

Deuteronomy is a second telling of the early history of the Israelites

The 10 Commandments were recorded in Exodus 20 and again in Deuteronomy 5

This telling of the 10 Commandments has a slightly different emphasis

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 is the portion referring to the command to keep the Sabbath

This time around, a little more information is given

In particular it refers to their freedom from slavery in Egypt

Remembering their own captivity and slavery, they are to remember what happened

God brought them out of slavery "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm"

Therefore, they are to keep the Sabbath day and keep it holy

Meaning...

They weren't supposed to work—it was a day of rest

For themselves and their children

For their slaves—both male and female

For all of their livestock, including oxen and donkeys

For the resident aliens or foreigners that lived in the towns too

So that everyone, including the slaves could rest

In Exodus 23, Leviticus 23 and 25, Deuteronomy 15 there is additional information about the Sabbath

Not only was everyone to rest on the seventh day—it was a major part of their feasts/festivals

Passover was a particular commemoration of their freedom from Egypt—held every spring

Every 7 years, there was a Sabbatical Year and every 7 Sabbatical Years, a Year of Jubilee

Every 7th year forgive debts, release slaves, and let the fields have a year of rest

Land based economy so most debts and slaves were due to need for help with farms

Interest free loans to needy—if can't pay indentured servant 6 years, then free/forgiven

This alone is huge—to forgive debts, release slaves, and give the land a year off

But then came the Year of Jubilee—after 7 Sabbatical Years, came the Year of Jubilee

Every 50th year every one returns to the family property

Land reverts back to the original owner—no matter what

God's intention that the land be redistributed to all

Their land was the basis for economic freedom

Jubilee prohibits accumulation of economic power in the hands of a few
at the expense of others

With Jubilee the poor have a fresh start

At the root of Jubilee is the principle that the land doesn't belong to humans, but to God

Also, Sabbath and Jubilee affirm a confidence and trust that God will provide

There will be enough—if I honor Sabbath

Again, we no longer live under the law of the Old Testament

But, rather than living by the rules, how is it that we are called to follow God?

We live in a 24/7 society in which we always carry work with us on our phones and email

We don't take all of the vacation time that we have been offered

Do we ever take a complete break from work?

I recently read that we are more productive in a 6 hour day than in a 8 hour day¹

¹ <http://www.sciencealert.com/sweden-is-shifting-to-a-6-hour-workday>

What about economic balance today? Is there not a way to equalize the disparity of economy?

The top 20% of US households own more than 84% of the wealth,
and the bottom 40% combine for a paltry 0.3% of the wealth.²

How are we working to rebalance our economy so everyone has an opportunity?

As Americans we hold on to the belief that everyone has the ability to succeed

But the truth is that our economic and social systems hold many down

With poverty, low wages, lack of education, debt, no jobs—there is no future

How is it that we can right this wrong?

As Quakers we take pride in the ending of slavery and tell the stories of John Woolman

On Dr Martin Luther King Day, we celebrate racial equality

We celebrate the election of a black President

Yet, studies show that oppression and slavery continue in our country today...

Sex trafficking—adult and child, forced or bonded labor, forced child labor,
debt bondage among migrant laborers, involuntary domestic servitude³

While against the law, they persist

But, sadly, legal oppression is also present

While slavery and the Jim Crow laws of segregation were outlawed

There's a new system of oppression through mass incarceration of black males⁴

With the war on drugs our prisons grew from 300,000 to over 2 million

The US has more people in prison than any other country

In the US, 750 out of 100,000 are in prison

While studies show that the use of drugs is equal across all races

Black men are incarcerated at a much higher rate than whites

3 out of 4 black men can expect to serve time in prison

Coming out of prison, these persons are subject to legal discrimination

They can't get housing, jobs, education, and they can't vote

"Once released, former prisoners enter a hidden underworld of
legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion. They
are members of America's new undercaste."⁵

As a result, they are locked into permanent second-class citizenship

How is it that we can right these wrongs?

God's economic and social systems of Sabbath, the Sabbatical Year, and the Year of Jubilee

Created a way to prevent systemic abuses that lock people into oppression

There was an end to debt and loss of land

There was a systemic way in which the economy rebalanced

Our work is not over

² <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/economic-inequality-it-s-far-worse-than-you-think/>

³ <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/what/>

⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, The New Press, 2010.

⁵ Alexander, page 13.

As people of the Kingdom of God, we must continue to work for equality of all persons
First, we repent of the places we have perpetuated an unfair system
We must change our attitudes and opinions when they don't follow the heart of God
We must strive to treat all people equally
It often begins with practicing goodness and small kindnesses
We need to create a new culture that follows God's priorities

Can we see our Sabbath-keeping and Jubilee-living as one act of resistance to the status quo?