsavah]: to lay charge (upon), give charge (to), command, order

Matthew - Although the first Gospel is anonymous, the early church fathers were unanimous in holding that Matthew, one of the 12 apostles, was its author. Matthew, whose name means “gift of the Lord,” was a tax collector who left his work to follow Jesus (9:9-13). In Mark and Luke he is called by his other name, Levi. Modern critical studies stress Matthew's alleged dependence on Mark for a substantial part of his Gospel.

Since his Gospel was written in Greek, Matthew's readers were obviously Greek-speaking. They also seem to have been Jews. Many elements point to Jewish readership: such as Matthew's concern with fulfillment of the OT (he has more quotations from and allusions to the OT than any other NT author); his tracing of Jesus' descent from Abraham; and his lack of explanation of Jewish customs (especially in contrast to Mark); and yet although Matthew's Gospel is Jewish, it has a universal outlook. Matthew's main purpose is to prove to his Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah. He does this primarily by showing how Jesus in his life and ministry fulfilled the OT Scriptures.

WEARY - κοπιᾶω [kopiáō]: (from kópos, "exhausting labor") – to labor until worn-out, depleted (exhausted) with effort (of bodily and mental labor alike)

carrying heavy burdens - φορτίζω [phortizó]: to load up (properly, as a vessel or animal), i.e. (figuratively) to overburden with ceremony (or spiritual anxiety) -- lade, by heavy laden.

yoke - ζυγός [zugos]: a yoke; hence met: (a Jewish idea) of a heavy burden, comparable to the heavy yokes resting on the bullocks' necks; a balance, pair of scales. A yoke unites two elements to work as one unit, like when two pans (weights) operate together on a balance-scale – or a pair of oxen pulling a single plough. A yoke actually makes the work easier for the creature doing the work by focusing the energy and sharing the labor.