GOVERNED BY LAW

What goes up must come down. You will recognize this statement as a formulation of Newton’s third law of motion. This and other laws of nature govern the behavior of natural phenomena. The concept of law, then, is endemic to our existence. Protesting the laws of nature does not change the law. Rather, we must conform our lives to live within the sphere of the laws or risk losing our lives altogether. If you ascend to a great height, you had better have a plan for how to descend from said height. Failure to plan for the descent will have life-threatening consequences.

Governments also enact laws to ensure the smooth functioning of society. Human interaction is governed by legislation that facilitates the protection of life and property. Without laws, those who are weaker are disproportionately mistreated, with no redress.

Whereas philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau would credit social contract theory for the development of laws governing human interaction, Scripture paints a different picture. According to the Bible, the same God who created nature and instituted the laws of nature also created humanity to live happily only when subject to His divine law governing their nature. Central to the law as articulated in Scripture is the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, and it is pivotal to a full appreciation of all God’s law.

This week we meditate on the law of God.
Write out Deuteronomy 6:1–9 from the Bible translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
A TALKING POINT

A “talking point” is defined as a subject of discussion. During political campaigns, the economy usually emerges as the number-one talking point. In cases of sports teams trading players, the talking point may be the players’ physical health.

The concept of a talking point runs throughout the Decalogue. After forty years of wilderness wandering, and within striking distance of the Promised Land, the Israelites received three speeches, or sermons, by Moses. The speeches reviewed the desert wanderings, urged the people to follow Yahweh, and gave reassurance that if they sinned against God, they would be accepted on condition of repentance.

Early in the first speech, Moses reviewed the Ten Commandments, then followed up with an extended exposition in chapters 5 to 11 of Deuteronomy. He offered this admonition: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:6, 7, KJV).

The emphasized activities do not only occur on Sabbath; they are daily events. Consequently, instruction in the law was a daily requirement—a heaven-ordained talking point!

Of the Ten Commandments, none was more central than the Sabbath commandment. In its wording, the Israelites were instructed that neither heads of homes, nor children, nor service animals, nor guests were to work on that day (Exod. 20:10). This surely required “instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Genuine obedience does not occur by osmosis.

Especially upon parents was placed the solemn burden of keeping the way of God constantly before their children. The Decalogue, and particularly the Sabbath, was to be the curriculum for the home. Why the Sabbath? Because it acquainted them with the Mighty God, with His title (Creator), and with the sphere of His sovereignty—the universe. It is in knowing God that salvation is possible (John 17:3). No commandment reveals God more than the Sabbath commandment. And the commandments are “the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13, KJV).

Ellen White wrote, “I saw the ten commandments written on them [the tables of stone] with the finger of God. On one table were four, and on the other six. The four on the first table shone brighter than the other six. But the fourth, the Sabbath commandment, shone above them all; for the Sabbath was set apart to be kept in honor of God’s holy name. The holy Sabbath looked glorious—a halo of glory was all around it.” (Ellen G. White, Maranatha (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 245.)

May this glorious light illumine the path of the reader daily, hourly, moment by moment.

Memorize your favorite verse in Deuteronomy 6:1–9. Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

What does it mean to meditate on God’s law?

How does the Sabbath commandment incorporate elements of all the other commandments?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/sab03-3
HEAD AND HAND

Only one restriction was given to Adam in the Garden of Eden: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen. 2:16, 17). However, since sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4; Rom. 4:15), and there was no sin before Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, then we may rightly surmise that Adam and Eve kept all of the Ten Commandments in Eden. Demonstrably, they kept the first three and the last six and by inference the fourth as well.

One might deduce that God’s law was written on their hearts, and this is why they did not sin (Ps. 119:11). No one needed to tell them not to kill because they wanted only to foster life. It was not necessary to instruct them not to take God’s name in vain because they loved and trusted God so well that they could only sing His praises. Before the entrance of sin into the world, it was not necessary to articulate what humanity did naturally.

Obedience to the sole restriction placed upon them would demonstrate that Adam and Eve continued to live in harmony with God’s law. For instance, the very choice to obey honored God as required by the first commandment and honored Him as a parent as stipulated by the fifth commandment. To eat of the fruit would be tantamount to killing oneself, so obeying the restriction was abstaining from taking life as required by the sixth commandment.

Once they left the Garden of Eden, the very first story we read is of murder and lies (Gen. 4:1–10). We do not have a list of Ten Commandments, but based on Cain’s snarky retort when God asked where his brother was (Gen. 4:9), we know that he knew full well that murdering his brother was wrong. Throughout Genesis we see evidence that God’s law, though not in the form enshrined at Sinai, was known (e.g., Gen. 20:6–9; 26:5; 28:7; 35:1, 2, 4; 44:8). During the exile in Egypt, the knowledge of God’s law had become diluted, and it became necessary to codify it at Sinai.

On the occasion of reiterating the law in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses explains that the law is for our good: “And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day” (Deut. 6:24). To fully benefit from it, Israel must not only know the law intellectually, but God said, “Bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes” (Deut. 6:8, KJV). While the Jews in Christ’s day took this instruction literally and wore a bound copy of the law on their head and on their wrist, the directions pointed to a deeper concept. Everything that we do is represented by the hand, and binding the law on one’s hand meant that God’s people were to refrain from wicked actions and engage in acts of mercy. Furthermore, God’s law between the eyes meant that one’s worldview ought to filter through the lens of the law of God.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Revelation 13:5–7
Psalm 1
Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13, 14
James 2:10, 11
John 5:1–17
Daniel 7:25

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Deuteronomy 6?

Review your memorized verse from Deuteronomy 6:1–9.
THE SABBATH STUMBLE

The first lesson in these “Reflections on the Sabbath” discussed the importance of the fourth commandment at the close of time. At that time, all of humanity will be called to decide whether they will yield their allegiance to God by honoring His seventh-day Sabbath or if they will accept the spurious counterfeit that the devil will enforce.

There are those who will default to the counterfeit because they will not choose God. But then there are those who will claim to be followers of God and yet refuse to keep His signature Sabbath. This group would purport to keep God’s commandments while shunning the fourth. As James puts it, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). You would have to be above God to decide which parts of His law are important and which parts are obsolete. When God in Christ came to this earth to give us the clearest revelation of Himself, He never diminished the importance of any portion of the law (cf. Matt. 5:17, 18).

With respect to the Sabbath, Jesus made it His custom to attend worship at the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). He never instructed His disciples to the contrary, because even after His ascension, His followers continued likewise (Acts 18:4). However, there was contention over how Sabbath was to be kept (Luke 6:2). It was Christ who hallowed the Sabbath day at the beginning (Gen. 2:1–3; John 1:1–3, 14), so who better to teach us how to truly keep it holy?

While in Jerusalem one Sabbath, Jesus sees a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda and heals him (John 5:1–7). Jesus knows that the Pharisees would take issue with a man carrying a burden on the Sabbath day (John 5:10). Knowing this full well, He not only heals the man but tells him, “Take up your bed and walk” (John 5:8). It was Christ’s purpose to illustrate the true meaning of Sabbath rest and to elevate the law (John 5:17).

True to form, the Jews reprimand the healed man for carrying his bed on the Sabbath day, and he responds by informing them that he only did so in obedience to the One who had healed him (John 5:11). When the healed man later finds out that it was Jesus who had healed him, he hastens to inform the Jews (John 5:15). This controversy over the Sabbath leads to the Jews plotting Christ’s demise (John 5:16)—as it will likewise lead to persecution of Christ’s followers in the last days.

In Christ’s day, the controversy was over how to keep the Sabbath holy. At the close of time, the controversy will revolve around when to keep the Sabbath. God has made both plain in His word. In humble submission to Him, those who would keep His commandments as did Jesus will not deviate from what He has plainly stated.
inSight

Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the chapter, what personal applications are you convicted of in your life?

What applications can be made in your school, family, workplace, and church?

CHANGELESS

Had it been possible for the law to be changed or abrogated, then Christ need not have died. But to abrogate the law would be to immortalize transgression, and place the world under Satan’s control. It was because the law was changeless, because man could be saved only through obedience to its precepts, that Jesus was lifted up on the cross. Yet the very means by which Christ established the law Satan represented as destroying it. Here will come the last conflict of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

That the law which was spoken by God’s own voice is faulty, that some specification has been set aside, is the claim which Satan now puts forward. It is the last great deception that he will bring upon the world. He needs not to assail the whole law; if he can lead men to disregard one precept, his purpose is gained. For “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” James 2:10. By consenting to break one precept, men are brought under Satan’s power. By substituting human law for God’s law, Satan will seek to control the world. This work is foretold in prophecy. (White, The Desire of Ages, 762, 763.)

The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds. (White, 207.)

God placed man under law, as an indispensable condition of his very existence. He was a subject of the divine government, and there can be no government without law. God might have created man without the power to transgress His law; He might have withheld the hand of Adam from touching the forbidden fruit; but in that case man would have been, not a free moral agent, but a mere automaton. Without freedom of choice, his obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced. There could have been no development of character. Such a course would have been contrary to God’s plan in dealing with the inhabitants of other worlds. It would have been unworthy of man as an intelligent being, and would have sustained Satan’s charge of God’s arbitrary rule. (White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 49.)

The Saviour had not come to set aside what patriarchs and prophets had spoken; for He Himself had spoken through these representative men. All the truths of God’s word came from Him. But these priceless gems had been placed in false settings. Their precious light had been made to minister to error. God desired them to be removed from their settings of error and replaced in the framework of truth. This work only a divine hand could accomplish. By its connection with error, the truth had been serving the cause of the enemy of God and man. Christ had come to place it where it would glorify God, and work the salvation of humanity. (White, The Desire of Ages, 287, 288.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What is the connection between spirituality and the law?

In what ways are the laws of nature similar to the laws of God?

How is the Sabbath commandment central within the Ten Commandments?

What are the roles of duty, commitment, and loyalty in spiritual identity and development?

How else can your worldview be filtered through the lens of the law of God?

Why do some have a hard time believing that the Sabbath will be a main issue in the last days?

How is when to keep the Sabbath such an important question?

How has law been mishandled to abuse spiritual development? How can law be restored to its rightful place?