

Sabbath

Study Notes

Introduction

On page one of the Bible, God orders a beautiful world out of chaotic darkness within a sequence of six days. And on the seventh day, God rests. This introduces the major biblical theme of patterns of seven that concludes with God and humans resting together as partners. In this video, we explore the theme of seventh-day rest and the biblical concept of Sabbath. We also look at why Jesus adopted this idea as a major part of his own mission to bring God's Kingdom to Earth.

These notes explore this theme more thoroughly than a five-minute video. The concept of Sabbath and seventh-day rest is rich and complex, woven from start to finish throughout Scripture. Get ready for a lot of patterns of sevens! You'll quickly discover that the practice of the Sabbath is only one piece of the underlying message the authors are trying to communicate.

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Thirty Centuries of Shabbat

For some 3,000 years—thirty centuries—ancient Israelites and later Jews have observed the Sabbath day, or Shabbat. What does observance of Shabbat look like? Friday afternoons are spent bustling and hurrying to make preparations before sunset: last minute shopping, food prep, getting animals settled and children ready. At sunset, everyone gathers around a table to light candles and say a prayer. It goes like this:

<p>רְשָׁא סְלוּעָה רַלְמִ וּנְיָהֲלָא יַנְדָּא הַתָּא רַוּרָב תְּבַשׁ לֶשׁ רַבִּי קִיּוּדְהֵל וּנְנָצִין וּיְתוּצְמֵב וּנְשִׁדְקֵי</p>	<p><i>Blessed are you, God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctified us with the commandment of lighting Shabbat candles.</i></p>
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The next 24 hours are spent eating, singing, and praying. On Saturday morning, you wake and go to synagogue to hear the Torah and Prophets read aloud. You'll likely hear an exhortation on the Scriptures to love God and serve your neighbors.

After that, you head home with family and neighborhood friends. Come Saturday evening, you'll share another celebratory meal, welcoming the eighth day. This eighth day is the first day of the new week, full of new tasks and opportunities.

Why is the Sabbath observed so carefully and consistently by the Jews? The basic answer is simple. It was one of the ten commandments God gave to Moses for Israel to obey. This command is repeated three times in the Torah with some important differences and similarities.

Exodus 20:8-11	Deuteronomy 5:12-15	Leviticus 23:3
<p>Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.</p> <p>Six days you shall labor and do all your work,</p> <p>but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.</p> <p>For in six days the LORD made the Heavens and the Earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested (Heb. shabat) on the seventh day;</p> <p>Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.</p>	<p>Keep the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.</p> <p>Six days you shall labor and do all your work,</p> <p>but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest (Heb. nuakh) as well as you.</p> <p>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;</p> <p>Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.</p>	<p>For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.</p>

All three commands have a similar line: "It is a Sabbath of Yahweh," (שבת ליהוה) literally, "A Sabbath that belongs to Yahweh." However, notice the difference in reasoning between Exodus and Deuteronomy. In Exodus, the author hyperlinks to Genesis 1-2. In this context, Sabbath represents participation in God's presence and rule over creation. When the command gets repeated in Deuteronomy, the author connects it to the Exodus event. Here, Sabbath is a way of implementing God's presence and rule by liberation from slavery. Sabbath was central to creation; therefore, it will be a crucial aspect of our redemption and journey toward new creation.

Jewish scholar Matitiah Tsevat also reflects on the importance of Shabbat.

This phrase is so important, it's easy to miss its centrality. Just as in the seventh year of release, man desists from utilizing the land for his own business and benefit, so on the Sabbath day he desists from using that day for his own affairs. And just as the intervals in regard to the release year and the jubilee years are determined by the number seven, so too is the number seven determinative for that recurring day when man refrains from his own pursuits and sets it aside for God. In regular succession he breaks the natural flow of time, proclaiming, and that the break is made for the sake of the Lord.

This meaning which we have ascertained from the laws finds support [in] Isaiah 58: "If you restrain your foot on the Sabbath so as not to pursue your own affairs on my holy day."

Man normally is master of his time. He is free to dispose of it as he sees fit or as necessity bids him. The Israelite is duty-bound, however, once every seven days to assert by word and deed that God is the master of time. One day out of seven, the Israelite is to renounce dominion over his own time and recognize God's dominion over it. Every seventh day, the Israelite renounces his autonomy and affirms God's dominion over him. In the conclusion that every seventh day the Israelite is to renounce dominion over time, thereby renounce autonomy, and recognize God's dominion over time and thus over himself. Keeping the Sabbath is acceptance of the Kingdom and sovereignty of God.

Matitiah Tsevat, *The Basic Meaning of the Biblical Sabbath*, 453-455

Sabbath as the Climax of Creation

The creation account on page one of the Bible acts as a primer to understand the importance of the number seven and the concept of rest. Let's take a look.

Literary Design of Genesis 1

The first day begins with darkness (Gen. 1:2), and the divine light creates an end to the darkness, creating the first day (Gen. 1:5). God contains the darkness within a cycle of light and dark, bringing to it the order of time (naming it day and night). This pattern of darkness to light explains the unique account of the day in Genesis 1. "There was evening and there was morning, the X day." Because creation began with darkness followed by light, the counting scheme of days and time is the same. The next day begins at sundown and ends at the next sundown.

The seven days are structurally designed to highlight many themes. Take a look at the literary unit design below. We'll unpack some of these themes in the following pages.

<p>1:1 Summary Prologue: <i>In the beginning, God created the skies and the land</i> [7 Words]</p>			
<p>1:2 Exposition of Prologue in 3 lines <i>Now, the land was wild and waste (tohu va-vohu)</i> <i>And the darkness was over the face of the deep abyss (tehom) [7x2 words]</i> <i>But the breath of Elohim was hovering over the face of the waters (hamayim)</i></p>			
<p>Tohu - wilderness, unorder, chaotic Days 1-3: Order Out of Chaos</p>		<p>Vohu - uninhabited, empty, no residents Days 4-6: The Habitation of the Ordered</p>	
A	<p>Day 1 [1:3-5] "light" called "day" "let there be light" "divide between ... and between" "good"</p>	<p>Day 4 [1:14-19] "lights" "let there be lights" "divide between ... and between" "good Rule the day/night</p>	A'
B	<p>Day 2 [1:6-8] Sky dome in the waters Dome called "heavens" divides the waters "divide between ... and between" A: waters below B: waters above</p>	<p>Day 5 [1:20-23] Sky and water creatures Creatures in the waters and the dome of the heavens "good" / "created" A: water-swarmer below + sea monsters B: Sky flyers above Blessing: "fruitful, multiply, fill the land"</p>	B'
C	<p>Day 3 [1:9-13] Dry land emerges from the waters A: land emerges from the waters [1:9-10] "good" B: Plants and fruit trees emerge from the land C: the land brought forth vegetation [1:12] "good"</p>	<p>Day 6 [1:24-31] Land creatures A: Beasts emerge from the land C: "let the land bring forth beasts" [1:24] "good" / "created" B: Creation of ('adam) to rule the land "very good" Blessing: "fruitful, multiply, fill the land" Rule the land</p>	C'
<p>2:1 Summary Epilogue: Thus were finished the skies and the land and all their host</p>			
<p>2:2-3 Exposition of Summary</p> <p>1. And God completed on the seventh day his work which he had done [7 words] 2. And he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done [7 words] 3. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [7 words] Because on it he rested from all his work which God created to do [key word of 1:1]</p>			

Do you notice the symmetry and repetition of sevens? Scholar Michael Morales reflects on its significance:

Emphasis on the seventh day is accomplished on a variety of levels in Genesis 1:1-2:3. The literary structure that balances and matches two triads of days highlights the unique seventh day as climactic. Also, while the first six days are mentioned once each ("day one ... day two ... day three ..."), the seventh day is mentioned three times in three consecutive sentences in 2:2-3 ... The seventh day is the first object that is "sanctified" [set apart as sharing in God's holiness] in the Hebrew Bible ... By this consecration, God creates the seventh day as a "cathedral in time" [Abraham Heschel], forming a temporal space and filling it with holiness so that here, at the culmination of creation, "forming and filling" kiss each other. Further, the description of the seventh day in 2:1 forms an inclusio frame around all of Genesis 1 by matching Gen 1:1-2. The seventh day is justly interpreted as the fulfillment, purpose, and end of the story in Genesis 1, the goal of the whole creative process.

Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured*, 92-93

Patterns of Seven

It is no accident that the Hebrew Scriptures say God created the world in seven days. Seven was symbolic in ancient Near Eastern and Israelite culture and literature. It communicated a sense of fullness or completeness. In fact, שבע or "seven" is spelled with the same consonants as the word שבע or "complete/full."

What is the origin of this understanding? Scholars think the significance of seven likely originates in the lunar calendar of moon cycles. The biblical Hebrew word for month is "moon" (חדש), consisting of 29.5 days a month. So each month consists of four 7.3-day cycles, making a "complete" cycle of time (see Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism*, 134-37). However, the Sabbath cycle is independent of the moon cycle, and Sabbaths do not coincide with the new moon. It is patterned after creation and stands outside of any natural cycle of time. This makes sense of the pervasive appearance of patterns of seven in the Bible.

The author of Genesis clearly had in mind the significance of seven when constructing the creation account. Take a look at the various patterns of seven found in the first few pages of the Bible.

- The opening line of Genesis 1 has **seven words**, and the central word, which is untranslated in English, is two Hebrew letters, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
הארץ the land	ואת and	השמים the skies	את	אלהים God	ברא he created	בראשית In-the- beginning
ALEPH = א / TAW = ת						

- There are **seven words** in Genesis 1:1 and fourteen words in Genesis 1:2.
- There are **seven paragraphs** in Genesis 1:1-2:3, each marked by "evening and morning."
- The concluding **seventh paragraph** in Genesis 2:1-3 begins three lines which have seven words each (Gen. 2:2-3a).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
And-he-finished	God	on-the-day	the-seventh	his-work	which	he-made
and-he-ceased	On the day	the-seventh	from-all	his-work	which	he-made
and-he-blessed	God	the	day	the-seventh	and-he-sanctified	it

- Each key word in Genesis 1:1 is repeated by multiples of **seven** in Genesis 1:2–2:3.
 - **God**, 35x (7 x 5)
 - **Land**, 21x (7 x 3)
 - **Skies**, 21x (7 x 3)
- Several key words are repeated **seven** times.
 - **Light** and **day** on day one
 - **Light** on day four
 - **Living creature** (חיה) on days five and six
 - **God saw that it was good**

God speaks 10 times in Genesis 1:1–2:3.

- **Seven** times are creative commands to the creation itself, “Let there be ...”
- Three times are divine initiatives toward humanity: “Let us make adam,” “Be fruitful and multiply,” and “Behold, I have given you ...”

Time

When we isolate the theme of time in Genesis 1, another design pattern emerges that provides a foundation for all of Israel's rituals of sacred time.

This design highlights the structural significance of divinely ordered time in Genesis 1. God provides the essential order (day one) and then delegates the maintenance of that order to others (day four). This is mirrored by the sacred calendar of Israel, which all looks forward to and leads up to the Sabbath.

A	B	C	D	E
Time	Inhabitants	Time and Inhabitants	Inhabitants	Time
Day 1 Light and dark Day and night	→	Day 4 Sun and moon Day and night Annual festivals	→	Day 7 Sabbath day Jubilee cycle
	Day 2 Waters Sky dome	→	Day 5 Fish Birds	
	Day 3 Dry land Plants	→	Day 6 Animals Humanity	

A	1:14a And God said, "Let the lights be in the skies for dividing between the day and between the night 1:14b and let them be for signs and for festival times and for the days and for years.
B	1:15 And let them be for lights in the dome of the skies, to give light upon the land. "
C	1:16a And God made the two great lamps, and the great light for ruling over the day
C'	1:16b and the little lamp for ruling over the night and also the stars.
B'	1:17 And he set them in the dome of the skies, to give light upon the land,
A'	1:18a and to rule over the day and over the night 1:18b and to divide between the light and between the darkness."

Rest

At the climax of the creation story, God rests on the seventh day. What does this mean? There are two Hebrew words that can be translated for our English word "rest." Understanding their function and definition gives us a more robust understanding of what rest really means. Let's take a look.

*Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. On the seventh day, God completed his work which he had done, and he **rested** (**Heb. shabat**) on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.*

*For in six days, the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested (**Heb. nuakh**) on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the **Sabbath** (**Heb. shabbat**) day and made it holy.*

Exodus 20:11

Genesis 2:1-2

- The Hebrew **shabat** means to “cease from.” God ceases from his work because “it is finished” (Gen. 2:1). Compare with Joshua 5:12, “The manna **ceased** (shabat) on that day ...”
- The Hebrew **nuakh** means to “take up residence.” Compare with Exodus 10:14, “The locusts came up over the land of Egypt **and rested** (nuakh) in all the land.”
 - When God or people **nuakh**, it always involves settling into a place that is safe, secure, and stable.
 - 2 Samuel 7:1: “Now King David dwelt in his house, for Yahweh **had provided rest** from his enemies.”

God’s rest is about God’s presence taking up its rest within a sacred space by filling it with his divine presence. Creation is depicted as the cosmic temple filled with God’s presence on the climactic Sabbath.

Blessing

Blessing occurs several times in the book of Genesis. In the first occurrence, God blessed the creatures and the humans on days five and six, which meant “being fruitful and multiplying and filling the land.” By analogy, the blessing on the Sabbath would also involve a kind of fruitfulness, multiplying, and filling that is appropriate to a period of time. The idea is that the Sabbath would become many as it’s observed and experienced by others.

Set apart from all other days, the blessing of the seventh day establishes the seventh part of created time as a day when God grants his presence in the created world. It is then his presence that provides the blessing and the sanctification. The seventh day is blessed and established as the part of time that assures fruitfulness, future-orientation, continuity, and permanence for every aspect of life within the dimension of time. The seventh day is blessed by God’s presence for the sake of the created world, for all nature, and for all living beings.

Mathilde Frey, *The Sabbath in the Pentateuch*, 45

Scholarly Reflections on the Culmination of Time in Genesis 1

Unlike the previous days, the seventh day is simply announced. There is no mention of evening or morning, no mention of a beginning or ending. The suggestion is that the primordial seventh day exists in perpetuity, a sacred day that cannot be abrogated by the limitations common to the rest of the created order.

Samuel Balentine, *The Torah’s Vision of Worship*, 92

The seventh-day account does not end with the expected formula, “There was evening and morning,” that concluded days one through six. Breaking the pattern in this way emphasizes the uniqueness of the seventh day and opens the door to an eschatological interpretation. Literarily, the sun has not yet set on God’s Sabbath.

Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, 90

The Sabbath is that point in time where God and man meet. On the seventh day of creation, God joined himself and his eternal presence to his temporal creation, to the world of man. On the Sabbath day, man not only recalls but participates in an act of cosmic creation ... he experiences the original structuring of time within the microcosm of his own life ... The observance of the Sabbath links humanity to a divinely ordained future, as well as a divinely created past. Sabbath observance has cosmic implications ... a foretaste of an eschatological future ... a prefiguration of the final phase of the divine/human reconciliation. In pointing back to the beginning, the Sabbath also points to what is yet to be, to the final destiny to which all creation is moving.

Bernard Och, *Creation and Redemption:
Towards a Theology of Creation*, 240

With regard to the lack of the final formula, "there was evening and there was morning," commentators have argued that the seventh day is not meant to be understood as a literal day. This argumentation then has led to an eschatological interpretation of the seventh day. However, as part of the first creation account, the seventh day is the last of the seven sections, and the formula "there was evening and there was morning" in the account of the weekdays may be taken not only as a closing formula but also as a literary feature to anticipate what comes next within the series of sections in the creation account, that is the next day of the creation week. Functioning as a transition from one day to another the closing formula is a feature that moves the text forward throughout the six weekdays with the intention to arrive at the seventh day. Once it arrives at the last section, the text highlights the identification of the seventh day by stating it three times and then has no more need for the formula because there is no eighth section following for an eight day. Creation has come to an end, for the seventh day has arrived.

Mathilde Frey, *The Sabbath in the Pentateuch*, 38

Genesis 2-3 and the Failure to Obtain Sabbath Rest

At the pinnacle of the second creation account found in Genesis 2 and 3, God places the human in the garden so he can work it and keep it. In the Hebrew, the word "place" is actually *nuakh*, or rest.

*Then the Lord God took the human and **rested** him (וינחהו)
/ nuakh) into the garden of Eden to **work** it and keep it.*

Genesis 2:1-2

Said more accurately, God rests the human in the garden so that he can work it. The biblical portrait of rest actually includes work! So what happens next in the story? Humanity rebels and finds themselves exiled from the garden of Eden, sent to work/labor the ground.

*Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.
It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.*

Genesis 3:17-19

Humanity's new reality is void of the rest (*nuakh*) God intended for his creation. How is God going to restore the Eden Sabbath?

Sabbath/Eden Themes in Genesis 4-50

God embarks on a project with the family of Abraham for new creation and a new Sabbath. But it's not just about one family—through them God will restore his blessing to the nations and all creation. The remainder of Genesis includes key stories that move God's plan forward. It's no surprise that these passages are riddled with patterns of seven, reminding us that this whole story is aimed at a Sabbath rest in the new creation. Let's take a look at a couple of examples from the life of Noah and Abraham.

Noah's Story

In Hebrew, Noah's name actually means "rest" (*noakh*). His story takes him from the wilderness of exile from Eden, through the flood waters of death, to rest on the cosmic mountain.

*Now he called his name **Noah (noakh)**, saying, "This one will **give us comfort (Heb. yenakhmenu)** from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed."*

Genesis 5:29

*In the **seventh** month, on the **seventeenth** (literally, **seven-ten**) day of the month, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat.*

Genesis 8:4

*Then it came about at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made; and he sent out a raven, and it flew here and there until the water was dried up from the earth. Then he sent out a dove from him, to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; but the dove **found no resting place (Heb. manoakh)** for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the ark, for the water was on the surface of all the earth. Then he put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark to himself. So he waited yet another **seven days**; and again he sent out the dove from the ark. The dove came to him toward evening, and behold, in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the water was abated from the earth. Then he waited yet **another seven days**, and sent out the dove; but she did not return to him again.*

*Now it came about in the **six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month**, the water was dried up from the earth. Then Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the surface of the ground was dried up.*

Genesis 8:6-13

Abraham's Story

Genesis chapters 3-11 tell of humanity's downward spiral away from God. In chapter 12, we meet Abraham, who enters into a unique relationship with Yahweh. God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 includes seven lines with five blessings to match the five curses in Genesis 3.

*Now the LORD said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

Genesis 12:1-3

Abraham responds with trust and embarks on the journey toward the land God would show him. In Genesis 21, we read about a location along the way, Beersheba, which means "well of seven." God provides miraculous water in the desert for Hagar the Egyptian and her child at the well of seven (Gen. 21:14-19). Abraham then makes peace with the nations at the well of seven by sacrificing seven sheep and planting a tree at the well of seven (Gen. 21:22-33).

Years later, during Joseph's story, the characters experience seven years of plenty and seven years of famine in Genesis 42-47. Why the subtle (and not so subtle) inclusions of patterns of seven? The author is trying to show us that God is on the move, looking to restore humanity to seventh day rest.

The Exodus as Sabbath Liberation

The next major movement in the biblical narrative is the exodus from Egypt. It should come as no surprise that the exodus story is presented in cosmic terms in analogy with the creation story in Genesis.

Here's how the story goes. The powers of evil (Egypt) have left the new humanity (Israel) in a state of destruction through slavery (lit. "working," עבדה). Israel passes through the waters of death (the sea) and into new life (the promised land). But first, God brings 10 plagues against Egypt.

The Plagues

The 10 plagues function as inversions of the 10 creative words of God in Genesis 1. All of the plagues de-
create Egypt back to chaotic darkness. Take a look at the similarities between these passages.

<p>Genesis 1:2-3 and darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ) was over the surface of the deep ... And God said, 'Let there be light (יְהי אֹר)'</p>	<p>Exodus 10:21, 23 Let there be darkness (וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ) over the land of Egypt ... but for all the sons of Israel, there was light (הָיָה אֹר) in their dwellings</p>
<p>Genesis 1:20 Let the waters swarm (וַיִּשְׂרַץ) with every swarming (וַיִּשְׂרַץ) creature ...</p>	<p>Exodus 8:3 The Nile will swarm (וַיִּשְׂרַץ) with frogs</p>
<p>Genesis 1:29-30 I have given to you for food all vegetation ... all the tree which has the fruit of the tree ... every green thing (וְיֵרֹק) ...</p> <p>Genesis 2:9 and Yahweh sprouted (וַיִּצְמַח) from the ground every tree (וְעֵץ)</p>	<p>Exodus 10:5 the locust will eat every tree (וְעֵץ) which sprouts (וַיִּצְמַח) for you from the field (הַשָּׂדֶה),</p> <p>Exodus 10:15 fruit of the tree ... all vegetation in the tree and green thing (וְיֵרֹק) in the field</p>

Darkness

The 10th and final plague corresponds to the provision of the Passover meal and takes place at night. Pharaoh also sends Israel out of Egypt at night (Exod. 12:29, 31, 42). These circumstances give a nod to the darkness found in Genesis 1:2. Now that Egypt has been reduced back to the pre-creation state, the parting of the waters replays Genesis 1:2 as the divine Spirit brings new creation.

The story continues as Israel flees to the edge of the Red Sea where Pharaoh's army chases them for a nighttime showdown (Exod. 14:20). It's also at night that God parts the waters (Exod. 14:21). During the last watch of the night (Exod. 14:24), the Egyptians falter in the midst of the sea, and at sunrise the waters destroy the Egyptians while the Israelites flourish on dry land (Exod. 14:27).

Promise of Sabbath Rest

Exodus 15 is a song about Israel going into the land to be planted on a cosmic mountain to be in God's (Sabbath) presence!

*You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;
They sank like lead in the mighty waters.
Who is like you among the gods, O LORD?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
Awesome in praises, working wonders?
You stretched out your right hand,
The earth swallowed them.
In your lovingkindness you have led the people whom you have redeemed;
In your strength you have guided them to your holy habitation.*

*You will bring them **and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance,**
The **place of your dwelling** (שִׁבְתֵּךְ / Heb. shibteka, Sabbath!), which you have made,
The **sanctuary**, O LORD, which your hands have established.
The LORD shall reign forever and ever.*

Exodus 15:10-18

The Significance of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Creation

In Exodus 12-13, we see the patterns of seven continue. Passover occurs on the 14th of the month (2 x 7) and is followed by a seven-day festival of unleavened bread (15th-21st) that begins and ends with a “super Sabbath” rest.

There are also hyperlinks back to Genesis with the repetition of the phrase, “In the beginning.” Passover is like creation—a seven-day ritual that restarts the calendar. The date of the recession of the floodwaters has been coordinated with the Torah’s chronology of Passover and the inauguration of the tabernacle.

Creation	The date of the flood’s finish	The date of the Passover/exodus	The date of the tabernacle completion
Genesis 1:1-2 <i>In the beginning (תִּשְׁאָרָב) God created the skies and the land: Now the land was wild and waste and darkness was over the deep waters, but the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters ...</i>	Genesis 8:13 <i>Now it came about in the six hundred and first year, in the beginning (וּשְׁאָרָב), on the first of the month, the water was dried up from the earth. Then Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the surface of the ground was dried up.</i>	Exodus 12:1-2 <i>Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be the beginning (וּשְׁאָר) of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you."</i>	Exodus 40:1-2 <i>Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "On the first day of the beginning (וּשְׁאָר) month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting."</i>

Passover was a significant event in the history of Israel. When you look at the parallels of the Passover account with Genesis, it becomes clear why.

Parallels Between Passover and Creation Event		
Repetition of ten and seven	Genesis 1 God speaks ten times , and God pronounces good seven times over the course of seven days.	Exodus 12:3, 6 <i>On the tenth of the month you will take for yourself a lamb" ... "and it will be under watch until the fourteenth (7 x 2) day of the month.</i>
	Genesis 2:1-4 The seventh day is holy, for God finished his work.	Exodus 12:16 <i>On the first day it is a holy convocation, and on the seventh day it is a holy convocation ... all work should not be done on them.</i>
Instructions given on what to eat (and not eat)	Genesis 2:16 There is a certain food provided (מן כל העץ), and a certain food that is forbidden (the tree of knowing good and evil).	Exodus 13:6-7 <i>Seven days you will eat unleavened bread (מצות) and on the seventh day it is a feast for Yahweh; unleavened bread will be eaten (יאכל) for seven days, and leaven will not be seen among you for seven days.</i>
Presence of waters parting	Genesis 1:6 God parts the sea so that dry land can emerge.	Exodus 14 Passover is coordinated with the wonder of the parting of the waters and deliverance onto dry land.
Reinforcing humanity's co-ruler status	Genesis 1-2 is about the creation of humanity as God's co-rulers who work (עבד) the land.	Passover is about Israel's liberation from slavery (עבדה/עב"ד).
Reversal of banishment	Genesis 3:22-24 Humanity is banished from Eden into the wilderness.	Exodus 12:39 Passover is a reversal of humanity's exile as Israel is banished (גרשו) from Egypt.

Passover is a celebration of this new creation.

This new, free state of the people of Israel necessitated some new habits. The unleavened bread is meant to show the people that their liberation requires them to eat only what God allows and provides, instead of trying to provide their own security or provision. The unleavened bread eaten at Passover is a precursor to God's provision of manna in the wilderness. Scholar Douglas K. Stuart reflects further upon the significance of the unleavened bread.

But why require eating unleavened bread as the special focus of the Exodus memorial meal, the Passover? The answer is that unleavened bread was the unique food of the original Exodus, the event God wanted his people to be sure not to forget. People everywhere normally eat leavened bread. It tastes better, is more pleasant to eat, is more filling. Leavened bread was the normal choice of the Israelites in Egypt too. But on the night they ran, there was no time for the usual niceties—a fast meal had to be eaten, and hastily made bread had to be consumed. The fact that a lamb or goat kid was roasted for the meat portion of the meal or that bitter herbs were eaten as a side dish was not nearly so special or unusual as the fact that the bread was unleavened, thus essentially forming sheets of cracker. Eating it at the memorial feast intentionally recalled the original departure in haste. Eating it for a solid week tended to fix the idea in one's consciousness.

Douglas K. Stuart, Exodus, Vol. 2, *The New American Commentary*, 283

Exodus 16 and the Manna as Sabbath Provision in the Wilderness

As the Israelites enter the wilderness on their way to the promised land, God provides for them sustenance. Manna is a divine gift that comes from proximity to the divine glory (Exod. 16:9-10). This miraculous provision doesn't behave like normal food. There is more than enough each day, no matter how much has been gathered.

The rhythms of gathering and not gathering on the Sabbath are an imitation of God's own patterns of work and rest in Genesis 1. God pronounced "good" days one through six and "very good" on day seven. Therefore, Israel collects manna on days one through six and double manna on day seven. On the seventh day, God rested (took up residence in his temple). Likewise, on the seventh day, Israel rested, and Moses rested a perpetual sample of manna before Yahweh and before the testimony (Exod. 16:33-34).

The existence of manna and Sabbath enabled Israel to participate in a new creation. The manna is a new work of creation that violates normal creation while at the same time fitting within God's ideal purpose for creation (i.e. within the seven-day scheme).

The Sabbath Command in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5

The first occurrence of the Sabbath command occurs in Exodus 20:8-11. The command is expressed in seven statements, arranged in chiasmic symmetry. A chiasm is a common literary form that arranges material in a symmetrical structure in order to emphasize a main point. In this instance, it serves to accentuate the purpose of Sabbath.

1	A	Remember the Sabbath day , to keep it holy .	
2		B	Six days you will labor
3		C	and do all your work ,
4		D	but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God;
5		C	you shall not do any work , you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant, or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.
6		B	For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day;
7	A	therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy .	

This passage connects the Sabbath with participation in God's presence and rule over creation. The Sabbath command is repeated again in Deuteronomy to the second generation of Israelites, who are about to enter the promised land.

Keep the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a **Sabbath of the LORD your God**; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, **so that your male servant and your female servant may rest (Heb. nuakh) as well as you.**

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.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

This passage portrays Sabbath as implementing God's presence and rule by the liberation from slavery. Both commands in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 state clearly, "It is a Sabbath of Yahweh," (שבת ליהוה) literally "a Sabbath that belongs to Yahweh." This simple phrase reminded Israel of an important truth: God is the master of time, and the seventh day is a way to renounce human autonomy and embrace God's dominion. Scholars Trevaskis and Robinson expound on this point.

[T]he sabbatical rest seems to remind Israel of her covenant obligations as Yahweh's new creation. Though this rest is more immediately connected to the Exodus in these chapters, it has its roots in the creation story (Genesis 2:1-3; cf. Exodus 20:11), and by connecting Israel's remembrance of her redemption from Egypt with the sabbatical rest, the Exodus becomes infused with further theological significance: just as God's seventh day rest in the creation story marks the emergence of his new creation, so does Israel's sabbatical rest attest to her emergence as Yahweh's new creation through his act of redemption. And since her identity as a new creation is tied up with the covenant (cf. Exodus 15:1-19; 19:4-5), Israel's sabbatical rests ... presumably recall her obligation to remain faithful to this covenant, encouraging her to live according to the Creator's will.

Leigh Trevaskis, *The Purpose of Leviticus 24 Within Its Literary Context*, 298-299

The Sabbath grows into a symbol signifying humanity's salvation and freedom, free from bondage, both external (oppression and slavery in Egypt) and internal (sin of estrangement from God and other humans); freedom from anxieties as to what to eat (Exodus 16:27; Leviticus 25:6, 20), and where to live (Isaiah 56:2-7). Sabbath thus acquires an eschatological meaning. By abstaining from his work every seventh day, humanity stands before God in absolute freedom, rejoicing in his salvation (Isaiah 58:13-14), and looking forward to the realization of this joy of God's salvation and freedom for all people of all times.

Gnana Robinson, *The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath*, 420

Exodus 24-40: Sabbath and the Tabernacle

A significant portion of the last section of the book of Exodus features the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle. Once again, the author includes literary features like chiasm and repetition to point readers toward the significant themes emerging from this event. Take a look at the overview of the section.

25-31 Tabernacle instructions		35-40 Tabernacle construction	
	31:12-18 Sabbath legislation		35:1-3 Sabbath legislation
		32-34 The golden calf; covenant broken and renewed; Moses' intercession	
Exodus 24:15-18 <i>Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of Yahweh dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain tip. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.</i>			Exodus 40:34-35 <i>And the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.</i> <i>Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.</i>

Exodus 24

Let's zoom in to Exodus 24, the culmination of the covenant ceremony between God and Israel. Moses goes up the mountain, and God's heavenly presence descends upon it. The author writes in chiasmic structure to emphasize the seventh day.

A	24:15b The cloud covered the mountain.
	B 24:16a Glory of Yahweh dwelt on the mountain.
	C 24:16b The cloud covered the mountain for six days .
	C' 24:16c God called to Moses from the midst the cloud on the seventh day .
	B' 24:17 The appearance of the glory of Yahweh was fire on the mountain.
A'	24:18a Moses went into the midst of the cloud.

Exodus 25-31

Let's take a closer look at the tabernacle blueprints in Exodus 25-31. Notice that the tabernacle is spoken into existence by seven acts of divine speech. Sound familiar? These seven speech-acts correspond to the seven-day pattern of Genesis 1:3-2:3, culminating in the seventh Sabbath day.

1	Exodus 25:1 <i>And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying ...</i>	The offering for tabernacle materials The ark of the covenant The table for sacred bread The menorah The tent curtains and poles The altar, screens for outer court, priestly garments, priestly ordination ritual, and altar of incense
2	Exodus 30:11 <i>And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying ...</i>	Atonement offering for the census of Israel
3	Exodus 30:17 <i>And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying ...</i>	The bronze bowl for ritual washing
4	Exodus 30:22 <i>And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying ...</i>	The oil of ritual anointing
5	Exodus 30:34 <i>And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying ...</i>	The sacred incense
6	Exodus 31:1 <i>And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying ...</i>	God fills Bezalel and Oholiab with the spirit of wisdom
7	Exodus 31:12 <i>And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying ...</i>	Sabbath

The seventh Sabbath speech (31:12-17) links together the concepts of the temple and Sabbath and points forward to the completion of the tabernacle, which mirrors the completion of creation. "The Sabbath is to time what the temple and tabernacle are to space" (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*).

Creation and Sabbath	Tabernacle Designs and Sabbath	Tabernacle Completion and Sabbath
Genesis 1:31-2:3 Creation's completion	Exodus 31:12-17 Seventh tabernacle speech	Exodus 39-40 Completion of the tabernacle
Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24 Seven days open with the divine command, "And God said ..."	Exodus 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12 Seven speeches open with the divine command, "And Yahweh spoke to Moses ..."	Exodus 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32 Seven acts of obedience to the divine command complete the tabernacle. "And Moses did ... just as Yahweh commanded Moses."
Genesis 2:1-3 Seventh day culminates in Sabbath	Exodus 31:12-17 Seventh speech emphasizes the sign of the Sabbath	Exodus 40:32 Seventh act of obedience completes the tabernacle
Genesis 1:31 <i>And God saw all that he had done, and behold, very good. And there was evening and morning, the sixth day.</i>		Exodus 39:43 <i>And Moses saw all the work they had done, and behold, just as Yahweh commanded, so they did, and Moses blessed them.</i>
Genesis 2:1 <i>and the skies and the land were completed (כל"ה)</i>		Exodus 40:33 <i>and Moses completed (מלאכה) the work (כל"ה)</i>
and God rested (שב"ת) on the seventh day ...		Exodus 40:34 <i>and the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tent.</i>
Genesis 2:2-3 <i>... from all his work (מלאכה) ... and God blessed (בר"ך) the seventh day and made it holy (ש"קדש)</i>	Exodus 31:14-15 <i>you shall keep the Sabbath for it is holy (קדש) for you ... Six days let the work (מלאכה) be done, and on the seventh day it is a Sabbath of Sabbath.</i>	

Exodus 40

The last chapter of Exodus documents the completion of the tabernacle. The passage builds upon what has come before, repeating the themes of seven, work, and rest.

A	<i>And it came about in the beginning month, in the second year, on the first of the month, the tabernacle was set up (הוקם), and Moses set up (ותקם) the tabernacle ... (Exod. 40:17-18a)</i>
B	List of tabernacle items set up by Moses, arranged into seven sections that each conclude with the same line. [1] "... just as Yahweh commanded Moses" (Exod. 40:19) [2] "... just as Yahweh commanded Moses" (Exod. 40:21) [3] "... just as Yahweh commanded Moses" (Exod. 40:23) [4] "... just as Yahweh commanded Moses" (Exod. 40:25) [5] "... just as Yahweh commanded Moses" (Exod. 40:27)
A	<i>And Moses completed (ויכל) the work (המלאכה) (Exod. 40:33).</i>

The structuring of the narrative in Exodus 25-40 binds the Sabbath observance closely with the construction of the sanctuary. Both are tightly connected with the question of the presence of Yahweh with his people ... The Sabbath is a significant element in the celebration of the presence of Yahweh with his people. Just as the tabernacle was built along lines specified by divine decree, so too in the sequence is the human Sabbath institution modeled on the divine pattern. The Sabbath ... is tied to the notion of the presence of Yahweh. Since the tabernacle, which is patterned on the divine plan, reveals the presence and shares in the role of the heavenly temple to proclaim the sovereignty of Israel's God, so the Sabbath shares in the proclamation of the sovereignty of Yahweh.

Howard Wallace, *Genesis 2:1-3 - Creation and Sabbath*, 246

The Seventh Year of Release for Land and Slaves

Sabbath was not just for the Israelites but for the land and the immigrants among them as well. Let's take a closer look at the passages in which Moses commands Sabbath release for the land and a year of release for debts and slaves. Notice how these passages reflect the Sabbath theme.

Exodus 23:9-12

A	You shall not oppress the immigrant , since you yourselves know the life (נפש / Heb. nephesh) of the immigrant, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt.	
	B	Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but on the seventh year you shall release it and leave,
		C so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.
	B'	Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease (תשבַת / Heb. shabat) so that your ox and your donkey may rest (תנוּח / Heb. nuakh)
A	and the son of your female slave, as well as your immigrant , may refresh (נפש / Heb. naphash) themselves.	

At the **end of every seven years** you shall grant a **release** (Heb. shemittah, Grk. ἀφεσις). This is the manner of **release**: every lender shall **release** what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because Yahweh's **release** has been proclaimed. From a foreigner you may exact it, but your hand shall **release** whatever of yours is with your brother. However, there will be no poor among you, since Yahweh will surely bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, if only you listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today ...

If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you **six years**, but in the **seventh year** you shall send him out (Heb. shalakh) free. When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as Yahweh your God has blessed you. You shall remember **that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Yahweh your God redeemed you**; therefore I command you this today. It shall come about if he says to you, "I will not go out from you," because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you; then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also you shall do likewise to your maidservant. It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with double the service of a hired man; so Yahweh your God will bless you in whatever you do.

Deuteronomy 15:1-5, 12-18

In Deuteronomy ... the treatment of the Hebrew slave is tied to Israel's sacred narrative of liberation from Egypt. Fundamental issues of God's sovereignty in the world and Israel's identity as Yahweh's liberated people are at stake. As Yahweh showed mercy and generosity toward enslaved Israel, the Israelite lender must show mercy and generosity toward the Hebrew slave ... By observing the terms of the Hebrew slave law, Israel celebrates the character of Yahweh, divine Redeemer and Savior of slaves.

There is something about the seventh day rest and the seventh year release that is inexorably bound to liberation from Egypt, where Israel languished as resident aliens and slaves. The allusion to the Exodus story is strengthened by the use, in the first clause, of the verb "to oppress" (lahats). It reiterates Exodus 22:20 "You must not wrong or oppress an immigrant, because you were immigrants in Egypt." But more importantly, it alludes to Exodus 3:9, "I have seen the oppression (lahats) by which the Egyptians are oppressing (lohetsim) Israel." Oppressing the immigrant runs exactly counter to Israel's sacred history. It associates Israel with the quintessential enemy whom Yahweh defeated so that Israel could live. Israel's identity as God's people and Yahweh's character as the God who liberates slaves are at stake in the Sabbath and the Sabbath year observance.

Richard Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, 34-35, 52

Sabbath and Jubilee in Leviticus 23-26

Get ready for another bunch of sevens! The book of Leviticus includes instructions specifically for priests. It was their responsibility to maintain the rituals and worship that would remind the Israelites of their identity as the people of God. Let's walk through several chapters and highlight the theme of seventh-day rest.

Leviticus 23: The Sabbath Ideal Multiplied by Seven

We arrive at Leviticus 23 and see the Sabbath ideal has been multiplied by seven! There are seven sacred meeting/convocation days for Israel's worship. Every one (except Firstfruits) is a multiple of seven (in days or in the seventh month) or a duration of seven and is a moment representing new creation.

	Holy Day	Date	Duration	Work?
1	Sabbath	Seventh day	One day	No work
1st half of the year				
2	Passover and Unleavened Bread	1/14 1/15-1/21	One day + seven days	No work on first and seventh day
3	Firstfruits	Day after the seventh day	One day	—
4	Weeks/Pentecost	7x7+1 days after Sabbath	One day	No work
2nd half of the year				
5	Trumpets	Seventh month/ first day	One day	No work
6	Day of Atonement	Seventh month/ 10th day	One day	No work
7	Tabernacles	Seventh month 7/15-7/21	Seven days	No work on first and seventh day

It's as if Eden bursts into time with the principle of Sabbath multiplied by seven. Additionally, these holy days all participate in and develop some aspect of the meaning of the original Sabbath.

- **Passover and Unleavened Bread:** Redemption from death (new creation) and commitment to simplicity and trust in God's power to provide food in the wilderness.
- **Firstfruits and Weeks:** Celebrating the gift of produce from the land.
- **Trumpets:** Announcing the Sabbatical (seventh) month.
- **Day of Atonement:** God's renewing the holiness of his Eden presence among his compromised people.
- **Tabernacles:** Provision for God's people on their way to the promised land/Eden. For one Sabbath cycle, Israel acts like they are living in God's tent. Consider the instructions for Tabernacles from Leviticus 23:40, "And you will take the fruit of the beautiful tree, the branches of a palm, and branches of a tree of leaf and of poplar trees by a river, and you shall rejoice before Yahweh for seven days." Think about the garden in Genesis 1-2. The author is describing a mini-Eden tent made of the fruit of a beautiful tree.

Leviticus 24: Daily Light and Sabbath Bread

The lamp and the bread are two important features inside the tabernacle. The lamp (מאור / Heb. *ma'or*) is attended to every evening so that its light burns perpetually (Lev. 24:1-4). The lamp is described with the vocabulary of the sun, moon, and stars in Genesis 1. "From evening to evening," these are symbols of the divine glory and markers of the "appointed feasts" (Gen. 1:14-16). The lamp symbolizes these divine lights that perpetually shine upon Israel as the lamp shines on the bread in the tabernacle. In Numbers 8:1-4, the light of the lamps on the menorah are specifically said to be "facing forward to shine in front of" the lamp, that is, to shine in the direction of the bread.

Continuing on in the chapter, the bread is to be placed directly across from the light (Israel) and is recreated through newly baked bread every Sabbath (Lev. 24:5-9). This bread is called "the eternal covenant" (Lev. 24:8), a symbol of the eternal relationship between God and Israel. Scholar Michael Morales describes the connection between the lamp and the cosmos.

The heavenly bodies were made in order to "serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years" (Genesis 1:14). The whole cycle of time marked by the sun and moon and stars is divided up into sevens: the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath day; the seventh month is the month of atonement (Leviticus 16); the seventh year is the year of release from debts and slavery (Deuteronomy 15), and the seventh of the seven year cycles is the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). In the same way, the menorah lampstand contains the same seven-fold structure, symbolizing the entire seven-part structure of time provided by the heavenly lights ... just as the cosmos was created for humanity's Sabbath communion and fellowship with God, so too tabernacle was established for Israel's Sabbath communion and fellowship with God "every day of the Sabbath" (Leviticus 24:8). This ritual drama of the lights and the bread, symbolizes the ideal Sabbath, the tribes of Israel basking in the divine light, being renewed in God's presence Sabbath by Sabbath.

Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord*,
189-190 [with embedded quote by Vern Poythress]

Leviticus 25: The Year of Jubilee

God commands the people in Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15 to make every seventh year a Sabbath or release. In this special year, the land rests and reverts to Eden conditions.

*The LORD then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, "When you come into the land which I shall give you, then **the land shall have a Sabbath** to the LORD. **Six years** you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, but during **the seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath rest**, a Sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. Your harvest's aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year. All of you shall have the Sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat.*

*'You are also to **count off seven Sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years**, so that you have the time of the **seven Sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years**. You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; **on the day of atonement** you shall sound a horn all through your land. You shall thus **consecrate the fiftieth year** and proclaim a **release** through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a **jubilee** for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. You shall have the 50th year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in from its untrimmed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field.*

Leviticus 25:1-12

Notice that every 49th-50th year is to be a super-Sabbath, also known as the Year of Jubilee. During this special year, three important things happen.

- The land rests on its proper Sabbath.
- The land "goes out" from slavery to return to its original owners.
- Slaves "go out" from slavery to return to freedom.

So what's the deeper significance of the Year of Jubilee? If you read with Genesis in mind, you'll notice that Jubilee points toward a restoration of the Eden conditions God intended. Jubilee welcomes the present and sustained reality of liberation from slavery, debt, and oppression.

While the redemption of people and property could be practiced anytime and was primarily intended to keep land from leaving the clan, the jubilee was only practiced every 50 years and returned the land to the smaller "households" or familial units. Thus, clan lands could not be controlled by one or two powerful families. Therefore, oppression would have been severely limited. Furthermore, Yahweh's covenant stipulations for the land would have constantly been brought to mind, for every economic transaction related to the land would have been executed in light of the coming Year of Jubilee.

Christopher Bruno, *The Old Testament Background of Jesus' Jubilee Announcement in Luke*, 88

Jubilee also looks forward in anticipation to complete restoration in the future. The extension of the Sabbath day (1/7 days) to years (1/7 years) and multiple years (2/50 years in the Jubilee) expands the idea to increasingly larger claims on time and history. New creation is a liberation from the powers (human and spiritual). Scholars Bergsma and Och explain the forward-pointing nature of Jubilee.

There is something inherently “eschatological” about the jubilee, long before it was seen as a symbol of the eschaton by later writers. Since it recurred usually only once in a lifetime, the impoverished Israelite—or at least the one projected by the text—would spend most of his life in anticipation of this event of restoration. Also, from the perspective of the entire Pentateuch, the conquest and settlement of Canaan was a kind of “realized eschatology”—the fulfillment of the promise of the land of Canaan originally made to Abraham. Leviticus 25—in its present position in the Pentateuch—looks forward to the time when the “eschatological” condition of Israel dwelling within her own land will be realized, and enacts measures to ensure that periodically this utopian, “eschatological” state of Israel will be renewed and restored.

John Bergsma, *The Jubilee From Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, 81

The Sabbath is that point in time where God and man meet. On the seventh day of creation, God joined himself and his eternal presence to his temporal creation, to the world of man. On the Sabbath day, man not only recalls but participates in an act of cosmic creation ... he experiences the original structuring of time within the microcosm of his own life ... The observance of the Sabbath links humanity to a divinely ordained future, as well as a divinely created past. Sabbath observance has cosmic implications... a foretaste of an eschatological future ... a prefiguration of the final phase of the divine/human reconciliation. In pointing back to the beginning, the Sabbath also points to what is yet to be, to the final destiny to which all creation is moving.

Bernard Och, *Creation and Redemption: Towards a Theology of Creation*, 240

Leviticus 26: Exile as an Inverted Jubilee

Leviticus 26 includes the blessings and curses of the covenant. First, covenant loyalty results in blessing, freedom, abundance, and security reminiscent of Eden.

If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments so as to carry them out, then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full (שבע / seven) and live securely in your land. I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making you tremble. I shall also eliminate harmful beasts from the land, and no sword will pass through your land ... So I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will confirm my covenant with you. You will eat the old supply and clear out the old because of the new. Moreover, I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you (Genesis 3:8) and be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you would not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

Leviticus 26:3-6, 9-13

If obeying the covenant leads to a Jubilee/Eden environment, what happens when Israel disobeys? Covenant violation will result in an anti-Jubilee curse (seven times anti-blessing, slavery, poverty, and oppression, leading to exile and slavery).

*But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases, and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you. If after all this you will not listen to me, **I will discipline you for your sins seven times over.***

*If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, **I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve.***

*If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, I myself will be hostile toward you **and will afflict you for your sins seven times over.***

*If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and **I myself will discipline you for your sins seven times over.***

*I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. **Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years** all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; **then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths.** All the time that it lies desolate, **the land will have the rest it did not have during the Sabbaths you lived in it.***

***If they confess their iniquity** and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against me, and also in their acting with hostility against me ... or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,*

***then I will remember my covenant** with Jacob, and I will remember also my covenant with Isaac, and my covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land. For the land will be abandoned by them, and will make up for its Sabbaths while it is made desolate without them. Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking my covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD.*

Leviticus 26:14-40

Exile from the land is not a random curse. Rather, it signifies the land resting for the Sabbath/Jubilee periods that it never received. The exile is portrayed by the biblical authors as an inverted Jubilee. However, Israel is not left without hope. Even if they disobey the covenant, repentance and circumcision of heart will result in restoration and covenant renewal.

Numbers-Deuteronomy: The Promised Land as the Future Rest

God brought Israel out of Egypt in order to place them in the land he promised them. Israel's journey to that land in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy continues to reflect the biblical theme of rest. Take a look at a couple key passages.

*Thus they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD journeying in front of them for the three days, **to seek out a resting place for them.** The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp.*

Numbers 10:33-34

*These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe **in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess** as long as you live on the land ...*

*But you shall seek the Lord at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, **to establish his name there for his dwelling**, and there you shall come. There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you.*

*You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; for you have not as yet come to the **resting place** and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and **he gives you rest** from all your enemies around you so that you live in security ...*

Deuteronomy 12:1, 5-10

Notice the similarity in language to earlier passages covered in Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus. The biblical authors continually remind their readers of God's desire for them to enter his rest.

Joshua: Sabbath and New Creation in the Promised Land

The book of Joshua details the story of Israel finally entering the promised land. Let's take a look at several key ways the Sabbath theme continues through this part of the story.

1. Yahweh will provide a land of rest in Canaan.

*Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, "The LORD your God **gives you rest** and will **give you this land ...**" The LORD gives your brothers rest, as he gives you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them.*

Joshua 1:13, 15

2. Entry into the land is depicted as an act of new creation and new exodus.

And Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over ahead of the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went ahead of the people.

Now the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. You shall, moreover, command the priests who are carrying the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'"

Joshua 3:6-8

*And when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at **Adam**, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.*

Joshua 3:15-17

3. Israel celebrates Passover and transitions off manna.

Before the battle with Jericho, the Israelites celebrate Passover (Sabbath). Since the Passover took place at the time of the barley harvest, it included a presentation of the firstfruits of the land of Canaan. Subsequently, the manna stops as they eat from the produce of the land. This change in diet, from manna to grain, signified the end of the period in the wilderness and the dawning of a new age to be fruitful and multiply (see Gen. 1) in the land.

*While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho. On **the day after the Passover**, on that very day, **they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased** on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.*

Joshua 5:10-12

4. The fall of Jericho is depicted in analogy with Genesis 1 and Exodus 16.

God provides the land and manna for the seventh-day rest.

*The LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. You shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. **You shall do so for six days.** Also **seven** priests shall carry **seven** trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; then **on the seventh day** you shall march around the city **seven times**, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead."*

*Now Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. The **seven** priests carrying the **seven** trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew the trumpets; and the armed men went before them and the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while they continued to blow the trumpets. Thus the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp; they did so **for six days.***

*Then **on the seventh day** they rose early at the dawning of the day and marched around the city in the same manner **seven times**; only on that day they marched around the city seven times.*

So the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city.

Joshua 6:2-5, 12-15, 20

5. The land is subdued so Israel can have rest.

- "So Joshua took **the whole land**, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. **Thus the land had rest from war**" (Josh. 11:23).
- "Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. **The land lay subdued before them**" (Josh. 18:1).
- "So the LORD gave Israel **all the land** which he had sworn to give to their fathers, and **they possessed it and lived in it**. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that he had sworn to their fathers, and **no one of all their enemies stood before them**; the LORD **gave all their enemies into their hand**" (Josh. 21:43-44).
- "Now it came about after many days, when **the LORD had given rest to Israel** from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years, that Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders and their heads and their judges and their officers ..." (Josh. 23:1-2).
- "I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant" (Josh. 24:13).

6. Israel faces the temptation to ignore God's command to finish the subjugation of the land and succumb to the temptation of the Canaanites (// snake in Eden).

- "Now Joshua was old, advanced in years when the LORD said to him, 'You are old and advanced in years, and **very much of the land remains to be possessed**'" (Josh. 13:1).
- "Judah **wasn't able to dislodge the Jebusites**, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah" (Josh. 15:63).
- "They **did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer**; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labor" (Josh. 16:10).
- "Yet the Manassites **were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region**. However, when the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out completely" (Josh. 17:12-13).

David and Solomon: The Sabbath, Messiah, and Temple

Several hundred years after they enter the land of Canaan, Israel's monarchy begins. It becomes clear that the people are in need of a king to deliver them from their surrounding enemies and usher in a period of rest. King David was the first to do this. The rest that David achieved is a model for his future **seed** who will rule in the time when Yahweh **plants** his people in the land to live in peace and rest.

*Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and **the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies**, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you."*

*But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, "Go and say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should **build me a house** to dwell in?""*

*"Now therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and **I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth**. I will also appoint a place for my people Israel and **will plant them**, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel; and **I will give you rest** from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that **the LORD will make a house for you**. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, **I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.**"*

2 Samuel 7:1-13

David's son Solomon becomes the next king of Israel. The author carefully presents Solomon as a new Adam who will live long in the land—as long as he passes his test. In 1 Kings 3, Solomon has a dream in which he can ask God for anything. Instead of choosing something for his own glory, he chooses wisdom. It's as if Adam and Eve's choice in the garden is replayed, this time with a better result. Solomon also claims to be the seed who will bring rest and build the temple.

Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always been a friend of David. Then Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying, "You know that David my father was unable to build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the wars which surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary (satan) nor misfortune. Behold, I intend to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spoke to David my father, saying, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he will build the house for my name.'"

1 Kings 5:1-5

Solomon goes on to complete the task. It takes him seven years to build the temple and 13 years to build his house.

*In the 11th year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished throughout all its parts and according to all its plans. So he was **seven years in building it.***

1 Kings 6:38

Now Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house.

1 Kings 7:1

1 Kings 8: Solomon's Prayer of Temple Dedication

After seven years of building, the temple is dedicated in the seventh month during the feast of Sukkoth which lasts seven days (1 Kgs. 8:2). Solomon gives an elaborate prayer with seven petitions at its center. Let's take a look at the design of this prayer.

B	1 Kings 8:14-21 <i>The king turned around his face and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while they were standing ... 'Blessed be Yahweh the God of Israel ...'</i>
C	1 Kings 8:22-30 <i>Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven ... "Your eyes may be open toward this house ... Listen to the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place;</i>
1	1 Kings 8:31-32 <i>When someone sins against their neighbor ... then hear in heaven and act and bring justice for your servants ...</i>
2	1 Kings 8:33-34 <i>When your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against you, if they turn to you and confess ... then hear in heaven and forgive</i>
3	1 Kings 8:35-36 <i>When the heavens are bound up and there is no rain, because they have sinned against you, and they pray toward this place and confess your name ... then hear in the heavens and forgive ...</i>
4	1 Kings 8:37-40 <i>If there is famine in the land, plague, blight, mildew, locusts ... or if an enemy besieges them in the land ... whatever prayer or supplication is made by any person ... then hear in the heavens your dwelling place and forgive ...</i>
5	1 Kings 8:41-43 <i>And also regarding the foreigner who is not from your people Israel ... when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in the heavens ... and act according to what he calls to you ...</i>
6	1 Kings 8:44-45 <i>When your people go out to battle against their enemy ... and they pray to Yahweh toward the city you have chosen ... then hear in the heavens and bring justice for their cause.</i>
7	1 Kings 8:46-53 <i>When they sin against you ... and you deliver them over to their enemy... and if they repent and seek your favor ... then hear their prayer ... and forgive your people</i>
C'	1 Kings 8:51-54 <i>Your eyes may be open to the supplication of your servant and to the supplication of your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to you." When Solomon had finished praying this entire prayer and supplication to the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread toward heaven.</i>
B'	1 Kings 8:55-56 <i>And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, "Blessed be Yahweh, who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he has spoken; not one word has fallen from every good word which he has spoken by the hand of Moses his servant."</i>

Jon Levenson presents a parallel between the temple building event and the seven-day creation of the world in Genesis.

The construction of the temple is presented here [in 1 Kings 6-8] as a parallel to the construction of the world in seven days (Genesis 1:1-2:3) ... The temple, Solomon tells his audience, is the place in which God's name is to be found, a familiar idea from Deuteronomy (Deut 12:4) ... On the other hand ... he says "But can God really dwell on earth when the heavens, and the heavens of the heavens, cannot contain you?" (1 Kings 8:27). At first glance, this disclaimer looks like a renunciation of the notion that God is to be found in his temple ... But the proof that the temple cannot contain God is that even the uttermost reaches of the heavens cannot contain him. The same limitation is placed on both the temple and the heavens. The temple is less infinite, so to speak, than the world. Since the world cannot contain God, neither can the temple. The distinction only makes sense in a cosmology where the world and the temple are thought to be comparable.

Jon Levenson, *The Temple and the World*, 289

Psalms: Sabbath as Hope for Cosmic Rest

Psalms includes prayers, praises, and poetic wrestlings from Israel's rich yet rebellious history. There are several psalms that reflect upon the concept of Sabbath as hope for cosmic rest. Let's take an in-depth look at Psalm 92 and 95.

Psalm 92

*A psalm. A song. **For the Sabbath day.**
It is good to thank Yahweh
and to sing praise to your name, Most High,
to proclaim your steadfast love in the **morning**
and your faithfulness by **night**,
on the ten-stringed instrument and the standing lyre,
to the melody of the hand lyre.*

*For you have filled me with joy, Yahweh, by your work,
at the **works of your hands** I shout for joy.*

*How great are your works, Yahweh,
how very deep are your thoughts.*

*A man who is a beast does not know this,
and only a fool does not understand this.*

*Even though the wicked flourished like grass
and all evildoers blossomed,
it was only so that they might be rooted out forever.*

But you, on high, are forever, Yahweh.

*For see, Yahweh, your enemies,
for see, your enemies will perish,
all evildoers will be scattered.*

*But you have exalted my horn
like that of the wild ox,
you have poured over me green oil,
my eyes looked down upon my enemies,
my ears hear (with joy) about those who rose up
in wickedness against me.*

*The righteous will flourish like the palm tree,
grow like a cedar in Lebanon.*

*Those who are planted in the house of Yahweh,
they will greatly flourish in the courts of our God,
even in old age they will bear fruit,
they will be lush (fat) and green,
to proclaim: "Upright/Righteous is Yahweh,
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."*

The indication "for the Sabbath day" shows that the psalm was to be recited on the weekly Sabbath; however, this quickly acquired the eschatological nuance "in anticipation of the eternal Sabbath of the world." The commentary in m. Tamid 7.4: "A psalm, a song for the future that is coming, for the day that is altogether a Sabbath of rest for eternal life."

Hossfeld-Zenger, *Psalms* 2.

The poem opens (vv. 2-4) and closes (vv. 13-16) with imagery of worship in the temple. The reason for the praise is the wisdom lesson learned from the psalmist's experience and reflection (vv. 5-9), that evil humans are beasts who flourish for a short time and then wither like grass. This is God's handiwork (vv. 5-6) and a display of his heavenly rule (v. 9).

In contrast to the wicked, the psalmist is the royal recipient of God's favor and vindication (vv. 10-11).

The psalmist's vindication is a paradigm of all the righteous who will flourish in the Eden-temple and become trees of life bearing fruit and giving thanks to Yahweh.

This is an outstanding poetic expression of the symbolism of Sabbath hope. Weekly rest in the present is a celebration of the reign of Yahweh and anticipation of future rest in the new Eden.

Psalm 95

Come, let us rejoice in Yahweh,
let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come before his face with songs of thanksgiving,
and raise a loud shout to him with songs!

For Yahweh is a great God and a great King above all
gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the heights of the mountains are his also,
His is the sea, which he made,
and the dry land that his hands have formed.

Come, let us bow down and bend the knee,
let us kneel **before Yahweh**, our Creator.

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture
and the sheep of his hand,
If, today, you would listen to his voice!

Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as on the day of Massah in the desert,
where your ancestors **put me to the test**,
tried me, although they had seen my works.

Forty years I detested that generation,
and I said: They are a people wayward in heart,
and they do not know my ways.

Therefore I swore in my wrath:
They shall never **enter into my place of rest**.

The psalm begins with a summons to enter the temple courts and meet Yahweh in worship. This is a Sabbath motif. Entering the temple is like returning to Eden, the place where one meets the Creator.

To enter the temple in worship is to acknowledge that Yahweh is the creator of all things (vv. 3-5), and more specifically, the creator of Israel (vv. 6-7).

The covenantal relationship between God and Israel (v. 7) is dependent upon obedient listening. Disobedient non-listening will result in a fate similar to that of the wilderness generation, forfeiting the chance to enter into God's rest in the promised land.

Numbers 14:21-23

*But indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. Surely all the men who have seen my glory and my signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have **put me to the test** these ten times **and have not listened to my voice**, shall **by no means see the land** which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned me see it.*

This psalm is drawing significantly from Deuteronomy 5 and its connection between symbolic Sabbath rest and its full realization if Israel obeys (noted by Laansma, *I Will Give You Rest*, 90-91).

The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, all those of us alive here today.

But the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.

*So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may **live** (Heb. תחיון) and that he may give you rest (**Grk.** καταπαυση / **Heb.** תנוחה) and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong days in the land which you will possess.*

Deuteronomy 5:2-3, 14, 32-33

Exile and Restoration as Sabbath and Jubilee Cycles

After years of disobedience to the covenant, Israel's fate becomes clear: exile from the land.

Israel's prophets warn of impending destruction, but they leave with the hope of future restoration.

One prophet in particular, Jeremiah, predicts the exact amount of time Israel would be in exile.

This also has to do with the theme of seven! Let's take a look at these passages.

Jeremiah's 70 Years

*This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. "Then it will be when **seventy years** are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation," declares the LORD, "for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation."*

Jeremiah 25:11-12

*For thus says the LORD, "When **seventy years** have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill my good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you," declares the LORD, "and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile."*

Jeremiah 29:10-14

What is the significance of these 70 years? Some have thought that the number 70 came from a round number estimation of a human lifetime. There is some evidence for this in Psalm 90:10, which states, "all our days pass away under your wrath ... 70 years, or 80 if our strength endures." However, it seems improbable that the period of exile and bondage is the combination of the Sabbath number and the perfect number of the divine commands (7 x 10, cf. God's 10 acts of speech in seven days in Gen. 1). If the exile is a reversal of God's creation purposes for Israel (Jer. 4:22-26), then 70 is a perfect symbolic number.

As it played out, 70 years was true to what actually happened in the following decades. In the following quote, Jack R. Lundbom provides helpful dates for us to make that connection.

As far as Babylon's tenure as a world power is concerned, 70 years turned out to be a good approximation: From the fall of Nineveh (612 B.C.) to Babylon's capture by Cyrus (539 B.C.) was 73 years; from the Battle of Carchemesh (605 B.C.—Nebuchadnezzar's first year; cf. 25:1) to Babylon's capture by Cyrus (539 B.C.) was 66 years; and from the actual end of the Assyrian Empire (609/8 B.C.) to Babylon's capture by Cyrus and the return of the exiles (539 B.C.) was almost precisely 70 years.

Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 21b, Anchor Yale Bible, 249-250

Exile and Jubilee in 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 and Daniel 9

2 Chronicles 36:20-21 represents an interpretive connection between Jeremiah's promise of a 70-year exile and the representation of the exile in Leviticus 25-26 as a Sabbath rest. Let's review some passages in order to see the connection.

1. **Leviticus 25:** The land's Sabbath rest is one year every seven years. The Jubilee Sabbath rest is every seven times seven years.

*When you enter the land I am giving you, then the land shall have a Sabbath rest. Six years you shall sow your field ... but during the seventh year the land will have a Sabbath rest to the LORD ... You are also to **count off seven Sabbaths of years, seven times seven years**, and there will be for you the days of seven Sabbaths of years: **49 years**.*

Leviticus 25: 2-4, 8

2. Leviticus 26: The exile is to be a Sabbath rest for the land.

You, however, I will scatter among the nations ... as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. Then the land will enjoy its Sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths.

All the days of its desolation it will observe the Sabbath which it did not observe on your Sabbaths, while you were living on it ...

For the land will be abandoned by them, and will enjoy its Sabbaths while it is made desolate without them. They, meanwhile, will be making amends for their iniquity.

Leviticus 26:34-35, 43

3. Jeremiah 25 and 29: Exile is predicted to last 70 years.

*This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon **seventy years**. Then it will be when **seventy years** are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation.*

*For thus says the LORD, "**When seventy years have been completed** for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill my good word to you, to bring you back to this place."*

Jeremiah 29:10

Jeremiah 25:11-12

4. 2 Chronicles 36: Jeremiah's words are fulfilled. The 70-year exile made up for the 70 lost Sabbaths for the land, a total of 490 years.

*Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, **until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept Sabbath in order to fulfill the seventy years.***

2 Chronicles 36:20-21

5. Daniel 9: The land's Sabbath rest was 70 years. The ultimate Sabbath rest is 70 x 7 = 490 years.

*In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, **seventy years**. So I gave my attention to the LORD God to seek him by prayer and supplications ...*

While I was still speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel ... came to me ... and gave me instruction and spoke to me and said, "Daniel, I have come to give you insight with understanding ...

"Seventy sevens have been determined concerning your people and concerning your holy city, to finish the rebellion, and to seal up sins, and to atone for evil, and to bring eternal righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy ... Know this: from the issuing of the declaration to return and rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed prince, **seven sevens and sixty-two sevens ...**

Daniel 9:1-2, 21-22, 24-27

This passage maps onto the passages found in Jeremiah and Chronicles. Daniel would have been heartbroken because he was hoping that this would have been a proclamation of good news that Israel would return from exile. Instead, the message is that Israel has a long way to go in its exile. Notice, the prophetic clock starts ticking “at the issuing of the decree to return and rebuild Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:25). This is a reference to the edict of Cyrus, which immediately follows!

There are many ways to read and interpret the 490 years (70 sevens) in Daniel 9. For further reading on this topic, we recommend a study from scholar Roger Beckwith, who has done an enormous study on the various interpretations of Daniel 9 in his paper, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation.”

The Jubilee in Ezekiel

Ezekiel is another of Israel’s prophets at the time of exile in Babylon. Ezekiel sees a vision of the new Jerusalem and temple in Ezekiel 40-48. This passage begins with a curious time indicator.

In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and he brought me there. In the visions of God he brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south there was a structure like a city.

Ezekiel 40:1-2

Why the 25th year? The 25th year is precisely half of a Jubilee cycle, and the beginning of the year and tenth of the month are both clear references to the Day of Atonement. The Israelite calendar was structured in two halves, so that the first and seventh months were both marked as beginnings of a year. Scholar John Bergsma reflects upon the significance of Ezekiel’s vision.

What is the significance of this date for understanding the rest of the vision (chs. 40-48)? The deportees, in a sense “half-way” through the exile, would be feeling the discouragement associated with “midtime,” and in need of a word of hope from the Lord. Ezekiel provides that in his vision. On the Day of Atonement—on which the old temple would have been cleansed and the Lord would have renewed his presence therein—Ezekiel foresees a new, cleansed temple to which the Lord’s presence returns ... With respect to the jubilee, several scholars have noted that the numbers used in the dimensions of the visionary temple are consistently multiples of 25 (half a jubilee) and 50 (a jubilee) ... In a sense, the restored temple is a “built jubilee”: that is, built on jubilee dimensions ... In fact, the entire vision of Israel restored in chs. 40-48 can be described as Israel finally appropriating the wholeness that should have been actualized on every Day of Atonement of a jubilee year.

John Bergsma, *The Jubilee From Leviticus to Qumran*, 189-190

The Jubilee in Isaiah

Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Isaiah is another one of Israel's prophets called by God to deliver his messages to Israel. Isaiah repeatedly presents a hope for the restoration of the edenic ideal of rest. For example, in Isaiah 11:1-10, the new creation is depicted as a new Eden and the resting place of God and his people. In Isaiah 25:10, the author nods back to the creation event stating that God's hand will rest in the new Eden mountain. Later, Isaiah begins to hint that this hope we are waiting for may be a person (or persons). Let's take a look at this famous passage.

*The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim **liberty/release** to captives
And freedom to prisoners;
To proclaim **the year of the favor** of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
To grant those who mourn in Zion,
Giving them a garland instead of ashes,
The oil of gladness instead of mourning,
The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting.
So they will be called oaks of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.*

Isaiah 61:1-3

As you read this passage, several questions may come to mind. Who is the "me" that is speaking? Is Isaiah referring to himself? Also, what are the different components of the mission of this anointed one? Let's explore these questions!

Who is the "Me" Speaking?

To answer this question, we'll need to look at the passages surrounding Isaiah 61. Isaiah 49-55 introduces a prophetic servant who appropriates the role of Israel's davidic king. The Spirit-endowment of the "me" in Isaiah 61:1 adopts the royal and prophetic role of the servant and his community (Isa. 11:1-3; 42:1; 48:16b; 44:2-3). Good news for the poor makes this figure one of the heralds of restoration to Zion (Isa. 40:9; 41:27; 52:7). The herald of good news to the exiles about the return to Zion has become a herald of good news to Zion about its restoration.

What is the Mission of This Anointed One?

There are several things the anointed one is called to do. Let's look at what each component really means.

61:1a: "to announce good news for the poor/afflicted" (עֲנִיִּים)

These afflicted ones were mentioned in Isaiah 49:13, "Yahweh will comfort his people and show compassion on his afflicted ones (עֲנִיִּים)" and Isaiah 41:17, "The afflicted ones look for water ... I Yahweh will answer them." Isaiah 48:10 states, "I chose you in the furnace of affliction (עֲנִי)." Affliction here refers to the community that has suffered in the exile to Babylon and has returned to harsh conditions (Isa. 58).

61:1b: "to bind up the brokenhearted" (נִשְׁבְּרֵי לֵב)

This term is rare in the Hebrew Bible. It appears elsewhere only in Psalms 34:19, 51:19, and 147:3, "who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Each of these instances refers to exile.

61:1c-2a: “to proclaim (קרא) release (דרור) for the captives (שבויים), and opening up for the prisoners”

This is Jubilee tradition language from Leviticus 25:10, “You shall proclaim (קרא) release (דרור) in the land for all its inhabitants (ישיביה).” The tradition says that if a tribal land inheritance is sold, it is restored to the tribe in the Jubilee. Or if a poor person goes into debt slavery, he is to be freed on the Jubilee year. In Isaiah, slavery/imprisonment was the main image of oppression and exile in chapters 1-39 and 40-55. So in Isaiah 61:7, we hear the promise, “Instead of shame, I will give a double portion, and instead of reproach, they will rejoice in their inheritance, for in their land they will inherit a double portion.” Israel’s exile from the land was viewed as a form of debt-slavery from which they needed a Jubilee redemption. The anointed one would proclaim that release.

After the exile, if not already long before, the social and economic conditions of ancient agrarian tribal Israel, for which the jubilee was appropriate, were hopelessly destroyed, and a re-implementation of the jubilee legislation was unworkable even had it been desired. Nonetheless, scriptural authors after the exile remained convinced that the sacral laws retained relevance ... and based on this conviction they began to treat the jubilee law as prophecy by means of symbolic, or typological interpretation. In their view, the jubilee texts referred not only to poor Israelites who fell into debt-slavery. Rather, the individual whose plight was addressed in Leviticus 25:25-55 became a corporate symbol of the people of Israel as a whole, who had fallen into debt with the Lord by failing to observe the Torah, and so had become enslaved to various foreign powers and alienated from their ancestral land.

John Bergsma, *The Jubilee From Leviticus to Qumran*, 298-299

61:2: “to proclaim the year of Yahweh’s favor (רצון) and the day of vengeance”

A reference to Yahweh’s favor also occurs in Isaiah 49:8, “In the time of favor (רצון) I answered you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” Isaiah 61 is combining the two roles of the redeemer in the Torah: one who redeems slaves and enslaved land (Lev. 25, 27) and one who avenges enemies for innocent bloodshed (Num. 35, Deut. 19). These scholarly quotes help us understand the concepts in this passage.

Behind this theological imagery is the typological association of the Babylonian exile with the Egyptian captivity. Just as Yahweh brought the people out of Egypt by bringing plagues upon the Egyptians, so he will also liberate his people from Babylon through vengeance. In Isaiah 40-55 this exodus imagery has been combined with the depiction of debt-slavery to bring about the picture of Yahweh as Israel’s “redeemer,” that is, the one who both restores and avenges ...

... Just as Isaiah 40-55 understood the Babylonian exile as an image of the Egyptian captivity, so in Isaiah 56-66 the oppressive situation in Jerusalem after the exile becomes another symbol alongside these. One gets the impression that the author does not see the situation back in post-exilic Palestine as appreciably better than the situation in Babylon, or in ancient Egypt. In all cases, Israel remains “shackled” because of sin and awaits deliverance by Yahweh. Also, the prescriptions for the jubilee year have been eschatologized. By employing a typological relationship between the enslaved Israelite of Leviticus 25 and the entire post-exilic community, Isaiah 56-66 has moved the concept of the Jubilee from a legal prescription to an image of eschatological deliverance, and this is the same kind of hermeneutical move we find in other Second Temple texts ...

... Isaiah 61:1-3 represents one of the earliest attestations of the phenomenon of understanding the exile as an ongoing state, that is, understanding the exile theologically rather than just historically.

B. C. Gregory, *The Post-Exilic Exile in Third Isaiah*, 487-488

Jesus' Jubilee Announcement in Luke 4

At the end of the Old Testament story, we are left waiting for this anointed one to rescue Israel. When Jesus comes on the scene, he makes it abundantly clear he is the long-awaited Messiah. Take a look at Jesus' epic announcement at the start of the book of Luke.

*And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through all the surrounding district. And he began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and as was his custom, he entered the synagogue **on the Sabbath**, and stood up to read.*

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. And he opened the book and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,

Because he anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor.

*He has sent me to proclaim **release** to the captives,*

And recovery of sight to the blind,

*To **set free** those who are oppressed,*

*To proclaim **the year of the LORD'S favor.**"*

And he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4:14-21

Sound familiar? Jesus is the anointed one from Isaiah 61. Let's compare the subtle differences between Isaiah's original words and Jesus' reading of them.

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
Because he has anointed me
To bring good news to the poor;
He has sent me **to bind up the brokenhearted**,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And recovery of sight for the blind

To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God."*

Isaiah 61:1-2

*"The Spirit of the LORD is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me
to proclaim **release** for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor."*

Luke 4:18-19

Key Definitions

There are two words in this passage that bring clarity to Jesus' mission. Let's look at these key definitions.

Freedom (Grk. *aphesis* "release," Heb. *deror* "Jubilee liberation," see Isa. 61:1 and Lev. 25:10): This is the common word for "forgiveness" in Luke (1:77 or 3:3), but the word's meaning is broader: release from burden or bondage. The word in Isaiah 61 is rooted in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25) and is about release from the social consequences of a society's collective sin: freedom from debt, slavery, poverty, and oppression.

The poor (Grk. *ptokhos*, Heb. *aniy*): refers to more than economic status. It's about a person's wider social location in terms of family heritage, land ownership, vocation, gender, ethnicity, education, and religious purity. In Jewish literature, it refers to anyone of low status, or who lives outside the socially accepted boundary lines.

Jesus' mission is directed to the poor ... in the holistic sense of those who are for any number of reasons relegated to positions outside the boundaries of God's people. Jesus refuses to recognize those socially determined boundaries, asserting instead that these "outsiders" now can belong to God's family.

Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 211

What Was the Meaning of Jesus' Claim?

Scholar Christopher Bruno summarizes this point well when he states,

Jesus' claim to "fulfill" Isaiah 61 must be seen as a claim to inaugurate the climactic Jubilee of God's people, the time when their freedom from captivity and oppression would be permanent. The main feature of Jesus' fulfillment of the Jubilee in Luke 4 is the proclamation of *αφεσις*, which in Luke-Acts refers ... to forgiven sin and ... to release from physical/economic oppression. This pattern is also evident in the church's pattern of sharing physical goods in Acts (see Acts 2:44-45; 4:32), which is ... preceded by Peter's admonition to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (*αφεσιν των αμαρτιων*; Acts 2:38).

Christopher Bruno, "*Jesus is Our Jubilee... But How?*" *The Old Testament Background and Lukan Fulfillment of the Ethics of Jubilee* 88

The Starting Point of Jesus' Ministry

The Nazareth announcement in Luke 4 sets the agenda for Jesus' healing and teaching ministry. The story continues in Luke 5-9, where he reaches out to everyone he said he would.

- A leper (5:12-16).
- A paralyzed man (5:17-27). Note the use of *aphesis* to mean **forgiveness** of sin and **release** from sickness with multiple nuances in this story.
- A man with a deformed hand **on the Sabbath** (6:6-11). Jesus "saves life" on the Sabbath.
- The reviving of the Roman centurion's servant (7:1-10).
- The grieving widow and mother in Nain (7:11-16). "God has come to visit his people."
- The blind, leprosy, lame, deaf, and poor are healed (7:22).
- A repentant prostitute (7:36-49). Note the repetition of *aphesis*, **forgiveness**, and **release** in the parable.
- Exorcisms for the demon-tormented (11:14-23).
- The hunch-backed woman (13:10-17). Note the explicit mention of **slavery**, **release**, and **freedom** vocabulary in Jesus' view of her illness.

Sabbath Controversies in Matthew 11-12

The Gospel of Matthew connects Jesus as the one ushering in Sabbath rest. However, Jesus' understanding of Sabbath is a cause for controversy with Israel's leaders.

This section of Matthew begins with Jesus' famous words on rest.

*At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal him. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and **I will give you rest.** Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **you will find rest for your souls.** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Matthew 11:25-30

Samuele Bacchiocchi notices several profound claims in Jesus' words here ("Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus' Rest and the Sabbath," 300-303).

- **Jesus is demonstrating his messiahship.** Matthew's placing the saying about the rest offered by Jesus right after Jesus' messianic disclosure was presumably intended to substantiate the latter through the former. In other words, through the structural arrangement of the narrative, Matthew seems to be saying that Jesus not only revealed (vv. 25-26) and proclaimed (v. 27) his messiahship, but also demonstrated it by offering the messianic rest typified by the Sabbath.
- **Devotion to the law should set you free.** The metaphor of the yoke was commonly used to express subordination and loyalty to God, especially through obedience to his law. Thus Jeremiah speaks of the leaders of the people who knew "the law of their God, but they all alike had broken the yoke, they had burst the bonds" (5:5; cf. 2:20). In the following chapter, the same prophet says to the people: "Find rest for your souls" by learning anew obedience to God's law (6:6; cf. Num. 25:3). Rabbis often spoke of "the yoke of the Torah," "the yoke of the kingdom of heaven," "the yoke of the commandments," "the yoke of God." Rabbi Nehunya b. Kanah (ca. 70) is reported to have said, "He that takes upon himself the yoke of the Law, from him shall be taken away the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care" (Pirke Aboth 3:5). What this means is that devotion to the law and its interpretation is supposed to free a person from the troubles and cares of this world.
- **Following the law means following a person.** Matthew sets forth the "yoke" of Jesus, not as commitment to a new Torah, but as dedication to a person who is the true interpreter and fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets. The emphasis on the person is self-evident in the saying of Jesus, "Come to me ... take my yoke ... learn from me ... I will give you rest." Moreover, the parallel structure of verses 28 and 29 indicates that taking the yoke of Jesus is equivalent to coming to and learning from him. That is to say, it is to personally accept Jesus as Messiah. Such an acceptance is an "easy" and "light" yoke, not because Jesus weakens the demands of the law (cf. Matt 5:20) but because, as T. W. Manson puts it, "Jesus claims to do for men what the Law claimed to do; but in a different way." The difference lies in Christ's claim to offer to his disciples the rest of messianic redemption to which the law, and more specifically, the Sabbath, had always pointed.

Following this teaching, Matthew inserts two stories of Sabbath controversies between Jesus and Israel's religious leaders.

*At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on **the Sabbath**, and his disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look, your disciples do what is not lawful to do **on a Sabbath**." But he said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that **on the Sabbath** the priests in the temple break the **Sabbath** and are innocent? But I say to you that one greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of **Man is Lord of the Sabbath**."*

*Departing from there, he went into their synagogue. And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the **Sabbath**?"—so that they might accuse him. And he said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it **is lawful to do good on the Sabbath**." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other.*

Matthew 12:1-13

Notice that Jesus is not doing away with the concept of Sabbath. The controversy centers not on whether the Sabbath should be observed (there is no suggestion that Jesus questioned that) but on what that observance entailed in practical terms. Theologian R.T. France sheds light on the popular interpretation on how to practically observe the Sabbath:

Fundamental to the rabbinic discussion was the agreed list (m.Šabb. 7:2) of 39 categories of activity which were to be classified as "work" for this purpose, some of which are very specific ("writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters") others so broad as to need considerable further specification ("building, pulling down"), while the last ("taking anything from one 'domain' [normally a private courtyard] to another") is so open-ended as to cover a vast range of daily activities. The 39 categories of work do not explicitly include traveling, but this too was regarded as "work," a "Sabbath day's journey" being limited to 2,000 cubits, a little over half a mile. These two rules together made Sabbath life potentially so inconvenient that the Pharisees developed an elaborate system of "boundary-extensions" ('erubin) to allow more freedom of movement without violating the basic rules. The 'erub system illustrates an essential element of all this scribal development of Sabbath law: its aim was not simply to make life difficult (though it must often have seemed like that), but to work out a way in which people could cope with the practicalities of life within the limits of their very rigorous understanding of "work." The elaboration of details is intended to leave nothing to chance, so that no one can inadvertently come anywhere near violating the law itself. Some rabbis spoke about this as "putting up a fence around the law."

R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 455-456

That's a lot of specifics! If you've been paying attention to the story so far, it's probably clear that Israel's religious leaders missed the point of the Sabbath. Jesus showed that the Sabbath was supposed to be about mercy, not legalism. It was supposed to point to him, the one promised through all of Israel's prophets, the one who would restore the rhythm of creation.

The Organization of John's Gospel

John picks up the pattern of seven in his Gospel account. He has designed the first and last movements of his account to fall into two matching weeks of seven days each. These are the only clusters of chronological notices in the entire book. See the chart below, adapted from Richard Bauckham, "Dimensions of Meaning in the Gospel of John's First Week," 134-35.

	The first week of Jesus' first sign	The last week of Jesus' seventh and final sign
Day 1	1:19-28 <i>"In Bethany beyond the Jordan"</i> (1:28) John's testimony to leaders from Jerusalem Jesus anointed by the Spirit (1:32-33). See day seven of the last week in 20:21-22.	12:1-11 <i>"Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany"</i> (12:1) Jesus anointed by Mary at Bethany
Day 2	1:29-34 <i>"the next day"</i> (1:29) John's testimony about Jesus	12:12-36 <i>"the next day"</i> (12:12) Jesus rides into Jerusalem as Israel's king
Day 3	1:35-39 <i>"the next day"</i> (1:35) Andrew and anonymous disciple follow Jesus <i>"They stayed with him that day. It was about the 10th hour"</i> (1:39)	12:36 <i>"Jesus was hiding from them"</i>
Day 4	1:40-42 Andrew brings Simon to meet Jesus	12:36 <i>"Jesus was hiding from them"</i>
Day 5	1:43-51 <i>"the next day"</i> (1:43) Jesus meets Nathanael and leaves for Galilee	13:1-19:42 <i>"it was the day of preparation (for Passover, 19:31, 42)"</i> Jesus final words and footwashing Jesus' arrest and two trials Crucifixion and burial
	1:49 <i>"you are the king of Israel"</i>	19:19 Jesus titled "king of the Jews"
	1:29-36 John the Baptist's witness <i>"the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"</i> (1:29, 36) <i>"I have seen and bear witness, this is the Son of God"</i> (1:34)	19:34-35 The Beloved disciple's witness <i>"and the soldier pierced his side and there flowed water and blood, and the one who saw has borne witness, and his witness is true, and he knows his testimony is true"</i> (19:34-35)
	1:51 Jesus' first Son of Man saying <i>"angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man"</i> (1:51) <i>"Son of Man lifted up"</i>	13:31 Jesus' final Son of Man saying <i>"now is the Son of Man glorified"</i> (13:31) Jesus is lifted up onto the cross
Day 6	2:1 Traveling to Cana	13:1; 19:31, 42 Passover/Sabbath

Day 7	2:1-11 "on the third day" (2:1 in relation to 1:43) Jesus' first sign-act at the wedding in Cana	20:1-23 "On the first day of the week" (20:1, the "third day" after Jesus' death) Jesus seventh sign-act of resurrection
	2:4 "my hour has not yet come"	17:1 "the hour has come"
	2:11 Jesus provides super-abundant wine from the water	11:24-25, 20:21-22 Jesus provides eternal life (11:24-25) Jesus pours out the Spirit on the disciples (20:21-22) See Day 1, 1:32-33.

The pattern of seven also informs the middle of John's Gospel account, chapters 2-12. It contains two large blocks of stories. Jesus encounters four classic Jewish institutions (2-4) and then four Jewish feasts (5-10), showing how he is the fulfillment or true reality to which all these point. John includes seven signs in total, clearly following his aim to prove the significance of Jesus. Take a look at the chart.

The Seven Signs in John

Seven Signs	Called a "sign" (Grk. σημεῖον)	Details that emphasize the sign's meaning
2:1-11 Water turned into wine	2:11 "the beginning of his signs "	Water held in six purification jars holding 20-30 gallons each (2:6), an overabundant amount and for ritual purification
4:46-54 Healing of the official's son	4:54 "the second sign "	Son recovered at the point of death (4:47) at the very "hour" Jesus spoke (4:52-53)
5:2-9 Healing the crippled man on the Sabbath	6:2 "the signs he was performing on the sick"	Paralyzed for 38 years (see Deut. 2:14 for the only other "38" in the Bible); The Father and Jesus are doing work on the Sabbath (5:17)
6:1-15 Feeding the 5,000	6:14 "the people saw the sign he had done"	I am the bread of life (6:35) I am the bread that comes down from heaven (6:41)
9:1-2 Healing the blind man on the Sabbath	9:16 "How could this man do such signs ?"	I am the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) I have come so that those who do not see might see (9:39)
11:1-45 Raising Lazarus from the dead	12:18 "the people heard that Jesus did this sign "	I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
19:1-46 The death of Jesus	2:18-19 "The Jews said, 'What sign will you do to show your authority ...?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy	
20:1-31 The resurrection of Jesus	this temple and in three days I will raise it up."	

There are other miraculous events not called signs, such as Jesus walking on water (6:1-15) and the large catch of fish (21:4-11). The design of the book of John accomplishes the aim stated at the end of the book.

*Therefore **many other signs** Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.*

John 20:30-31

Paul's Thoughts on Sabbath

If we needed to summarize Jesus' message in one sentence, we could say, "The Kingdom of God is here." The arrival of the Kingdom of God through Christ also meant the arrival of the ultimate seventh-day rest. But it doesn't appear that Paul was going around enforcing the Sabbath—one of the most tangible ways at the time to celebrate this reality. Why not?

We need to remember, most of Paul's letters are responses to problems and issues within churches. Many early Christians did not come from a Jewish background, in which case Paul was not strict about the observance of the Sabbath. However, some Christians from Jewish backgrounds were trying to make the former markers of the Jewish faith—Sabbath, circumcision, and kosher food laws—a barrier of entry to follow Jesus. Paul consistently rebukes these people.

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Colossians 2:16-17

Paul did not argue against the importance of the laws of Torah. However, he stressed that they culminate in Jesus. If observing the Sabbath on a specific day of the week enabled you to honor Jesus, Paul would say go for it! Rituals do shape us; however, they lose their point when they no longer connect us to the person of Jesus.

It would also seem the forms and practices to which we follow Jesus may shift depending on generation and culture (see Peter's vision, removal of kosher food laws in Acts 10). The attempt to trap how you celebrate the practice of new creation into one cultural form will not work. There can be many ways cultures, families, and individual can make rituals to shape their relationship with Christ and one another. The challenging question then becomes: at what point are we making what the Spirit has led our community to do the bar for all other communities? Paul would warn us against this type of thinking.

Entering into Sabbath Rest in Hebrews 3-4

Perhaps one of the most famous passages on rest in the New Testament occurs in the book of Hebrews. The author remains anonymous; however, it is clear that it is a pastor writing to a congregation of Greek-speaking Jews. He is trying to compel them not to abandon their faith in Jesus in light of persecution. His letter is one huge rhetorical hammer that elevates Jesus above all things a Jewish person would care about—spiritual beings, Moses, Joshua, the priesthood, and the tabernacle.

In chapter 3-4, the author focuses in on rest. Let's take a look.

Now Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over his house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

*“Today if you hear his voice,
Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me,
As in the day of trial in the wilderness,
Where your fathers tried me by testing me,
And saw my works for forty years.
“Therefore I was angry with this generation,
And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,
And they did not know my ways’;
As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter **my rest.**’”*

Hebrews 3:5-11

The author is referring to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness as they traveled to enter the promised land. The land itself serves as an image of hope for the restored seventh-day rest. These stories are documented in the book of Numbers (where there are seven stories of rebellion). However, the author does not include pieces of those narratives. Rather, he uses Psalm 95 compiled in light of the exile. Why?

It would appear the author selected Psalm 95 because it activates the two stories of rebellion when entering the promised land. First, Israel's rebellion in the wilderness after the exodus and Israel's rebellion once in the land which led to exile. These past narratives are an image to the future hope that Jesus has ushered into the present. The author goes on to make his point in the following verses.

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said,

"Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me."

For who provoked him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering his rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as he has said, "As I swore in my anger, They shall not enter my rest," although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works"; and again in this passage, "They shall not enter my rest."

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, he again fixes a certain day, "today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered his rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from his.

Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall through following the same example of disobedience.

Hebrews 3:5-4:11

The author affirms the present challenge to enter into rest as well as a future hope for ultimate rest. He makes it abundantly clear that it's not about going back to the land or settling in some physical location. Rest comes to those who have trust in Jesus. It's a present and future reality to which he affirms near the end of his exhortation.

*But you **have come to Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Hebrews 12:22-24

He believes in this present age, we have come in contact with new creation—seventh-day rest—which is here called Mount Zion.

Summary

We've covered a lot of material! Let's circle back on some core principles to sum it all up.

In the diverse history of Sabbath practice, it has always been about one thing: inconveniencing ourselves one day a week to remind us that our time is not our own. Observance of the Sabbath should reflect the core ideal that the ultimate reign and rule of God has already been launched. If God is at work renewing creation, what does that mean for us to participate with our entire lives? Marking out weekly rhythms—whatever those may be—reminds us of the story we are a part of. Sabbath is about creating a space for community and hope.

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