



Holistic
Healthy Rhythms of Rest: Matt. 12:1-8
Pastor Jerome Gay Jr.

Announcements

- **The Women's Ministry Launch Meet & Greet** was last week and I heard that the meeting was fantastic, I'm excited about this new ministry.
- D-1 begins January 30th.
- **The Color of Christianity** has been moved to February 27th at 6:30pm, please register today.
- Youth will have a Super bowl party and on Super bowl Sunday.

Parallel Passages

- Mark 2:23-28
 - Luke 6:1-11
1. For you to **understand** the necessity of emotional health and its connection to growth in Christ.
 2. For you to **grow** in self-awareness.
 3. For you to **embrace** your limitations.
 4. For you to **establish** healthy rhythms of rest.

Emotionally Unhealthy person is someone who operates in a continuous state of emotional and spiritual deficit,

lacking emotional maturity and a "being with God" sufficient to sustain their "doing for God."

If you recall, we started this series with a question, **how are you stewarding your soul?** We're taught to steward a lot of things, but rarely are we taught to pay attention to our mental and emotional health. **One of the biggest culprits of this constant state of doing and doing even to a point of depression is a lack of rest, which for believers is the breaking of a command given by God.** Why do we treat **Exodus 20:8** as a suggestion? Why do we ignore the reality that God chose to rest (Gen. 2:3)? Make no mistake about it, **God didn't need it rest**, in fact AW Tozer captures the power of God in his book, *Knowledge of the Holy* and in chapter six he says this:

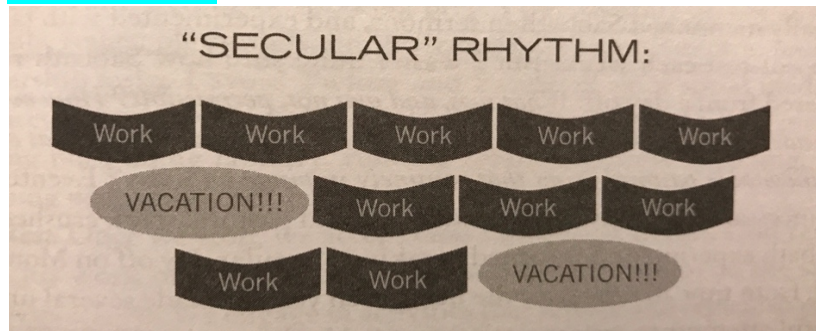
To admit the existence of a need in God is to admit incompleteness in the divine Being. **Need is a creature-word** and cannot be spoken of the Creator. – **A.W. Tozer**

When we refuse to admit our need and enjoy the gift of rest, in essence we're saying that we're gods or at the very least we're playing God.

God commands rest because we're not wired to always be 'on', you and I need rest and **rest is a gift from God**. So why do we keep working well past our limits as leaders? One word; death (pg. 144). **We've connected our value and identity to what we do so much that subconsciously we think we'll die if we're not working ourselves to death.** Ironical right?! The reality is that when we slow down we're faced with ourselves and we have to confront our dark side

(shadow), rather than doing this, we stay busy and this leads to unhealthy living.

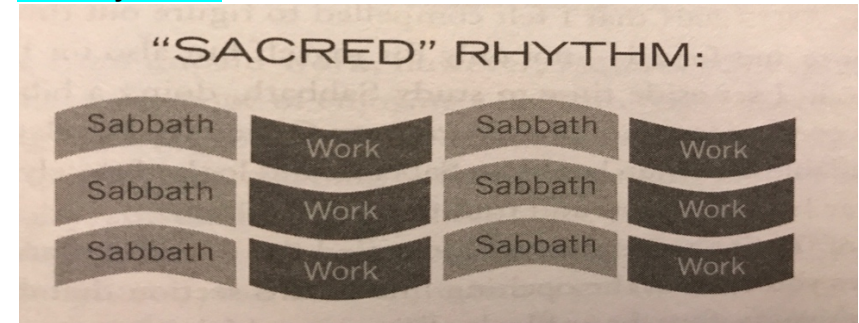
Cultural Ethos



Ask yourself these diagnostic questions:

- Do I get more excited about my work than about my family or anything else?
- Do I take my work to bed? On vacation?
- Is work the activity I like to do best and talk about most?
- Has my family given up on expecting me to be home on time?
- Do I take on extra work, because I'm concerned that otherwise it won't get done?
- Do I underestimate how long a project will take and then rush to complete it?
- **Do I get impatient with people who have other priorities besides work?**
- Has working long hours hurt my family and other relationships?

Healthy Ethos



Thought Tattoo

The Sabbath is a **gift** and a **necessity**.

To help us understand this I want us to look at how Jesus engages the legalism and consequential workaholism of the Pharisees:

Matt. 12:1-2

At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. ² When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

What's interesting about Matthew is not just how Jesus engages the Pharisees, but what precedes this occurrence. In **Matthew 11:28-30**, Jesus talks about the **rest** He provides, this rest isn't to be confused with The Sabbath, but it's important because Jesus makes it clear that **he desires rest for our souls** (Matt. 11:29) remember what we said in week 1, **success doesn't satisfy, but a satisfied soul is success.** The word used for rest **ἀνάπαυσις** means

to cease and it carries the idea of relief. Relief from what? He's not indicating that one shouldn't work, but the rest he provides is a **soul level satisfying rest that comes from being His child and placing faith in Him**, which is why He beckons people to come to him. Jesus wants to address this notion that we can work ourselves into God's favor and that our works define us by showing us that he provides the rest we need, which perfectly sets up **Matthew 12**. I want to summarize verses one and two, the disciples were hungry and the Pharisees were more concerned about the day of the week. This is **legalism on steroids**, but while their response was insensitive, this is not to imply that the Sabbath doesn't matter. The focus isn't the day of the week, but the necessity of rest and the admittance of our limitations.

What is the Sabbath?

We must go to the creation narrative to understand The Sabbath. In Genesis 2:2, 3. God "ceased" his work in creation after six days and then "blessed" the seventh day and "declared it holy." **God reiterates the necessity of rest in the fourth commandment (Ex 20:8-11)** God's "blessing" and "setting aside" of the seventh day after creation (the words used are the same as those in Gen.) form the basis of his demand that man should observe the seventh day as "a day of Sabbath rest before the Lord your God." Through Christ the day is not the focus, but rather the act of worship taking a Sabbath points to. The Sabbath involves four important elements:

1. **Stop** – Sabbath is first and foremost a day when we **cease** all work, paid and unpaid **(don't confuse**

Sabbath with laziness, the Sabbath assumes that you're active Heb. 4:1-11) The point is to embrace our limits and the gift of rest given to us by The Father. If you're in ministry it could include staying away from emails, phone calls, sermon prep, writing that involves work, leadership tasks, etc.

2. **Rest** – after we stop, we enable ourselves to accept God's invitation to rest. Again, God rested from work (Gen. 2:1-4). We engage in activities to restore and replenish our souls like napping, reading, eating healthy, sports, etc. The point is to rest from paid and unpaid work.
3. **Delight** – **After finishing his work in creation, God pronounced it "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Don't miss this, God didn't immediately go to another task, he enjoyed his work and as image bearers we should do the same thing.** We need to enjoy the gifts we see in creation and enjoy life. It's not selfish to enjoy life and the gifts God has given you to enjoy.
4. **Reflection** – contemplating the love of God should be the central focus of a Sabbath. Creation declares his glory (Psalm 19:1) and we're the pinnacle of His creation, so we should declare His glory in all forms, including rest. During your time of reflection, refocus your attention on the larger significance of Sabbath – the opportunity to experience a foretaste of eternity. In a real sense, **the practice of Sabbath joins heaven and earth, equipping us not merely to rest from our work but also to work from our rest.**

Matt. 12:3-5

³ He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry: ⁴ how he

entered the house of God, and they ate **the bread of the Presence** — which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests?⁵ Or haven't you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent?

This is crazy, because Jesus brilliantly pulls from the Old Testament to address the Pharisees, **what's interesting are the parallels David and his men were hungry, Jesus' disciples were hungry**, both appear to violate a law without penalty. Jesus quoted from 1 Samuel 21:

1 Sam. 21:1-6

David went to the priest Ahimelech at Nob. Ahimelech was afraid to meet David, so he said to him, "Why are you alone and no one is with you?"² David answered the priest Ahimelech, "The king gave me a mission, but he told me, 'Don't let anyone know anything about the mission I'm sending you on or what I have ordered you to do.' I have stationed my young men at a certain place."³ Now what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread or whatever can be found."⁴ The priest told him, "There is no ordinary bread on hand. However, there is consecrated bread, but the young men may eat it only if they have kept themselves from women."⁵ David answered him, "I swear that women are being kept from us, as always when I go out to battle. The young men's bodies are consecrated even on an ordinary mission, so of course their bodies are consecrated today."⁶ So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, for there was no bread there except the **Bread of the Presence** that had been removed from the presence of the Lord. When the bread was removed, it had been replaced with warm bread.

His point was that **people matter more than policy**, which is why Jesus used David as an example. The Pharisees made placed man-made laws on par with God's word, which is always dangerous. This led to them having 24 chapters of Sabbath Laws in their **Talmud**, which is the major compilation of **Jewish tradition** (you can't travel more than 3000 feet from your house, you can't pick up anything heavier than a dried fig, throwing something in the air with one hand and catching it with the other was forbidden, etc.). **Legalism always turns God's blessings into burdens.** Their legalism caused them to miss a few things:

1. Reaping was forbidden, not eating (Exo. 34:21).
2. The disciples didn't violate God's law, based on **Deut. 23:25**, they were perfectly within their rights to satisfy their hunger.
3. The tradition wrongly interpreted rubbing grain together as threshing which it was not.
4. Breaking human tradition isn't sinful, breaking God's law is.

Why bring up David?

David was admired by some more than the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament and they (Pharisees) would be familiar with the Old Testament. **David was fleeing for his life from Saul and went south of Gibeah**, which is what the 1 Samuel verse addresses. They were starving and ended up eating the Bread of the Presence, which should only be eaten by the priest. **Jesus who is the perfect prophet** (Samuel), **priest** (Ahimelech) and **king** (Saul→David), but there's something else we should not miss, while Samuel was the first of the prophets (1 Sam. 3:20, Acts 3:24 and Acts 13:20), **he was the last of the**

judges (1 Sam. 7:6, 15-17). God himself did not punish Ahimelech the priest or David for eating the Bread of the Presence because he is a God of mercy. Jesus is exposing their hypocrisy, arrogance and idolatry by essentially saying God can violate his own law, yet you don't even follow your own laws because the priest had to do double work on the Sabbath (Num. 28:9-10 and Lev. 24:8-9), yet you guys are silent about that, God has always been a God of mercy. (They crossed the Red Sea before the Ten Commandments were given).

This reveals a distinction in what many call ceremonial laws versus moral laws. Ceremonial laws (just the fourth commandment) need to be adhered to, but have nuance, but **moral laws** (the other nine commandments) have no wiggle room. This is why **God never says, you can believe another god** (violating the first commandment) if you like him or her more, or you can sleep with someone other than your spouse if you have strong feelings for them. Jesus is not eradicating the law, he's pointing to the heart of it, which is the show God's holiness and to provide rest for His children when it comes to the Sabbath.

Matt. 12:6-8

⁶ I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.
⁷ If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Here's what we need to remember about The Sabbath. **The Sabbath is a lifestyle not a day.**

- **Workaholism reduces your ability to show compassion** (vs. 2) – notice that they're upset that the disciples are hungry. Are you mad at people who don't overwork themselves like you? Do you label people with a work/rest balance as weak?
- **The Sabbath is a lifestyle of trust** (vs. 6) – trusting God with your **value** and trusting God with **time**. You're a human being, not a human doing.
- **Workaholism blinds you from seeing and receiving God's gifts** (vs. 6) – the Pharisees think they're serving God, but don't even realize that **they're talking to Him**. They would've been infuriated to hear Jesus say that something greater than the Temple is here, because **the only thing greater than the Temple in their eyes was God**. This is another reason that he brought up David because he had more authority than David and Ahimelech, this was a declaration of His deity, **in the same way God could pardon David, Christ could encourage his disciples to eat without fear of judgment.**
- **The Sabbath reminds you of your need for daily mercy** – does your need for mercy cause you to feel threatened or grateful?

Now What?

1. **Remind** yourself that you're a human being, not a human doing.
2. **Recognize** God's provision in practical ways.
3. **Rest** in Him: disconnect to connect **(power cords)**.
4. **Remember** His love for you isn't contingent upon your work.

(Ahimelech, Saul, David and Samuel – first of the prophets (1 Sam. 3:20, Acts 3:24 and Acts 13:20) and last of the judges (1 Sam. 7:6, 15-17). Jesus is the perfect prophet, priest, king and judge).

Extra's

The creation note is first sounded in Genesis 2:2, 3. God “ceased” his work in creation after six days and then “blessed” the seventh day and “declared it holy.”

In the fourth commandment (Ex 20:8–11) God’s “blessing” and “setting aside” of the seventh day after creation (the words used are the same as those in Gen.) form the basis of his demand that man should observe the seventh day as “a day of Sabbath rest before the Lord your God.”

The idea of God resting from his work is a startling one. It comes across even more vividly in Exodus 31:17, where the Lord tells Moses how he “was refreshed” by his day of rest. This picture of the Creator as a manual laborer is one the Bible often paints. No doubt it is presented in vividly human terms in Exodus to reinforce the fundamental Sabbath lesson that man must follow the pattern his Creator has set for him. One day’s rest in seven is a built-in “creation necessity” for individuals, families, households—and even animals (20:10).

The Sabbath’s setting in the biblical account of creation implies that it is one of those OT standards which are meant for all men, and not just for Israel. The inclusion of the Sabbath law in the Ten Commandments underlines this important truth. The Decalogue occupied a special place in

OT law. Alone of all God’s instructions, it was spoken by his audible voice (Ex 19:25; 20:1), written by his finger (31:18), and placed in the tabernacle ark at the heart of Israel’s worship (25:16). The NT, too, confirms the strong impression that the Decalogue as a whole embodies principles which are permanently valid for all men in all places at all times. Whether or not Sunday is recognized as the Christian Sabbath, one is obliged to accept the central principle of this biblical teaching as far as the Sabbath is concerned. God’s instructions require man to observe a regular weekly break from work.

If the Sabbath principle is built so securely into God’s creation plan, one might expect to find signs of its ancient observance on a worldwide scale. Although understandably scant, some evidence of this exists, particularly in the widespread acceptance of a seven-day week. There are, for example, intriguing references to ancient Babylonian taboos on the seventh day, and to a monthly festival in Babylon called “sabattu.” Their connection with the biblical Sabbath is very tenuous (certainly not strong enough to justify suggestions that the Jews adopted their Sabbath from Babylon), but they do provide pointers, from a very early period of human history, to man’s recognition of the seventh day as something special.

Even in the OT itself, there is only one clear reference to Sabbath observance prior to the Ten Commandments—in Exodus 16:22–30, where the Israelites gather twice as much manna as usual on the sixth day of the week and are told not to look for any on the following day because “the

Lord has given you the seventh day as a day of Sabbath rest.” From the people’s puzzlement (which probably accounts for their disobedience, v 27; if their disobedience had been deliberate and clear-sighted, they probably would have been severely punished—cf. 31:15), it seems that Sabbath observance had fallen into disuse. This would have been the natural outcome of Israel’s long years of forced labor in Egypt.

It cannot be ascertained that the patriarchs observed the Sabbath regularly before the people settled in Egypt, but it is likely that they did, in spite of the Bible’s silence. There are plenty of pointers to a seven-day week in early times (see, e.g., Gn 50:10), and the Sabbath would have provided opportunities for those acts of worship which took place (e.g., Gen. 12:8; Gen. 26:25).

To discover more about the way God marked out the Sabbath day at creation, and how he intended man to observe it thereafter, one must explore the meaning of the words “bless” and “declare holy” (or “set aside”) which occur in both the creation story and the Ten Commandments (Gn 2:3; Ex 20:11). In brief, “bless” is the language of giving, while “declare holy” is the language of claiming. When something is blessed by God, it becomes a vehicle of his generous giving and an expression of his warm concern. When God declares something holy, he claims it for himself, taking it out of ordinary circulation (whether it is a place, a day, or an animal for sacrifice) and declaring it special.

v verse

cf. compare

e.g. for example

e.g. for example

This provides a clue to God’s intention in requiring man to observe the Sabbath. Freed from time-consuming everyday work, man should accept the seventh day as a blessing from his Creator (using it to recall all God’s goodness in creation and to praise him for it), and recognize the claim it makes on his life. As a day “set aside,” the Sabbath is a reminder that all time is the Creator’s gift—a fact man acknowledges when he consciously gives back to God part of what is his anyway.

This, then, is the first note the OT strikes in its teaching on the Sabbath. In recognition of his Creator, and of the way he is made as a creature, man should stop work one day in seven. Any attempt to work a seven-day week is therefore an affront to humanity as well as disobedience to God.

Significantly, the second main strand of the Bible’s Sabbath teaching—that of redemption—also features in a list of the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath law (already noted in 20:8–11) reappears in Deuteronomy 5:12–15, but here a different reason is attached to its observance: “You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (v 15).

The differences between these two accounts of the fourth commandment are important. The first (Ex 20) is addressed, *through* Israel, to all men as created beings. The second (Dt 5) is directed *to* Israel as God’s redeemed people. So the Sabbath is God’s signpost, pointing not only to his goodness toward all men as their Creator, but also to his mercy toward his chosen people as their Redeemer.

OT Old Testament

v verse

The OT itself uses this “sign” language of the sabbath in Exodus 31:12–17. “The Sabbath,” God instructs Moses, “is a sign between me and you throughout your generations ... for ever between me and the people of Israel” (cf. Ez 20:12).

After man had spoiled his relationship with God by falling into sin (Gn 3), God himself set about repairing the damage. He began by saving Noah from the flood, and by selecting first a man (Abraham) and then a nation (Israel) to convey his redeeming love to the world. Each stage in the redemption story was marked by a covenant sign. In Noah’s case it was the rainbow and in Abraham’s circumcision (Gn 9:8–13; 17:1–14). And what better symbol of God’s covenant relationship with Israel, as a perpetual reminder of his redeeming love, than the sabbath? The annual celebration of the Passover would act as a powerful reminder of the exodus, of course, but the weekly sabbath would underscore God’s covenant mercy in giving his people rest from slavery in Egypt.

There is one other significant point in Deuteronomy’s version of the sabbath commandment that must not be missed. The prohibition of all work on the sabbath day is followed by an explanatory note—“that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you” (Dt 5:14). Practical concern for others is a feature of all the OT’s covenant teaching (see, e.g., 12:12; 16:11). So God’s loving concern for Israel in her Egyptian slavery must be matched by the Israelite family’s loving concern for those who served them. The sabbath offered an ideal outlet for the

practical expression of that concern. Jesus was especially keen to rescue this humanitarian side of sabbath observance from the mass of callous regulations which threatened to suffocate it in his day (see, e.g., Mk 3:1–5).

The OT’s provision for a “sabbatical year” develops this humanitarian theme further (see Ex 23:10–12; Lv 25:1–7; Dt 15:1–11; also the regulations for the “year of jubilee” in Lv 25:8–55). Every seventh year the land was to “lie fallow before the Lord, uncultivated” (Lv 25:4 LB). It needed a regular rest just as much as the people it sustained, but the primary purpose of this law was clearly philanthropic and benevolent: “let the poor among the people harvest any volunteer crop that may come up; leave the rest for the animals to enjoy.” Deuteronomy 15:1–11 extends the same humanitarian principle into the world of commerce. The sabbatical year must see the cancelling of all debts within God’s redeemed community. “Every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother” (v 2). For the tight-fisted who might be tempted to refuse a loan if the sabbatical year was imminent, the law added a warning and a promise. “If you refuse to make the loan and the needy man cries out to the Lord, it will be counted against you as a sin. You must lend him what he needs, and don’t moan about it either! For the Lord will prosper you in everything you do because of this!” (vv 9, 10 LB).

Observing the sabbatical year was obviously a great test of the people’s obedience to God and of their willingness to

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depend on him for their livelihood. Sometimes the temptation to turn a blind eye was too strong (Lv 26:34, 35). But history testifies to Israel's courage in observing the letter of this law on many occasions, despite threats of invasion and famine. Both Alexander the Great and the Romans excused Jews from paying taxes every seventh year in recognition of the depth of their religious convictions.

Returning from the seventh year to the seventh day, the OT law codes go to considerable lengths to buttress the sabbath ban on work by defining what may and may not be done by God's people on the sabbath day. The prohibitions were not meant to rule out activity of any kind. Their aim was to stop regular, everyday work—because if God had “set aside” the sabbath (Ex 20:11), the most obvious way of profaning it was to treat it just like any other day. So when the nation was in the desert, it was enough to say “stay where he is” (16:29 NIV). But with a more settled life in view, the rule had to be spelled out in specific terms that the farmer (34:21), the salesman (Jer 17:27), and even the housewife (Ex 35:2, 3) would understand.

The details may seem trivial, but obedience to the sabbath law was seen as the main test of the people's allegiance to the Lord. It was made quite clear that willful disobedience was a capital offense (Ex 35:2), and the fate of the man found gathering wood in defiance of sabbath regulations showed that this was no idle threat (Nm 15:32–36).

On the positive side, the Law also laid down rules and guidelines for the liturgical observance of the sabbath day.

The 12 loaves of the “showbread” (the OT version of the prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread”) were to be replaced every sabbath in the tabernacle, and special sacrifices offered (Lv 24:5–8; Nm 28:9, 10). Above all, the sabbath provided “a day for sacred assembly” for all the people (Lv 23:3).

Hemmed in by so many rules and regulations (and with the death penalty overhanging all), the sabbath easily could have become a day of fear, a day when the people were more afraid of committing an offense than worshipping the Lord and enjoying a weekly rest. This, however, was never the case. The sabbath was intended to be a blessing, not a burden. Above everything else, it was a weekly sign that the Lord loved his people and wanted to draw them into an ever closer relationship with himself. Those who valued that relationship enjoyed the sabbath, calling it “a delight” and “honorable” (Is 58:13, 14). Those on the cold fringes of the community, like the eunuch and the gentile outsider, were warmed on the sabbath as they were drawn into the center of God's love (56:1–7).

Nowhere does the OT express its sheer joy in sabbath worship more exuberantly than in Psalm 92, which has the title *A Song for the Sabbath*. “For thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by thy work; at the works of thy hands I sing for joy” (v 4).

The later prophets, were, however, far from blind to the darker side of human nature. They knew that a great deal of sabbath observance was a sham. Many people treated the sabbath day more as holiday than holy day, an opportunity

for self-indulgence rather than delighting in the Lord (Is 58:13). Some greedy tradesmen found its restrictions an annoying irritant (Am 8:5).

As God's spokesmen, the prophets did not shrink from exposing such neglect and abuse (even in the best ecclesiastical circles—Ez 22:26). Those who go through the motions of sabbath worship with unrepentant hearts nauseate the Lord, cries Isaiah (Is 1:10–15). As a symptom of rebellion against God, Jerusalem's sabbath-breaking will bring destruction on the city, thunders Jeremiah (Jer 17:27). The Lord has been very forbearing with his people, warns Ezekiel, but prolonged neglect of his sabbath makes judgment a certainty (Ez 20:12–24).

When the ax of judgment fell (in the exile to Babylon, 586 BC), the surviving remnant of the nation took the lesson to heart. Sabbath-keeping was one of the few distinctive marks faithful Jews could keep in a foreign land, so it assumed extra significance. At the prompting of prophets like Ezekiel, who set out rules for sabbath worship in the rebuilt temple at Jerusalem (Ez 44:24; 45:17; 46:3), and under the leadership of men like Nehemiah, the returning exiles were more careful than their predecessors in observing the sabbath day (Neh 10:31; 13:15–22).

Between the Testaments. The sabbath day has a twofold significance in the OT. It points to God's blessings in creation, calling all men to respect their Maker's instructions by observing one day's rest from work in seven, and it points to God's mercy in redemption, as a special sign of his covenant relationship with the people of

Israel. Generally speaking, Jewish writers who lived outside Palestine (so-called Hellenists) stressed the creation aspect of this sabbath teaching, while those who lived and wrote in the Holy Land itself (the Palestinians) placed far more emphasis on the special relationship between the Lord and Israel the sabbath signified. Some Palestinian Pharisees, for example, denied that the sabbath had any relevance for gentiles at all; while the Hellenist writer Philo described the sabbath day as "the birthday of the world" and "the festival not of a single city or country but of the universe."

It is in the Palestinian literature of this period that one finds the elaborate directions about sabbath observance which aroused so much controversy in NT times. Two tractates of the Mishna are devoted exclusively to these sabbath rules and regulations. Their main purpose is to define work (one tractate does so under 39 headings) in an attempt to show every Israelite what is and is not permitted on the sabbath. Unfortunately, though well intended, this led to such hairsplitting complexities and evasions that ecclesiastical lawyers often differed among themselves in their interpretations—with the inevitable result that the main purpose of the sabbath became lost beneath a mass of legalistic detail. The rabbis themselves were aware of how much they were adding to the straightforward teaching of the OT. As one of them put it, "The rules about the sabbath ... are as mountains hanging by a hair, for Scripture is scanty and the rules many."

Nevertheless, in spite of the weight of the rule books, the positive notes of joy and celebration never quite disappeared from sabbath observance. Two of the family's

main duties on the sabbath day, according to the rabbis, were to praise God and to enjoy the best food and drink in the home.

NT. Jesus' confrontations with the Jewish religious leaders over sabbath observance are well known. It is strange that the accusation of sabbath breaking was not pressed at his trial. Possibly it was because the Pharisees disagreed so much among themselves that they could not have made such a charge stick.

Jesus, however, never saw himself as a sabbath-breaker. He went to synagogue regularly on the sabbath day (Lk 4:16). He read the lesson, preached, and taught (Mk 1:21; Lk 13:10). He clearly accepted the principle that the sabbath was an appropriate day for worship.

His point of collision with the Pharisees was the point at which their tradition departed from biblical teaching. He made this clear when he defended his disciples by appealing to Scripture, after they had been accused of breaking sabbath tradition by walking through grain fields and breaking off heads of wheat (which fell in the category of "harvesting" according to the Pharisees; Mk 2:23–26). He followed this up with a remark that took his hearers straight back to God's creation purpose for the sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27).

Rabbinic tradition had exalted the institution above the people it was meant to serve. By making it an end in itself, the Pharisees had effectively robbed the sabbath of one of its main purposes. Jesus' words must have sounded uncomfortably familiar in his opponents' ears. A famous

rabbi had once said, "The Sabbath is given over to you, but you are not given over to the Sabbath." By "you" the rabbi meant "you Israelites" (to the exclusion of everyone else). Jesus, by giving this well-known saying with its important half-truth a new twist, recalled the Creator's purpose in instituting the sabbath. It was given as a blessing to *all* mankind, not just to the Jewish nation.

More than anything else, Jesus' sabbath healings put him on a collision course with rabbinic restrictions. The OT does not forbid cures on the sabbath day, but the rabbis labeled all healing as work which must always be avoided on the sabbath unless life was at risk. Jesus fearlessly exposed the callousness and absurd inconsistencies to which this attitude led. How, he asked, could it be right to circumcise a baby or lead an animal to water on the sabbath day (which tradition allowed), but wrong to heal a chronically handicapped woman and a crippled man—even if their lives were not in immediate danger (Lk 13:10–17; Jn 7:21–24)? The sabbath, he taught, was a particularly appropriate day for acts of mercy (Mk 3:4, 5). If tradition said otherwise, it was high time to get back to the Bible (Mt 12:7).

In stressing the aptness of healing on the sabbath, Jesus was reminding his disciples and opponents that the sabbath was a sign of redemption. The same God who had broken the enemy's power in Egypt, and commanded his people to remember that great act of mercy by observing the sabbath (Dt 5:15), was now breaking Satan's grip on people's lives through Jesus' healing miracles (Lk 13:16).

Jesus went one vital step further than that. He claimed that the sabbath, God's great redemption sign-post, was

pointing straight at him! He, the man from heaven, was Lord of the sabbath (Mk 2:28; cf. Mt 12:5–8). The great OT Scriptures which forecast the good news of man's redemption in the language of sabbatical release had reached their fulfillment in him, the redeemer of the world (Lk 4:16–21). Just as God kept working, despite his creation rest, to sustain the world in his mercy, so Jesus would continue to teach and to heal on the sabbath day (Jn 5:2–17). But one day his redemptive work would be complete, and then the sabbath's purpose as a sign of redemption would be accomplished.

Inscription on a column from the ruins of the synagogue at Capernaum.

Living on the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul was quick to grasp the significance of both for sabbath observance. As the Creator's directive to all mankind, the principle of sabbath rest was obviously still relevant. As an opportunity and stimulus for worship, the sabbath was still important, but already giving way to Sunday, especially in churches where Gentiles were in the majority. But as a pointer to redemption and as a necessity for salvation, the rules and regulations of OT Law (together with their embellishments in rabbinic tradition) were clearly redundant.

Paul does not go so far as to ban all observance of the Jewish sabbath. Indeed, he attended many sabbath

cf. compare
OT Old Testament
OT Old Testament

synagogue services himself in his evangelistic travels (see, e.g., Acts 13:14–16). Jewish Christians who insisted on keeping up their sabbath practices were free to do so, provided they respected the opinions of those who differed (Rom 14:5, 6, 13). But any suggestion that observing the Jewish calendar was a necessity for full salvation must be resisted as a relapse into slavery from the glorious freedom which Jesus had brought (Gal 4:8–11). For “these are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:17).

It is left to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews to explain just how the twin biblical “sabbath themes” of *creation* and *redemption* find their joint fulfillment in Christ. He does so by linking together the ideas of God's rest after creation and his redemptive act in bringing Israel to her “rest” in Canaan; and by showing how both relate to the present and future rest that Christians can and do enjoy in Jesus (Heb 4:1–11).

God intends all his people to share his rest—that is his promise (Heb 4:1). He showed this intention clearly when he brought Israel to the Promised Land, but that did not mark the complete fulfillment of his promise (v 8). The “full, complete rest still waiting for the people of God” (v 9 LB) is in heaven. “Christ has already entered there. He is resting from his work, just as God did after the creation” (v 10 LB). And because of his redeeming work he invites all

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those who believe in him to share that same “sabbath rest” now (v 9).

So here, finally, the two main strands of biblical teaching on the sabbath meet. The promised fulfillment in heaven does not, of course, necessarily rule out the idea of a Christian sabbath that can be observed in the world here and now as a pledge of the “real thing” (Col 2:17) still to come. But Hebrews’ main concern is to challenge its readers to continuing faith and complete obedience. “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience” (Heb 4:11).

See TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE; LORD’S DAY, THE; SABBATH DAY’S JOURNEY.

Bibliography. N.E. Andreasen, *The OT Sabbath*; N.E. Andreasen, *Rest and Redemption*; S. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*; N.A. Barach, *A History of the Sabbath*; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*; S. Goldman, *Guide to the Sabbath*; A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*; A.E. Millgram, *Sabbath: The Day of Delight*.

Sabbath, Covert for the. Covered place in the court of the temple reserved for the king who stood there with his attendants on a sabbath or feast day (2 Kgs 16:18 KJV; RSV covered way). Ahaz, king of Judah (735–715 BC) tore it

down for fear of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria. It is not known why.¹

v verse

OT Old Testament

KJV The King James Version

RSV The Revised Standard Version

BC before Christ

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Sabbath, Covert for The,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1874–1879.