

In a predominantly agricultural society, there were always certain chores that had to be performed daily, even on the Sabbath. Animals had to be fed and watered and cows had to be milked. Women about to give birth, the sick and the infirm, and victims of accidents all had to have assistance and care. The Lord knew all this, and must have anticipated all of these contingencies plus a thousand others in the Sabbath law.

Because of their additions to the Law of God by layer after layer of tortuous accretions and legalisms, our Lord came into conflict with the professional interpreters of the Law again and again. In each case, Jesus referred his accusers and critics back to the Old Testament, and to the true meaning and intent of the Law of God.

In their anxiety to ensure the most exact observance of the Sabbath, these Rabbis changed the simple concept of cessation from occupational work into a complicated and burdensome code of external ordinances pertaining mostly to the general meaning of work -- and by doing so, they lost the very first purpose of God in the Fourth Commandment, and made this aspect of the Law of God of no effect!

This, then, is the first purpose of the Sabbath -- cessation of man's occupational work, rest from the burden of making a living. The fulfillment of this first purpose is a necessary prerequisite to the achievement of the second and third purposes.

(2) Convocation of God's Worshipers

A second purpose of the Sabbath was to provide opportunity and time for convocations, assemblies, and gatherings, when God's people might assemble for worship. In Leviticus 23 two kinds of convocations are mentioned: regular weekly convocations and special convocations held at set times during the religious year. Leviticus 23:3 states that "the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation."

(3) Commemoration of God's Works

Among the great works the Israelites were to commemorate were God's work of creation, God's work of redemption, and God's work of sanctification.

In Exodus 20:11 the people are called upon to remember that "six days the Lord made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and consecrated it."

In Deuteronomy 5:15 the people are called upon to remember a second great work of God. Moses says: "And 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 Lord redeemed them from bondage in Egypt, as Exodus 20:2 also reminds them. Such a reminder could not help but bring to their mind the Passover sacrifice.

In Exodus 31:13 the people are called upon to remember a third great work of God. The Lord says to Moses: "But as for you, speak to the sons