

CHAPTER 4

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

The holy One upon Mount Sinai - Three great gifts bestowed upon the Hebrews - The Sabbath proclaimed by the voice of God - Position assigned it in the moral law - Origin of the Sabbath - Definite character of the commandment - Revolution of the earth upon its axis - Name of the Sabbatic institution - Seventh day of the commandment identical with the seventh day of the New Testament week - Testimony of Nehemiah - Moral obligation of the fourth commandment.

And now we approach the record of that sublime event, the personal descent of the Lord upon mount Sinai.¹ The sixteenth chapter of Exodus, as we have seen, is remarkable for the fact that God gave to Israel the Sabbath; the nineteenth chapter, for the fact that God gave himself to that people in solemnly espousing them as a holy nation unto himself; while the twentieth chapter will be found remarkable for the act of the Most High in giving to Israel his law.

It is customary to speak against the Sabbath and the law as Jewish, because thus given to Israel. As well might the Creator be spoken against, who brought them out of Egypt to be their God, and who styles himself the God of Israel.² The Hebrews were honored by being thus intrusted with the Sabbath and the law, not the Sabbath and the law and the Creator rendered Jewish by this connection. The sacred writers speak of the high exaltation of Israel in being thus intrusted with the law of God.

"He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord!" "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."³

After the Most High had solemnly espoused the people unto himself, as his peculiar treasure in the earth,⁴ they were brought forth out of the camp to meet with God. "And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." Out of the midst of this fire did God proclaim the ten words of his law.⁵

The fourth of these precepts is the grand law of the Sabbath. Thus spake the great Lawgiver:-

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

The estimate which the Law-giver placed upon his Sabbath is seen in that he deemed it worthy of a place in his

code of ten commandments, thus causing it to stand in the midst of nine immutable moral precepts. Nor is this to thought a small honor that the Most High, naming one by one the great principles of morality until all are given, and he adds no more,⁶ should include in their number the observance of his hallowed rest-day. This precept is expressly given to enforce the observance of the Creator's great memorial; and unlike all the others, this one traces its obligation back to the creation, where that memorial was ordained.

The Sabbath is to be remembered and kept holy because that God hallowed it, i.e., appointed it to a holy use, at the close of the first week. And this sanctification or hallowing of the rest-day, when the first seventh day of time was past, was the solemn act of setting apart the seventh day for time to come in memory of the Creator's rest. Thus the fourth commandment reaches back and embraces the institution of the Sabbath in paradise, while the Sanctification of the Sabbath in paradise extends forward to all coming time. The narrative respecting the wilderness of Sin admirably cements the union of the two. Thus in the wilderness of Sin, before the fourth commandment was given, stands the Sabbath, holy to the Lord, with an existing obligation to observe it, though no commandment in that narrative creates the obligation. This obligation is derived from the same source as the fourth commandment, namely, the sanctification of the Sabbath in paradise, showing that it was an existing duty, and not a new precept. For it should never be forgotten that the fourth commandment does not trace its obligation to the wilderness of Sin, but to the creation; a decisive proof that the Sabbath did not originate in the wilderness of Sin.

The fourth commandment is remarkably definite. It embraces, first, a precept: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy;" second, and explanation of this precept: "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates;" third, the reasons on which the precept is based, embracing the origin of the institution, and the very acts by which it was made, and enforcing all by the example⁷ of the Law-giver himself: "for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

The rest-day of the Lord is thus distinguished from the six days on which he labored. The blessing and sanctification pertain to the day of the Creator's rest. There can be, therefore, no indefiniteness in the precept. It is not merely one day in seven, but that day in the seven on which the Creator rested, and upon which he placed his blessing, namely, the seventh day.⁸ And this day is definitely pointed out in the name given it by God: "The seventh day is the Sabbath [i.e., the rest-day] of the Lord thy God."

That the seventh day in the fourth commandment is the seventh day of the New Testament week may be plainly proved. In the record of our Lord's burial, Luke writes thus:

"And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on. And the women also which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulcher, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them."⁹

Luke testifies that these women kept "the Sabbath day according to the commandment."

The Commandment says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." This day thus observed was the last or seventh day of the week, for the following¹⁰ day was the first day of the week. Hence the seventh day of

the commandment is the seventh day of the New Testament week.

The testimony of Nehemiah is deeply interesting. "Thou camest down also upon Mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: and madest known unto them thy holy Sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant."¹¹ It is remarkable that God is said to have made known the Sabbath when he thus came down upon the mount; for the children of Israel had the Sabbath in possession when they came to Sinai. This language must therefore refer to that complete unfolding of the Sabbatic institution which is given in the fourth commandment. And mark the expression: "Madest known¹² unto them thy holy Sabbath;" not madest the Sabbath for them: language which plainly implies its previous existence, and which cites the mind back to the Creator's rest for the origin of the institution.¹³

The moral obligation of the fourth commandment which is so often denied may be clearly shown by reference to the origin of all things. God created the world and gave existence to man upon it. To him he gave life and breath, and all things. Man therefore owes everything to God. Every faculty of his mind, every power of his being, all his strength and all his time belong of right to the Creator. It was therefore the benevolence of the Creator that gave to man six days for his own wants. And in setting apart the seventh day to a holy use in memory of his own rest, the Most High was reserving unto himself one of the seven days, when he could rightly claim all as his. The six days therefore are the gift of God to man, to be rightly employed in secular affairs, not the seventh day, the gift of man to God. The fourth Commandment, therefore, does not require man to give something of his own to God, but it does require that man should not appropriate to himself that which God has reserved for his own worship. To observe this day then is to render to God of the things that are his; to appropriate it to ourselves is simply to rob God.

1 That the Lord was there in person with his angels, see besides the narrative in Ex.19:20; 32-34, the following testimonies: Deut.33:2; Judges 5:5; Nehemiah 9:6-13; Ps.68:17. <[Return](#)>

2 Ex.24:10; Lev.22:32,33; Num.15:41; Isa.41:17. <[Return](#)>

3 Ps.147:19,20; Rom.3:1,2; 9:4,5. The following from the pen of Mr. Wm. Miller presents the subject in a clear light: "I say, and believe I am supported by the Bible, that the moral law was never given to the Jews as a people exclusively; but they were for a season the keepers of it in charge. And through them the law, oracles, and testimony, have been handed down to us. See Paul's clear reasoning in Rom. chapters 2, 3, and 4, on that point." - Miller's Life and Views, p. 161. <[Return](#)>

4 Ex.19; Deut.7:6; 14:2; 2Sam.7:23; 1Kings 8:53; Amos 3:1,2. <[Return](#)>

5 Ex.20:1-17; 34:28, margin; Deut.5:4-22; 10:4, margin. <[Return](#)>

6 Deut.5:22 <[Return](#)>

7 He who created the world on the first day of the week, and completed its organization in six days, rested on the seventh day, and was refreshed. Gen.1; 2; Ex.31:17. <[Return](#)>

8 To this, however, it is objected that in consequence of the revolution of the earth on its axis, the day begins earlier in the East than with us; and hence that there is no definite seventh day to the world of mankind. To suit

such objectors, the earth ought not to revolve. But in that case, so far from removing the difficulty, there would be no seventh day at all; for one side of the globe would have perpetual day and the other side perpetual night. The truth is, everything depends upon the revolution of the earth. God made the Sabbath for man [Mark 2:27]; he made man to dwell on all the face of the earth [Acts 17:26]; he caused the earth to revolve on its axis that it might measure off the days of the week; causing that the sun should shine of the earth, as it revolves from west to east, thus causing the day to go round the world from east to west. Seven of these revolutions constitute a week; the seventh one brings the Sabbath to all the world. <[Return](#)>

9 Luke 23: 54-56; 24:1. <[Return](#)>

10 See also Matt.28:1; Mark 16:1,2. <[Return](#)>

11 Neh.9,13,14. <[Return](#)>

12 This expression is strikingly illustrated in the statement of Eze.20:5, where God is said to have made himself known unto Israel in Egypt. This language cannot mean that the people were ignorant of the true God, however wicked some of them might be, for they had been God's peculiar people from the days of Abraham. Ex.2:23-25; 3:6,7; 4:31. The language implies the prior existence both of the Law-giver and of his Sabbath, when it is said that they were "made known" to his people. <[Return](#)>

13 It should never be forgotten that the term Sabbath day signifies rest-day; that the Sabbath of the Lord is the rest-day of the Lord; and hence that the expression, "Thy holy Sabbath," refers the mind to the Creator's rest-day, and to his act of blessing and hallowing it. <[Return](#)>

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