

“Fourth Commandment”

This article is from the “Among Friends” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s website (churchofgodbigsandy.com). It was posted for the weekend of June 21, 2025.

By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—At our Bible study on Wednesday night, I continued with our series. The topic is the Ten Commandments. The presentation was titled “Fourth Commandment.”

The presentation mentioned three general categories—the memorial of creation; Old Testament scriptures; and New Testament scriptures.

Foundational scripture

■ Exodus 20:2—“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Then, the Lord proceeded to remind the children of Israel about the Ten Commandments.

Old Testament lesson = After God delivered them from Egypt, He reminded them of His expectations from them.

New Testament lesson = When God offers His bountiful grace to New Testament disciples, He still has expectations of them (Romans 6:1-2, Ephesians 2:8-10 and Titus 3:4-8).

Fourth Commandment

■ Exodus 20:8—“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

■ Exodus 20:9-10—“Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work—you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.”

■ Exodus 20:11—“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them—and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

Memorial of creation

■ Genesis 2:1—The heavens, the earth and all the host of them were finished.

■ Genesis 2:2—God ended His work and rested on the seventh day.

■ Genesis 2:3—God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because He rested from all His work.

‘Test commandment’

Some people who keep the seventh day as the weekly Sabbath day like to proclaim that the Fourth commandment is a “test commandment.”

I recognize the scriptures in the book of Exodus that such Bible students use to establish their perspective. But I believe that many Bible students apply those scriptures more broadly than God intended.

- The Sabbath was definitely mentioned as a “test” in Exodus 16 when the instruction of the manna was given.
- But I do not accept that the Fourth Commandment was designated as the only test Commandment.
- And I do not accept that the Fourth Commandment was to be elevated above the other nine Commandments.
- King David is an example of a man who had trouble with adultery and murder. Many Bible students would therefore say that David’s test Commandments included the Seventh (adultery) and Sixth (murder) Commandments.

‘That I may test them’

- Exodus 16:4—The Lord said: “I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may *test* them whether they will walk in My law or not.”
- Exodus 16:22—On the sixth day, gather twice as much.
- Exodus 16:26—There will be none on the Sabbath.
- Exodus 16:27—Some went out on the seventh day to gather, and found none.
- Exodus 16:28—The Lord asked: “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?”

Obviously, the Fourth Commandment is important.

Picking up sticks

Numbers 15:32-36 is one of my favorite biblical events that shows the superiority of the New Covenant.

- Numbers 15:32—A man was gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.
- Numbers 15:33-36—The people (who found him doing it) brought him to Moses, Aaron and the congregation; put him under guard and stoned him.

Aren’t you glad that you are not living during the time of Numbers 15?

Pay close attention

For the record—some Bible students use Isaiah 1:11-15 to conclude that the Sabbath should no longer be observed. I personally reject that Isaiah 1:11-15 is making that statement.

It is true that God's correction there included comments about the Sabbath. But He was not lessening the importance of the Sabbath in these verses. What was God's biggest correction in this section of Scripture?

- Isaiah 1:11—"I do not delight in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats."
- Isaiah 1:12—"Stay out of My temple."
- Isaiah 1:13—"I can't stand the evil you do on your New Moons festivals, on your Sabbaths, and other times of worship."
- Isaiah 1:14—"I hate your New Moon festivals and all others as well."
- Isaiah 1:15—"When you pray, I will not listen . . ."

Why did the Lord use such strong language? Was He mad about them keeping the Fourth Commandment? What was the cause of His irritation?

His irritation was not due to the Fourth Commandment.

However, His irritation was due to their violation of another Commandment—the Sixth Commandment.

- Isaiah 1:15—" . . . Your hands are full of blood."

All the Sabbath-keeping in the world will not cement our relationship with God if we are violating the Sixth Commandment.

More Isaiah verses

- Isaiah 56:1-2—Blessed is he who keeps from defiling the Sabbath.
- Isaiah 58:13—This verse says two times to avoid doing your own "pleasure"—The James Moffatt translation describes those instances as "business" both times.

Gathering food

- Matthew 12:1-6—The Son of God defended His disciples for gathering food on the Sabbath.
- Matthew 12:7—"I desire mercy and not sacrifice."
- Matthew 12:8—"The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Man with a withered hand

- Matthew 12:10—Hoping to accuse Him, they asked Him: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"
- Matthew 12:11—A sheep falls into a pit.
- Matthew 12:12—"Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."
- Mark 3:2—They watched Him closely whether He would heal him on the Sabbath so they might accuse Him.
- Mark 3:4—"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil? Is it lawful on the Sabbath to save life or to kill?"

- Mark 3:5—He looked around at them with anger.
- Mark 3:6—The Pharisees plotted with the Herodians against Him—how they might destroy Him.

Woman with spirit of infirmity

- Luke 13:10-11—A woman had a spirit of infirmity for 18 years.
- Luke 13:12-13—The Son of God made her straight.
- Luke 13:14—The ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because He healed her on the Sabbath day.
- Luke 13:15-16—Leading an ox or donkey to water on the Sabbath.

Man had dropsy

- Luke 14:1—When the Son of God went into a house of a Pharisee ruler on the Sabbath, they watched Him closely.
- Luke 14:2—There was a man who had dropsy.
- Luke 14:3—"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"
- Luke 14:5—A donkey or an ox falling into a pit.

Man with infirmity for 38 years

- John 5:5-9—"Rise, take up your bed and walk."
- John 5:10—Some Jews: "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."
- John 5:16—For this reason, the Jews persecuted Him and sought to kill Him—because He had done these things on the Sabbath.
- John 5:18—The Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He broke the Sabbath (by healing people) and by saying that God was His Father (making Himself equal with God).

Blind man

- John 9:1-15—He healed a blind man on the Sabbath.
- John 9:16—When some of the Pharisees saw Him healing on the Sabbath, they said: "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath."