

Session 5

September 29, 2019

A SLOWER PACE

Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17

The writer of Hebrews pointed out, “a Sabbath rest remains for God’s people. For the person who has entered His rest has rested from his own works, just as God did from His” (Heb. 4:9-10). Hence, there is a spiritual aspect to rest. It involves “resting” in God’s grace and enjoying God’s presence. That’s what Jesus meant when He told His followers, “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find *rest* for your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29).

But there is a much simpler and more utilitarian reason to seek rest: we need it! For this reason—and to continually remind us of God’s ultimate rest that awaits—He instituted a weekly Sabbath Day observance.

Consecration (Ex. 20:8-11). This fourth of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3-17) states quite frankly, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (v. 8). The three verses that follow designate the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week (Saturday); forbid any work during that day; require its observance by both Jews and foreigners; and explain its basis as modeled by God in the days of creation. The command to *remember* indicates the Sabbath was not a new notion. Indeed, the day was specifically honored by God in the creation account (Gen. 2:2-3) and is revisited in Exodus 16. The reminder to *remember* then is to keep the Sabbath observance at the forefront. Twice in these verses the word *holy* is used. The term means “set apart.” Hence, the Sabbath was to be distinct and not to be mixed and muddled with the toil of the workweek. On the seventh day of creation God ceased His creative “work” and set aside a specific time dedicated to Him. The clear expectation was that His created beings would do the same.

Covenant sign (Ex. 31:12-14). This restatement of the commandment adds both a promise and a penalty. The promise involves the continual favor of the Lord over His people. It is a *perpetual* promise (for them and their future generations, v. 13) and a *particular* promise (for Israel and Israel alone), that they would be His “set apart” people. Here, too, penalties are issued for breaking the Sabbath. The severity of the penalties mentioned in this section (exile and/or death!) makes a bit more sense when examined in its context. Since Exodus 25, God has been giving instructions for the building of His tabernacle. No doubt the news that God desired a sanctuary so that He might dwell among His people (Ex. 25:8-9) would have stirred the nation with excitement and anticipation. Added to that was the sacredness of the task itself. The result would have been a desire to “get busy and get it done!” even if it meant working 24/7. But to do so would have negated the greater purpose. *Worship of God* always takes precedence over *working for God*.

Celebration (Ex. 31:15-17). These final verses restate—and therefore reemphasize—the commands already made. The repetitive wording of verse 15 is particularly emphatic; literally, “there must be a Sabbath of Sabbaths.” The promises and penalties are again stated clearly, followed by a return to the subject of creation, and hence the origin of the day of rest. But one small (but significant) addition is made in verse 17: “...on the seventh day He rested and *was refreshed*.” What exactly does this mean? God certainly wasn’t *tired* from His creative work and

in need of a break; nor was He *bored* from the six previous days of creation and needing some kind of reprieve. The term is literally “took a breath.” This description is rare in the Bible, and always applies to humans. The idea is not that God was worn out by His creative work, but rather that He was *pleased* with it. The principle is that we not only work, but that we take pleasure in what is accomplished, and in the One who makes it possible.