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REST IN CHRIST: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR  
MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH IN  
SANDY SPRINGS, GEORGIA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Chad Trevor Ireland  
May 2020

**APPROVAL SHEET**

REST IN CHRIST: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR  
MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH IN  
SANDY SPRINGS, GEORGIA

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To Jennifer

My beloved

You are a gift from the Lord

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## PREFACE

God graced me with a father who loves Jesus Christ and his church, and one of the primary ways my father exhibits this love for the Lord is through his insatiable interest in the Bible. His love for the Word of God set him on a course for Bible college and seminary in pursuit of being equipped to serve the local church. My dad's tenure as a pastor preceded much of my life, but his love for the church has marked my walk with the Lord and dedication to the local church, second only to the Bible. It was through our many conversations regarding theology and ministry that God taught me the value of theological education *for* the local church. This project is a result of a lifetime of grace at work in and through my dad, who has been one of my biggest supporters in life, ministry, and my pursuit of the Lord.

Proverbs 31:10 speaks of an excellent wife who is far more valuable than precious jewels. The rhetorical question the author asks indicates that a wife of this caliber cannot be found apart from the Lord. As I reflect on the genesis of pursuing this degree, I was not only committing myself to it but asking my wife, Jenny, to die to herself in yet another way as my helper. She is a gift from the Lord in so many ways, but her managing our household, praying for me, encouraging me, and protecting my time so that I could devote myself to countless hours of research and writing is overwhelming to consider. She is a treasure from the Lord.

This project is also born out of a sincere desire to know Christ more deeply and serve his church more effectively. It has been my privilege and joy to serve the local church for the past eighteen years. These years in ministry have had a humbling effect on my understanding of what I bring to the ministry. "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7 ESV). Serving the local



church has been thrilling and hard. However, the Lord continues to make clear how essential and central the ministry of the Word is to the health and vitality of the church. The desire to continue my education was born out of a love for the church and an eagerness to more effectively communicate the eternal truth of God’s Word. Furthermore, during the three years of this journey, I have had the privilege of serving hundreds of pastors overseas who have little to no access to formal theological education. I realize now, more than ever, that God has graced me with this opportunity. May I steward it well for his glory.

I am especially thankful to my doctoral supervisor, Stephen Wellum, for giving of himself to the process of sharpening my heart and mind to engage in this task of theological study. He has profoundly influenced the way I read and study the Bible. I am grateful for the time he invested reading and improving this project. He has helped me grow as a writer and set me on a path toward continued growth in the discipline of biblical and systematic theology—for the sake of the church and the glory of Christ. Jenny and I have known Stephen, Karen, and their children for more than a decade, and it has been a joy to see how the Lord has grown and used their family.

When I embarked on this journey three years ago, I was unaware of the deep friendships and brotherhood that would be forged with Adam, Andy, Dave, and Josh. I count it an honor to have studied biblical theology with these brothers. Their faithful and humble service to the church as pastors has grown my love for and appreciation of the diverse men the Lord uses to shepherd his flock. These men have challenged me to grow as a husband and father as they love and lead their families. They also remind me how essential it is to ensure that theological musings reach the pew in ways that serve the body of Christ. Whatever our ability to parse theological concepts, if the faithful church member cannot understand the glorious truths of Scripture, then our labor is in vain.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the faithful prayer and encouragement of our church family at Mt. Vernon. We have felt incredibly loved and

cared for by the elders and fellow members of the church throughout this season of our lives. This project is the fruit of answered prayer. The saints at Mt. Vernon are generous in their encouragement, sincere in their interest, and faithful to point us to Christ in every pursuit.

Most of all, I am humbled to know the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. My study has helped me see that Jesus does not merely surpass the various institutions, people, and commands of the Old Testament—his worth surpasses all things! I pray that God would cause me to be convinced of this truth every day, as long as it is called “today,” until I see him face to face.

Chad Ireland

Kennesaw, Georgia

May 2020

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This project focuses on the book of Hebrews with the goal of obtaining a better understanding of the promised rest of Hebrews 3:7–4:13 and its implications for the church today. The hermeneutical method of the author will guide interpretation “so that we are interpreting particular parts of the story in light of the whole.”<sup>1</sup> This project argues that God’s rest is an eschatological state established archetypically at creation and fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Hebrews addresses key themes and realities brought about by the inauguration of the new covenant through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In that sense, it serves as a New Testament lens through which one can gain a proper understanding of the rest theme throughout the Bible.<sup>2</sup> The author of Hebrews cites Genesis 2:2 creating a theological link between the rest offered and promised to God’s people under both the old and new covenants.<sup>3</sup> Exploring this theological connection provides a greater understanding of the ultimate rest God intends for his people.

Hebrews 3:7–4:13 comprises one of five warning passages in the book. Thomas Schreiner contends that the pervasiveness of the warnings in Hebrews points to

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

<sup>2</sup> For this project the terms *rest*—or *divine rest*—and *sabbath* will be used to differentiate between God’s rest and the institution established for God’s people. The root word for divine rest in Gen 2:2–3 is “shabath,” which is the root word for “shabbath,” translated Sabbath throughout the Old Testament. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, trans. Edward Robinson (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 991–92.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, *Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 138.

the purpose of the book for both the original and contemporary audience: “They must not turn away from Jesus and the new covenant and revert to the Mosaic law and the old covenant.”<sup>4</sup> The writer of Hebrews “means to bring his audience safely to salvation” through the use of judgment and warning passages.<sup>5</sup>

The writer of Hebrews has selected particular topics—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—to demonstrate a fulfillment of the Old Testament and the superiority of the new covenant in Christ.<sup>6</sup> Hamilton contends, “The people, events, and institutions in the narratives of the Law and the Prophets are the narrative substructure of the letter to the Hebrews.”<sup>7</sup> The writer interprets God’s rest in Genesis 2 as a type in light of the inauguration of the new covenant in Christ. Rest is no longer simply a Sabbath or land acquisition issue, but rather these were always intended to point to something greater. The author of Hebrews uses God’s promise to the Israelites in the Old Testament as a lens to magnify Christ. Jesus fulfills all that God intended from creation’s inception and that which was lost in the garden, securing the rest that was lost in the fall. Augustine expresses it eloquently in his *Confessions*: “You made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its place of rest in You.”<sup>8</sup>

John MacArthur employs the theme of superiority or the preeminence of Christ to organize his commentary. In his view, the writer of Hebrews presents Christ—and the new covenant which he inaugurated—as better than everything and everyone: “A better hope, a better testament, a better promise, a better sacrifice, a better substance, a better

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<sup>4</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 515.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 517.

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 518.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *St. Augustine: Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

country, a better resurrection, a better everything.”<sup>9</sup> Hebrews holds out the promised rest of God as better than that which Joshua attained for God’s people under the old covenant (Heb 4:8). The warning of chapter 3 amplifies this reality. If they forsake Christ, they forsake a better promise. “But just as Christ is greater in glory than Moses (v. 3), so the loss incurred in rejecting Christ is greater even than that incurred in rejecting Moses. The rebels in Moses’s day missed the promised blessing of entry into an earthly Canaan (or rest), but latter-day rebellion would forfeit the greater blessings of the new age.”<sup>10</sup> The use of Genesis 2:2 to support this argument in chapter 4 demonstrates a typological interpretation of the conclusion to the creation narrative. The rest offered to God’s people in Christ is superior to that of the old covenant.

If God’s promised rest is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, then how do Christians relate to the law? The church has wrestled with this question since its inception (Acts 15). A biblical theology of Sabbath rest presents an opportunity to examine this question using the fourth commandment as a case study. Schreiner concludes that “specific commandments, including sacrifices, circumcision, purity laws, food laws, and Sabbath, were not required of Christians.”<sup>11</sup> Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum concur and argue, “The external forms and shadows of the old covenant have been done away now that the reality has come in Christ (Col 2:16–17).”<sup>12</sup> The present study provides insight on this important question.

Broadly speaking, the subject of rest in the Bible touches on many areas of theological interest. D. A. Carson remarks that it not only touches on creation ordinance

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<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur Jr., *Hebrews, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), xix.

<sup>10</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 99.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 170–71.

<sup>12</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 382.

and moral law, but it also includes “the relationship between the Old Testament and the New, the relationship among the covenants, the proper understanding of salvation history, the nature of prophecy and fulfillment, biblical patterns of eschatology and the normativeness of any particular biblical law.”<sup>13</sup> The scope of this project does not permit an investigation into all of these spheres. However, a biblical theological study of the Sabbath will touch on several of the above by tracing the rest theme through the storyline of Scripture. For instance, the already-not yet features of eschatological promise and fulfillment are traced through the theme of rest in the Old and New Testaments.

### **Mount Vernon Baptist Church**

Mount Vernon Baptist Church is located in Sandy Springs, Georgia—a wealthy suburb of Atlanta. It is a healthy church with sound biblical teaching and a firm grasp of the gospel. Like many Southern Baptist churches that are at least fifty years old, the demographic is comprised of a broad range of ages. The older generation at the church grew up during a time in American culture that recognized Sunday as the Lord’s Day with Sabbath overtones. Sunday and Sabbath were conflated for many in that era. American culture was also sympathetic to this during the latter half of the twentieth century as many businesses were closed on Sunday and most people had Sundays off from work.

That is not to say that the older saints in the church are the only group with this perspective of Sunday. Many of those who grew up in a local church have been taught Sabbath principles which were reinforced throughout childhood and beyond. The result is a group within the church who wrestle with how to view the Sabbath. Some question its validity for believers today yet feel a sense of guilt from past teaching that may be at

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<sup>13</sup> D. A. Carson, ed., introduction to *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1982), 17.

odds with how they understand the gospel today.<sup>14</sup> In this way it has become a matter of conscience for some.

Conversely, younger generations within the church have grown up in a very different American culture—and church subculture—than the generations before them. While there may be a temptation to legalism in terms of Sabbath observance for older generations, younger generations have not always given much thought to practices related to the Lord’s Day.<sup>15</sup> A biblical theology of rest provides an opportunity for thoughtful reflection on the Sabbath’s relevancy for today. In-depth teaching on the Sabbath’s relevancy for today has not occurred at Mount Vernon in the past five years.<sup>16</sup>

Questions about the relevance of the Mosaic law for believers today are not limited to the older and younger generations as distinct categories within Mount Vernon. Debates often center on whether or not commandments are repeated in the New Testament. Another popular solution has been to divide the old covenant into moral, ceremonial, and civil laws, permitting new covenant believers to maintain the moral laws while setting aside the ceremonial and civil as irrelevant for the church today. However, scholars such as Gentry and Wellum would argue that such a division of the law is foreign to the way it was written.<sup>17</sup>

Many of the commands from the old covenant are repeated throughout the New Testament and treated as normative for new covenant living. Schreiner says that while the old covenant has passed away by the coming of Christ, “this cessation of the

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<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that the gospel has changed, but a right application of its realities and implications has taken root at Mount Vernon in very distinct ways from its past history. As a result, many in the church are applying the gospel to their lives more robustly, including how they relate to the Lord’s Day.

<sup>15</sup> This is the case at Mount Vernon. According to a conversation I had with one of the staff elders, the younger members he has encountered over the past five years fall into this category. Many have not given much thought to how the Lord’s Day should be treated.

<sup>16</sup> According to a conversation with the staff elder of education.

<sup>17</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 393.

Mosaic covenant does not constitute an abrogation of the law but a fulfillment and establishment of the law (Rom 3:31). In other words, one cannot give an unqualified ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer regarding the cessation of the law in Paul.”<sup>18</sup> The book of Hebrews confirms that the sacrificial system operative under the Mosaic law is no longer necessary because of the once and for all atoning death of Christ (Heb 9). Paul seems to nullify laws concerning the feasts, circumcision, Sabbath as well as food and purity laws (Rom 14; 1 Cor 5:7; 8:1–13; Col 2:16–21). An examination of the rest theme in Scripture provides insight on these claims.

The author of Hebrews indicates that the old covenant practice of keeping the Sabbath pointed to something greater, ultimately fulfilled in Christ. The Ten Commandments are generally accepted as being applicable for believers today because they are God’s commands and are considered to have moral value. Yet, the Sabbath stands apart from the rest of the Ten Commandments because it contains many cultic features. Its continued practice has been debated throughout church history.<sup>19</sup> One might argue that the Sabbath command is unique among the Ten because it is not repeated in the New Testament. Gentry and Wellum assert that the law is blended together in such a way that to separate one out as unique is unnatural to the text.<sup>20</sup> Whether or not it reappears in the New Testament is not pertinent to the discussion at hand.

The members of Mount Vernon would be served by a biblical theology of rest to bring clarity where there may be confusion or unfamiliarity. According to the author of Hebrews, God’s promised rest is restored by the saving work of Christ. To serve the members of Mount Vernon with this project, I develop a biblical theology of rest demonstrating that the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The project strives to

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<sup>18</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 161.

<sup>19</sup> For a helpful discussion on this topic, see Carson, introduction to *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 13–19.

<sup>20</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 393.



discern how the writer of Hebrews links God's rest in Genesis 2:2 with Christ's fulfillment and what that means practically for the church today and in the future.

### **What Is Biblical Theology?**

If you were to ask the average church member "What is biblical theology?" various answers may be given. One answer would be that it is theology that is biblical. In fact, this was the exact answer given in a recent conversation with a relative. She grew up in the church and has been a believer for over sixty years. However, she had never heard of biblical theology as a distinct discipline of Christian theology. Her lack of exposure and understanding of biblical theology represents why defining it more clearly is needed in the church today.

While biblical theology is not new, it has not been as prominent in the church as systematic theology until recently. One reason for the need to define and defend the validity of biblical theology is the challenge to the unity of the Bible.<sup>21</sup> The Enlightenment and postmodern thought has undermined any sense of authoritative truth and rejected arguments grounded in metanarrative. Biblical theology's aim of unifying the message of the Bible challenges such assertions. A brief survey of differing expressions of biblical theology will provide a starting point to define it more clearly.

The discipline of biblical theology demonstrates the unity of the Bible's message by grounding its arguments in divine inspiration. The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture undergirds biblical theology as a hermeneutical method by appealing to the single divine author who moved writers to speak on his behalf (2 Pet 1:20–21). James Hamilton's and G. K. Beale's approach to biblical theology appeals to divine inspiration to support their interpretive conclusions. Hamilton asserts that because the Holy Spirit

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<sup>21</sup> For a helpful discussion on this issue, see David Wenham's article, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament," in the appendix of George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 684–719.

stands behind the text of Scripture, biblical authors were certain of their interpretive conclusions.<sup>22</sup> In other words, because the Spirit moved writers to pen what God willed, the ways in which they interpreted and applied earlier Scripture are not only valid, they are inerrant. Christians gain a greater understanding for how Scripture should be read from the example of the authors themselves.<sup>23</sup>

Beale refers to this as “divine authorial intent,”<sup>24</sup> meaning that God’s purposes—communicated through human authors—may extend beyond the writer’s known intent at the time he wrote.<sup>25</sup> Divine and human intent are always in harmony. However, there may be greater depth and scope of meaning that can only be discerned by considering the canon in its completed form.<sup>26</sup> The Bible is a unified whole because God is the author. Hamilton describes biblical theology as learning the “practice of interpretation from the biblical authors so that we can interpret the Bible and life in this world the way they did.”<sup>27</sup> He allows for more than one way to do biblical theology, but his effort in *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment* is an attempt to draw out a central theme of the biblical message.<sup>28</sup> “To do biblical theology is to think about the whole story of the Bible.”<sup>29</sup> Although Schreiner admits “it is safe to say that no alleged

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<sup>22</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 5.

<sup>25</sup> See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 376–85, for a helpful discussion about extended meaning. Beale follows Kevin Vanhoozer in asserting that “some forms of [divine] communication can only be discerned from considering the completed canon as a whole.” Kevin Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Collin Greene, and Karl Moller, *Scripture and Interpretation* 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 34–37.

<sup>26</sup> I extend my appreciation to Peter Gentry (personal correspondence, March 12, 2020) for his comments helping me strengthen this explanation.

<sup>27</sup> Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 44.

<sup>29</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 12.

center will ever become the consensus,” he concludes that the various efforts to discern a center are helpful to the body of Christ.<sup>30</sup>

Paul House describes good biblical theology of the Old Testament as an “analysis that is God-centered, intertextually oriented, authority-conscious, historically sensitive and devoted to the pursuit of the wholeness of the Old Testament message.”<sup>31</sup> His goal is to treat Scripture in the same manner God’s people have for millennia: as relevant and authoritative for all of God’s people, for all time.<sup>32</sup> For House, biblical theology constrains study of the text to themes and focal points so that interpretation does not deviate from the unity of the Bible. Following Schreiner, House would not argue for a single center of the biblical storyline but believes centers are helpful to provide focus.

Beale asserts that a strong “intertextuality” exists between both Testaments, where later Scripture interprets earlier revelation and vice versa.<sup>33</sup> The authors of the New Testament interpret the Old through the lens of the gospel event—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup> The storyline of the Bible follows a trajectory of God’s purposes in creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.<sup>35</sup> For Beale, biblical theology traces this storyline and provides an interpretive method for doing so.

T. Desmond Alexander similarly frames biblical theology as God’s meta-story expressing his purposes. The essence of his definition is that there is an over-arching story to the Bible that answers life’s most important questions.<sup>36</sup> Stephen Dempster

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 12-13. Schreiner’s comments pertain to the New Testament but apply to the broader conversation.

<sup>31</sup> Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 57.

<sup>32</sup> House, *Old Testament Theology*, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical*

provides another perspective of biblical theology in his book *Dominion and Dynasty*. Rather than focusing on a particular doctrinal subject, Dempster utilizes biblical theology to “discover the Bible’s own distinctive theology.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, the Bible itself has a theology; it does not merely contain theology. From his particular vantage point, “the many shorter texts together contribute to this larger textual framework and find their meaning and significance within it.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the sum of the parts when taken together, provide an interpretive lens through which readers can grasp the bigger picture. Dempster argues that embedded within the order of the Old Testament is a theology that shapes how one approaches its message.

By way of analogy, consider a jigsaw puzzle. Jigsaw puzzles require people to undergo the painstaking process of matching pieces together, looking for clues in their shape and color. The picture on the front of the box reveals the completed puzzle. Imagine pouring out the contents of a puzzle for a friend yet withholding the box from her. Without seeing the picture in full, the task of putting together the various pieces becomes much more difficult. Similarly, biblical theology provides the larger perspective of the Bible to which the reader can link together the various books, genres, authors, and stories. Themes can be traced throughout the whole and linked together to form a complete picture of the Bible’s teaching on a given subject.

Biblical theology is not devoid of potential misuse. Hamilton notes the difficulty of doing biblical theology well when he says, “The progressive nature of God’s self-revelation given through the human authors during the unfolding of salvation history creates many interpretive challenges.”<sup>39</sup> One such challenge is what Beale refers to as the

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*Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 10, 192.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 15.

<sup>38</sup> Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New*

“radical reader-response approach,” where the reader ignores authorial intent and interprets something in the passage that was never intended.<sup>40</sup> The aim of biblical theology is not to read into the Bible what is not there but to read the Bible for what God has intended to communicate through the human authors on the Bible’s own terms and in the Bible’s own categories and presentation.

Such challenges should not preclude attempts to interpret Scripture within the larger context. Graeme Goldsworthy contends that biblical theology is essential for hermeneutics because it bridges the gap of history that separates readers of today from the works of God in the past.<sup>41</sup> It “examines the development of the biblical story from the Old Testament to the New, and seeks to uncover the interrelationships between the two parts. . . . It is a methodological approach to showing these relationships so that the Old Testament can be understood as Christian scripture.”<sup>42</sup> Redemptive history did not cease to progress with the close of the biblical canon. It continues to unfold in history until the consummation. Biblical theology acknowledges this reality and assists the church in embracing its role in advancing God’s kingdom today.

Biblical theology also “provides us with the means of moving toward”<sup>43</sup> answers to important questions concerning continuity between the Testaments. One such example is how Christians relate to the Mosaic law. Scripture unfolds progressively over time. God’s redemptive acts reveal his purposes and will. He works primarily through the establishment of covenants in which his promises anticipate fulfillment. The change in covenants from old to new marks a pivot in how God relates to humanity and raises

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*Testaments* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1991), 23.

<sup>43</sup> Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 24.

numerous questions for the church today. Trying to understand the progression of covenants without biblical theology risks answering these questions deficiently. In the preface to the New Studies in Biblical Theology series, Carson states two aims that assist in defining biblical theology: “The articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.”<sup>44</sup> The biblical authors penned their books within a larger framework and articulate themes that span the corpus of Scripture.

Taken together, these perspectives on biblical theology provide a clearer understanding of the discipline and the ways in which it serves the church today. This project has adopted Gentry and Wellum’s definition of biblical theology: “Biblical theology as a discipline attempts to exegete texts in their own context and then, in light of the entire canon, to examine the unfolding nature of God’s plan and carefully think through the relationship between *before* and *after* in that plan, which culminates in Christ.”<sup>45</sup> This approach to biblical theology will provide the guardrails for the following investigation of Sabbath rest through the Bible.

### **A Biblical Theology of Hebrews 3:7–4:13**

The author of Hebrews interprets Genesis 2:2, the wilderness generation, and Joshua’s conquest of the Promised Land through the lens of Jesus’s atoning work. His interpretation is grounded in a typological view of the land in conjunction with God’s promised rest. Hamilton states that typology has two key features: (1) historical correspondence and (2) escalation.<sup>46</sup> Gentry includes two additional factors that govern discerning biblical types: 1) biblical warrant, and 2) the progression of the covenants

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<sup>44</sup> D. A. Carson, preface to New Studies in Biblical Theology Series, quoted in Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 77.

“creates, controls and develops the typological structures across the canon of Scripture.”<sup>47</sup> A correspondence exists between creation as a whole, the Promised Land, and the new creation secured by Christ. This project will examine how the author of Hebrews interprets Genesis 2:2 in Hebrews 3–4 by tracing how God’s rest in creation—lost in the fall—becomes archetypal, recovered in shadow form in the Old Testament in the land and Sabbath, and fulfilled in Christ to be consummated in the new creation.

A pattern of rest emerges at creation and is developed through both the Old and New Testaments. Hebrews claims that God’s promise of rest “still stands,” warning readers not to “fall by the same sort of disobedience” (Heb 4:1, 11).<sup>48</sup> This warning is made to those who are “united by faith” with Christ, the one who fulfills the rest to which the Sabbath pointed (Heb 4:2). The writer of Hebrews—in relation to God’s promised rest—raises the serious danger of apostasy. An investigation to understand the nature and function of Sabbath rest in Hebrews provides a biblical theological framework for interpreting the fulfillment of the covenants in Christ.

Harold Dressler outlines the difference between a creation ordinance and an institution as it relates to the Sabbath.<sup>49</sup> He argues that the Sabbath was not installed under the old covenant as a result of being a creation ordinance. Rather, the Sabbath is an institution established by God after the heavenly pattern, finding its ultimate fulfillment in the eschatological hope.<sup>50</sup> A biblical theology that traces the rest theme through the covenants in Scripture will help us see this more clearly.

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<sup>47</sup> Peter J. Gentry, “The Significance of the Covenants in Biblical Theology,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 29. What Gentry means by “biblical warrant” is that “there must be exegetical evidence in the original text that indicates that what the text is dealing with is intended to be a model or pattern for something to follow in history.”

<sup>48</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

<sup>49</sup> Harold H. P. Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 27–29.

<sup>50</sup> Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” 27.

The writer of Hebrews sheds light on the future inheritance that has been secured for believers by Christ. Ladd highlights a number of elements throughout the book that point to a future fulfillment, providing clues “for understanding the rest that remains for the people of God.”<sup>51</sup> Christ’s enemies will be made his footstool (Heb 1:11; 10:13). Christ’s return will bring with it the final redemption of God’s people, including their eternal inheritance and promised home, better country, or city without foundations (Heb 9:15, 28; 10:36; 11:14, 16; 13:14). In addition, Ladd highlights the two-world interplay by the author of Hebrews, stating, “History has become the medium of the eternal.”<sup>52</sup> In terms of the promised rest spoken of in the Old Testament, the author reveals that it is a shadow of the truer rest that is to come. The “already, not yet” relationship between the inaugurated promises of the new covenant and their ultimate fulfillment in the eschaton provides an interpretive framework for Hebrews 3–4.

### **Familiarity with the Literature**

Developing a biblical theology of rest provides a better grasp of how rest is developed in the overall story of the Bible on the Bible’s own terms. An examination of how the writer of Hebrews uses the Old Testament to establish his conclusions will provide an interpretive lens for doing so. Therefore, sources will not be limited to studies on the book of Hebrews. The subject of rest is grounded in the covenants and reaches back to the creation account in Genesis 1–2. In order to set the landscape for the scope of the project, a brief exploration of the pertinent sources follows.

### **Commentaries**

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra and the Levites instructed God’s people in such a way that “they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading” (Neh 8:7–8). Just as

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<sup>51</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 620.

<sup>52</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 621.



Ezra and the priests provided a proper understanding of God’s inspired word, biblical theology strives to grasp the Bible canonically and interpret various texts in light of the whole narrative of Scripture.<sup>53</sup> A biblical theology of rest rooted in Hebrews 3:7–4:13 must endeavor to understand the various subjects the author alludes to as he warns God’s people.

Thomas R. Schreiner’s *Commentary on Hebrews* provides a helpful synthesis of the biblical text into the overarching storyline of the entire Bible.<sup>54</sup> His insights about the warning passages in Hebrews set the backdrop for the promised rest mentioned in Hebrews 3–4. Written from a biblical theological perspective, Schreiner’s work weaves eschatological themes into his commentary in clear, accessible prose.

The Pillar New Testament Commentary series is a staple of exegetical scholarship. Peter T. O’Brien’s volume on the book of Hebrews offers depth and comprehension of the original languages, undergirding his perceptive conclusions.<sup>55</sup> O’Brien helpfully compares and contrasts various schools of thought on the text, adding depth to his commentary. “Hebrews makes it plain that God himself gives both promises and warnings to assist people in their pilgrimage so that they will persevere in faith and reach their final rest. . . . They may be confident, then, that he will use their encouraging and exhortatory ministry of his word to help their brothers and sisters avoid the perils of unbelief and disobedience”<sup>56</sup>

William L. Lane’s two-volume entry in the Word Biblical Commentary series

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<sup>53</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). In 2016 Eerdmans released a statement regarding this volume’s failure to meet accepted standards of utilizing secondary sources. As a result, the volume has been withdrawn from the series and is no longer in print.

<sup>56</sup> O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 148.

provides a technical perspective of the passage.<sup>57</sup> Lane concludes that Christians, like the Israelites, are living in “between redemption and rest, between promise and fulfillment.”<sup>58</sup> He argues that there is a typological relationship between past events and God’s interaction with the audience of Hebrews.<sup>59</sup> “The entire unit assumes the form of a commentary on Ps 95 . . . in which the writer presupposes a correspondence between the successive generations of the people of God and consistency in the conduct of God.”<sup>60</sup> This eschatological theme will play a prominent role in interpreting Hebrews in light of the new covenant.

Paul Ellingworth’s entry in the New International Greek Testament Commentary series offers a highly technical study in the Greek text.<sup>61</sup> He focuses on the reality and locality of God’s place of rest with an emphasis on faith being essential for access to God’s promised rest.<sup>62</sup> Ellingworth interacts with extra-biblical sources in ways that provide fresh insights into the context of Hebrews. He highlights the pervasive theme of exodus in Hebrews, particularly 3:7–4:13.<sup>63</sup> There is an emphasis on being *in-between*—or what is commonly referred to as the already-not yet—in the book of Hebrews. God’s rest in Genesis 2 inaugurated this *in-between* age of redemptive history.

F. F. Bruce’s classic commentary on Hebrews presents a parallel between the temptation facing the recipients of the epistle and the temptation the Israelites faced in the

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<sup>57</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47 (Dallas: Word Books, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 89.

<sup>59</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 90.

<sup>60</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 83.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

<sup>62</sup> Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 244–46.

<sup>63</sup> Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 74.

extensive Old Testament quotations.<sup>64</sup> For Bruce, God’s rest is not merely something he bestows, but it also refers to rest that he himself enjoys and invites believers to share.<sup>65</sup> However, he sees an eschatological interpretation as foreign to passage—a point on which this project will deviate from him.<sup>66</sup>

In his excellent volume, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Phillip E. Hughes notes that Moses departs from the day/night pattern of creation on the seventh day, which raises interesting questions.<sup>67</sup> One implication is that God’s rest began and has not ended, which is why God can invite his people into his rest. The deviation in pattern by Moses begs the question as to whether or not there is more to understand about the seventh day of creation.

George Guthrie’s contribution in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* explores the context and usage of Genesis 2, Leviticus 16 and 23, and Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3–4.<sup>68</sup> He contends that the writer of Hebrews takes his readers to Genesis 2:2 in order to interpret God’s reference to “my rest” in Psalm 95. If God’s rest was inaugurated at the foundation of the world, it must transcend the temporal understanding attached to it with regard to the promised land.<sup>69</sup> Guthrie’s analysis links the rest of Hebrews 3–4 with the atoning work of Christ, seeing numerous verbal connections between this passage and Hebrews 10:19–25, linked by Leviticus 16 and 23.<sup>70</sup> Further treatment of the tabernacle/temple connection will be warranted.

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<sup>64</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 105.

<sup>65</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 106.

<sup>66</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 107.

<sup>67</sup> Phillip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 159.

<sup>68</sup> George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 919–96.

<sup>69</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 958.

<sup>70</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 959–60.

Craig Koester's work in Hebrews has been foundational to many commentators.<sup>71</sup> "Like the wilderness generation, the Christian community lived in between the deliverance accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection (2:10–18) and entry into their eternal inheritance. They too were confronted with the issue of whether they should trust other perceptions and give up hope."<sup>72</sup> He links the warning in Hebrews 3–4 to the ongoing ministry of the local church as the means by which believers will be brought into God's rest. "The ongoing need for mutual exhortation and the prospect that people might be infected by an evil heart indicates that the new covenant is not fully in place. The author intimates that the present will not continue forever, but only 'as long as it is still called today.'"<sup>73</sup> The tension between the inauguration of the new covenant and its fulfillment is woven throughout the epistle; the warning passages against apostasy bear this out.

Bruce Waltke penned a helpful essay on the Sabbath drawn from Genesis 2 in his commentary on Genesis in which he provides seven reasons God used the design of creation to sanctify his people.<sup>74</sup> His commentary is not overly technical. However, his helpful analysis draws out the theological implications of the fourth commandment in the Decalogue. A more technical-critical examination of Genesis 2:3 will be drawn from Victor Hamilton's entry in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament series<sup>75</sup> as well as Gordon Wenham's volume in the Word Biblical Commentary series.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ellingworth, Lane, Guthrie, and others cite Koester's work and interact with his conclusions often.

<sup>72</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 262.

<sup>73</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 265.

<sup>74</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 71–73.

<sup>75</sup> Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on The Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>76</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

The new covenant will be examined more broadly as well, particularly in Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, and various passages in the New Testament, including 2 Corinthians 3. J. A. Thompson's critical treatment of Jeremiah<sup>77</sup> and Daniel Block's dense commentary on Ezekiel<sup>78</sup> will each contribute exegetical insight into what makes the new covenant new through the lens of the Old Testament prophets. Jason Meyer's excellent title *The End of the Law* develops the distinct nature of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3 and will guide efforts to grasp Paul's understanding of the new covenant.<sup>79</sup> He argues that the nature of the new covenant is radically different than the old on the basis of his exegesis of this Pauline passage.

### **Theological Sources**

Schreiner's *New Testament Theology* is an engaging effort to understand the *already, not yet* nature of the fulfillment of God's promises.<sup>80</sup> His treatment of Pauline theology, particularly with regard to the law's fulfillment, will serve to frame God's promise of rest within the context of the new covenant.<sup>81</sup> George Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament* examines the theology of the author of Hebrews—as well as other writers of the New Testament—as he develops a theology of the unfolding plan of God in salvation history.<sup>82</sup>

A robust understanding of the importance and centrality of the covenants will be foundational for properly interpreting and applying the new covenant. Gentry and

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<sup>77</sup> J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

<sup>78</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

<sup>79</sup> Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009).

<sup>80</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*.

<sup>81</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*.

<sup>82</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*.

Wellum have produced a gift for the church in *Kingdom through Covenant*, where they argue that the covenants are the backbone of the Bible.<sup>83</sup> A thorough and helpful exegesis of each of the covenants provides an interpretive framework for understanding the promises of God as fulfilled by the new covenant.

Frank Thielman provides valuable insights in his entry, *Paul and the Law*, where he interacts with the new perspective on Paul and re-examines the traditional interpretation of Paul's conclusions about the believer's relationship to the law.<sup>84</sup> Thielman's *Theology of the New Testament* examines the themes of the biblical writers and sheds light on how God's promises find their fulfillment in Christ.<sup>85</sup>

The D. A. Carson edited work *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* explores the subject of Sabbath and rest historically and theologically. Harold Dressler in his chapter on "The Sabbath in the Old Testament" makes a stimulating claim that Genesis 2:2–3 is the capstone of God's creative act, indicating that the goal of creation is not mankind "but that all creative activities of God flow into a universal rest period."<sup>86</sup> It addresses subjects beyond the scope of this project, but will nonetheless touch on pertinent topics germane biblical theological understanding of God's promised rest.

Paul Jewett's *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* investigates the early Christian view of the Sabbath and asserts that the early church viewed the Sabbath as fulfilled in Christ.<sup>87</sup> He contends that early believers were indifferent toward the seventh day as a result of their theological view of Christ's

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<sup>83</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 138.

<sup>84</sup> Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

<sup>85</sup> Frank S. Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>86</sup> Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," 29.

<sup>87</sup> Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

fulfillment of the Sabbath.<sup>88</sup> Jewett approaches the study with the conviction that there is movement and unity in the redemptive story.

Oren Martin's biblical theology on the land promise provides helpful insight into the typological nature of the land that points to a greater eschatological fulfillment.<sup>89</sup> He demonstrates that the author of Hebrews uses proper exegesis by drawing out the future-oriented elements of the promised rest found in the Old Testament: "There are present and future realities that serve as motivations to obey and persevere, yet they stem from the unshakeable grace that is shared in Christ."<sup>90</sup> Martin's contribution places the warning passage within the framework of the Bible's storyline.

Finally, this project will endeavor to provide a basic summary of biblical theology and how it unites the storyline of the Bible. In addition to *Kingdom through Covenant*, James Hamilton's *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*<sup>91</sup> will contribute to the study as will G. K. Beale's *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*.<sup>92</sup> Both writers have a deep understanding of biblical theology, delivering needed clarity to key themes and typological realities throughout the Bible.

### **A Proposed Bible Study Series**

An exposition of Hebrews 3:7–4:13 will develop a biblical theology of rest spanning the entirety of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. Particular focus will be given to the promised rest hinted at in Genesis 2:1–3 and ultimately fulfilled in Christ

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<sup>88</sup> Jewett, *The Lord's Day*, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

<sup>90</sup> Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 143.

<sup>91</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*.

<sup>92</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*.

according to Hebrews 3–4. The scope of this project will cover seven biblical theological lessons distilled from this passage.

### **Sabbath Rest in Hebrews 3:7–4:13**

Hebrews 3:7–4:13 points to other theological topics and themes in both Testaments. A proper understanding of each within the context of redemptive history will be necessary to grasp how the Holy Spirit inspired the writer of Hebrews. Hebrews 3–4 will serve as a fountainhead for tracing the theme of rest canonically and, therefore, will serve as the starting point for this lesson series.<sup>93</sup>

The author of Hebrews opens the letter by making the case that Jesus Christ is superior in every way to those who mediated the previous covenant. At the center of his argument stands God’s Word (Heb 1:1–2, 5–13). The letter begins by highlighting the various ways God spoke in the past (1:1–2). Having now spoken through his Son, he spends the rest of the first two chapters describing why Jesus is superior to the previous mediators of God’s Word. In chapter 3, the audience is then invited to consider Jesus against the backdrop of Moses and the old covenant. “Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (3:3), and as the faithful Son over God’s house, the church, the recipients of the epistle are to hold fast to the gospel (3:6).

The centrality of God’s Word in these opening chapters frames Hebrews 3:7–4:13. In 3:7, the author opens by reminding his readers of the Spirit-inspired words of Psalm 95, and 4:12 beautifully expresses the powerful nature of God’s Word. Within this warning passage, the author exhorts his readers to guard against an unbelieving heart, tracing their situation back to the one facing Israel in the wilderness in Numbers 14.

Building on his warnings in 3:7–19, the author concludes that the promise to

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<sup>93</sup> One might argue that the gospels are a more appropriate starting point. However, Hebrews provides the fullest treatment of Sabbath rest in the New Testament and is the fruit of seeds planted in the gospels indicating that the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ.



enter into God’s rest still remains for believers today (Heb 4:1, 6–11). What is clear, however, is that they should not take for granted that they will enter simply because they have heard the “good news” (4:1–2). The wilderness generation heard the message, yet remained in unbelief. Faith that holds fast to God’s Word is required, making the message a “living reality” in their lives.<sup>94</sup> The author pulls back the curtain to reveal that God’s promised rest in Genesis 2 points forward to an eternal Sabbath for God’s people (Heb 4:3–4, 8–11). Not everyone agrees to an eschatological reading of Hebrews 3–4;<sup>95</sup> however, no passage of Scripture “can be interpreted satisfactorily in isolation from the rest.”<sup>96</sup> Hebrews 3:7–4:13 must be interpreted in light of the rest of the New Testament.

One of the aims of this lesson will be to unpack the biblical theology of the author’s interpretation of Scripture as he applies it to his audience. Interpreting the passage in light of the whole will require a more thorough examination of the Old Testament passages he references, shedding light on the promised rest secured for God’s people by Jesus Christ. Another aim of this lesson will be to understand how the author relates Psalm 95 to his audience and why he chooses the promise of rest to both warn and encourage his readers. This lesson will help lay the groundwork for the remaining portions of this project.

### **Sabbath Rest in the Pentateuch**

The writer of Hebrews understands the Bible in a canonical sense. He presents his interpretation of the Old Testament in light of the gospel event and reveals his perspective not only of past events but what it means for the future.<sup>97</sup> He quotes

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<sup>94</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 135.

<sup>95</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 77–78. Bruce sees an eschatological interpretation as foreign to the text.

<sup>96</sup> Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 10.

<sup>97</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 16.

extensively from Psalm 95, tracing a redemptive historical link to Genesis 2 and Joshua 21–23. A lesson devoted to drawing out an Old Testament understanding of God’s rest and the Sabbath as a sign of the old covenant will provide a canonical interpretation of Hebrews 3–4.

George Guthrie understands God’s rest as inaugurated at the foundation of the world and, therefore, transcends the temporal understanding attached to it with regard to the promised land.<sup>98</sup> Harold Dressler in his chapter on “The Sabbath in the Old Testament” makes a provocative claim that Genesis 2:2–3 is the capstone of God’s creative act, indicating that the goal or climax of creation is not mankind “but that all creative activities of God flow into a universal rest period.”<sup>99</sup> His distinction between creation ordinances and institutions is insightful and may provide clarity on how new covenant believers are to relate to the Ten Commandments. It will be necessary to differentiate whether or not the creation narrative of the divine rest is intended to install a principle of work and rest that overrides the Mosaic law and is relevant for all humanity for all time.

### **Psalm 95: Rest and the Davidic Covenant**

The writer of Hebrews applies Psalm 95 to the church in order to exhort and warn the saints that the rest spoken of by the psalmist has arrived in Christ. If they abandon him, they abandon the true and greater rest to which the psalm—and all of the Old Testament—pointed. That which anticipated fulfillment has now been accomplished, and they must not turn away. His interpretation and application of Psalm 95 builds on the covenantal progression of the Old Testament canon. The inauguration of the new covenant in Christ is the fulfillment of God’s promised rest.

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<sup>98</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 958.

<sup>99</sup> Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” 29.

The establishment of the Davidic covenant advances God's redemptive plan through an individual king-son rather than a corporate son or nation (Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1; Hos 11:1). The covenant blessing promised to Abraham and Israel will be channeled through the seed of the woman that will come from David's line. God's redemptive plan will be accomplished through a king who will be a son to God just like Adam and Israel (2 Sam 7:14). Covenant rest will be restored through this Davidic son.

### **Sabbath Rest in the Gospels**

The arrival of Christ brought a dramatic shift in redemptive history. Of the Synoptic Gospel writers, Matthew goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Jesus fulfilled all that the Old Testament pointed to.<sup>100</sup> The Sabbath lingers in the background in many of the conflicts Jesus had with the Pharisees. D. A. Carson notes that while Sabbath-breaking was often leveled against him during his ministry, no charge was brought against Christ during the trial before his death.<sup>101</sup> The answer as to why will help trace the history of the Sabbath from the Old Testament into the New.

In addition, Carson asserts that Jesus declaring himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt 12:8) and working just like his Father (John 5:17) in response to the Pharisees has eschatological overtones.<sup>102</sup> Jesus makes clear statements about his shared authority with the Father, and John outlines their shared work to establish the kingdom as history moves toward the judgment (5:19–29). A lesson will be devoted to surveying the Gospels to discern the movement of biblical teaching on the Sabbath at the pivot point in redemptive history found in the Gospel accounts.

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<sup>100</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 172.

<sup>101</sup> D. A. Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels," in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 71.

<sup>102</sup> Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels," 81.

## **Sabbath Rest in the Pauline Epistles**

The remainder of the New Testament unpacks the implications the Christ event had upon redemptive history. Paul, a former Pharisee very familiar with the Old Testament, makes what would have been radical statements regarding the Sabbath. In Colossians 2:16–17, he clearly states that the Sabbath—among other things—was a shadow of what has now come in Christ. Romans 14:5–6 describes a freedom for believers to recognize whatever day they are convinced of in their heart. Paul is interpreting the Sabbath in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and applying his interpretation to the church. Pauline writings will be the primary focus of this lesson with an aim to articulate his view of the Sabbath in light of the gospel event.

## **Conclusion**

God’s promised rest as our eschatological hope has implications for the local church today. All of history is moving toward that great day. A biblical theology of rest will provide guidance on how the church should live in light of Christ’s fulfillment of God’s promised rest. Some in the church today are convinced that the proper practice of Sabbath is a viable and helpful means of Christian growth and worship.<sup>103</sup> Others contend that there is a measure of freedom from such observance; therefore, it can be observed or not.<sup>104</sup>

The New Testament warnings aim to deliver God’s people to that ultimate rest. Hebrews 3 makes it clear that the church has a significant role to play in believers’ perseverance in the faith. The need for regular, on-going exhortation—“as long as it is called ‘today’”—is a ministry that should concern local churches for the sake of the flock. In this final session, the practical implications for the church and individual

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<sup>103</sup> For a helpful and practical discussion on the role and practice of Sabbath, see John Perritt, *Your Days Are Numbered: A Closer Look at How We Spend Our Time and the Eternity before Us* (Glasgow: Christian Focus, 2016). See also Jewett, *The Lord’s Day*, 164–69.

<sup>104</sup> A. T. Lincoln, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 404.

believers will be examined.

## CHAPTER 2

### SABBATH REST IN HEBREWS 3–4

Hebrews presents Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The author's argument depends on the progression of redemptive history. He labors to demonstrate that the various institutions of the old covenant are not rejected indiscriminately but are understood typologically to show their fulfillment in Christ. Thomas Schreiner summarizes the warning of Hebrews well: "Now that the end of the ages has arrived, a return to the old covenant would lead to final destruction."<sup>1</sup> The author's extensive use of the Old Testament to establish his argument separates it from other Epistles. He presents a tapestry of quotations accompanied by a Christological interpretation that sheds light on "the hermeneutical assumptions of first-century Christians so as better to learn how to read the Old Testament."<sup>2</sup>

The opening verses of the book introduces a recurring theme: the prophetic word proclaimed in the Old Testament finds its fullest expression and ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Hebrews makes clear that the Old Testament should be read in light of him.<sup>3</sup> The author's interpretation of the Old Testament demonstrates the early church's adherence to Jesus's exposition of the Scriptures recorded by Luke: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 666.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 615.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 30.

The extended discourse with regard to rest in chapters 3–4 is an interpretive launching pad for a new covenant perspective of the Sabbath. The author’s use of promise-fulfillment motifs, typology, eschatology, and the relationship between heaven and earth provide the pillars on which to build a meaningful interpretation of a debated theological point.<sup>4</sup>

Hebrews complements and expands the teaching of other New Testament authors. The author interprets and applies the entirety of the Old Testament through a new covenant lens to make his argument.<sup>5</sup> However, the writer’s interpretation does not exist in a theological vacuum. Hebrews is an epistolary sermon exhorting believers to persevere in the faith, (Heb 13:22).<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 3:7–4:13 is one of five warning passages in the book. Any interpretation and application of the author’s use of the phrase “Sabbath rest” should be marked by the sober warning and exhortation intended by the author. The author’s “pastoral concerns are represented by the Old Testament passages themselves as he exegetes them within the framework of his Christological understanding of history.”<sup>7</sup> The writer systematically shows how Christ corresponds to numerous Old Testament institutions and surpasses them, making clear their anticipatory nature.<sup>8</sup>

In one sense, Hebrews provides the most comprehensive treatment of the rest

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<sup>4</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> The author of Hebrews patterns his argument after Jesus’ teaching in Luke 24:44, where Luke highlights the tripartite division of the Old Testament to establish his argument. The tripartite division of the canon refers to the broad divisions of the Old Testament summarized as the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, organized in ancient Judaism and recognized in Jesus’ day (Luke 24:44). See Roger T. Beckwith, “Formation of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder (1988; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 39–86. See also David Brakke, “A New Fragment of Athanasius’s Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter: Heresy, Apocrypha, and the Canon,” *Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 1 (January 2010): 47–66.

<sup>6</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> John Laansma, “I Will Give You Rest: The Background and Significance of the Rest Motif in the New Testament,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 387.

<sup>8</sup> Dana M. Harris, *Hebrews, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), 5.

theme—including a discussion of the Sabbath—in the New Testament.<sup>9</sup> The current study begins here for this reason. The author of Hebrews views God’s rest as an eschatological state established archetypically at creation and fulfilled by Jesus Christ. His presentation of the Sabbath’s meaning and purpose offers insight as to how the church is to view the Sabbath throughout the Bible’s storyline. To demonstrate this thesis, I will unpack the redemptive-historical understanding of the writer so we can discern what is intended by his exposition of rest in the warning of Hebrews 3:7–4:13.

### **Biblical Theology, Hebrews, and the Sabbath**

Warning passages<sup>10</sup> in the New Testament—particularly in Hebrews—are somewhat jolting and should cause even the most mature Christian to pause and consider their relevance.<sup>11</sup> The author of Hebrews provides an exposition of Sabbath rest within the context of warning his audience of the dangers of abandoning Christ. His purpose is to preserve faith and stimulate obedience through the selective use and interpretation of key Old Testament passages. The writer exhibits a canonical awareness in his interpretation of Scripture and thus provides a helpful lens by which modern interpreters can understand and apply Hebrews 3–4 to the church today. R. T. France convincingly argues that Hebrews is “a first-century example of a Christian expositor” that serves as a template for modern Christian preachers.<sup>12</sup> His theological conclusions and his interpretation of earlier Scripture are instructive for the church.

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the author’s discourse regarding rest in 4:3–10 is an excursus used to positively motivate his audience to persevere in the faith. The rest that Jesus secures for his bride is qualitatively better than what was achieved by Joshua and David.

<sup>10</sup> The current discussion does not permit an extended treatment on various interpretations of the warning passages in Hebrews. For a helpful overview, see Herbert W. Bateman IV, ed., *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 26. Schreiner notes how pervasive warning passages are in the New Testament as a whole.

<sup>12</sup> R. T. France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 2 (November 1996): 250.



How the church ought to read Scripture must be according to Scripture, namely how the biblical writers read Scripture. By doing so, we are following the Reformation principle of “Scripture interpreting Scripture.” Biblical theology is the means through which the Bible can be understood on its own terms. It complements and builds upon the hermeneutical and interpretive foundation known as the historical-grammatical method, and endeavors to demonstrate the unity of the Bible’s message according to the Bible’s own presentation of itself.<sup>13</sup> This includes such things as: the Bible’s covenantal structure, promise-fulfillment, the progressive nature of revelation, and typology—all with Jesus Christ as the center and end. Biblical theology “provides the basis for understanding how the texts in one part of the Bible relate to all other texts, so that they will be read correctly, according to God’s intention.”<sup>14</sup> Illumined by the Holy Spirit, the author of Hebrews interprets and applies particular Old Testament passages to the church for the purpose of exhorting them to persevere in the faith.

How does the author of Hebrews understand and apply Sabbath rest to new covenant believers? The writer strings together various Old Testament passages to develop an understanding of Sabbath rest that follows a type-antitype formula. There is a definite and divinely intended (ordained) relationship between historical events, people, and institutions that anticipates fulfillment. Hebrews 3:7–4:13 interprets Sabbath rest as a type that points forward to the greater rest won in Christ. His understanding of rest as a typological pattern in the Old Testament is consistent with the way he points forward to the heavenly city in Hebrews 11–13.

### **Hebrews 3:7–4:13**

The opening verses of Hebrews signals to the recipients that they stand on the

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<sup>13</sup> Adherence to the doctrine of inerrancy as set forth in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is assumed and is the bedrock for defining hermeneutics and biblical theology in this project.

<sup>14</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 46.

riverbank of redemptive history. The author urges the church to look upstream to the ways in which God spoke to his people long ago and recognize that they are living in “these last days,” namely the days the Old Testament Prophets predicted and anticipated. God has spoken through his Son something new and more glorious than ages past. This introduction presents “a pronounced eschatological, redemptive-historical orientation to the entire document” and shapes the interpretive framework of the author.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the author brings past revelation forward and stresses its present implications for the church with fulfillment in Christ at the center of his argument.

In chapter 3, the audience is invited to consider Jesus against the backdrop of Moses and the old covenant. “Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses” and as the faithful Son over God’s house—the church—the recipients of the epistle are to hold fast to the gospel (3:3–6). F. F. Bruce emphasizes what is at stake if one disregards the Son: “But just as Christ is greater in glory than Moses (v3), so the loss incurred in rejecting Christ is greater even than that incurred in rejecting Moses. The rebels in Moses’s day missed the promised blessing of entry into an earthly Canaan, but latter-day rebellion would forfeit the greater blessings of the new age.”<sup>16</sup>

The centrality of God’s Word in these opening chapters frames Hebrews 3:7–4:13. Verse 7 opens by reminding readers of the Spirit-inspired words of Psalm 95, and 4:12 closes the pericope by expressing the powerful nature of God’s Word. Opening his quotation of Psalm 95 with “the Holy Spirit says” effectively brings this Old Testament text into the present for his readers. Craig Koester rightly says, “The mention of the Spirit in 3:7, however, has mainly to do with the way the Spirit *continues* to speak through the

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<sup>15</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God,” in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 34. See also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 116–18.

<sup>16</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 99.

text, making it a living word of God (4:12–13).”<sup>17</sup> Thus “it has immediate relevance to the community addressed.”<sup>18</sup> The author demonstrates how the church is to apply the Old Testament in light of the new covenant. Although the church is no longer under the administration of the old covenant, the relevancy of God’s Word continues in the new covenant age when understood Christologically.

The author’s unpacking of Old Testament texts reveals what Beale calls divine authorial intent. He asserts, “David may not have understood his warning to have such far reaching implications into the new covenant. However, God did and the Spirit inspired David and the writer of Hebrews to apply these verses to their audiences.”<sup>19</sup> God’s intent in the Old Testament can be known today through its application by the New Testament authors. The author’s use Psalm 95 demonstrates a Christ-centered application of an Old Testament passage to the church. “It is clear from the author’s powerful application of the psalm to the listeners that they are in real danger of possessing a similar *unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God* that was so dreadfully manifested by the wilderness generation.”<sup>20</sup> The threat is real, not hypothetical. The distinction in how the church is to understand this Psalm hinges on the inauguration of the new covenant by Christ. The recipients of Hebrews find themselves in a situation that mirrors generations past. However, Hebrews’ interpretation of Psalm 95 reveals an even greater meaning and significance to the rest referred to by the psalmist.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 254.

<sup>18</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47 (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 85.

<sup>19</sup> G. K. Beale describes “divine authorial intent as simply that God’s purposes—communicated through human authors—take interpretive precedent over the writer’s known intent in what he wrote.” G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 147.

<sup>21</sup> Gentry and Wellum observe, “As authors who wrote under divine inspiration, what they

The entire pericope of chapters 3–4 is shaped by seeing Old Testament people, events, and institutions as types that find their ultimate God-intended fulfillment in Christ. Paul Ellingworth notes that there is a pervasive exodus theme in Hebrews with an emphasis on being “in-between.”<sup>22</sup> Like the wilderness generation, the church experiences the tension of the living between salvation and ultimate rest.<sup>23</sup> The quotation of Psalm 95 and the extended discourse regarding Israel’s unbelief in the wilderness is not merely *functioning* as a paraenetic exhortation. The present reality of the church is the antitype of the wilderness event itself with a greater Joshua leading them to a greater promised land. “The tested, failed generation provides a negative mirror to the current audience, who are being tested, who stand at the threshold of God’s promised rest, and who are in danger of falling away.”<sup>24</sup> Yet the situation of the church is far more serious than the previous generation.

The rest secured by Christ for the church is that to which the Old Testament pointed and anticipated, hence its greater nature. Richard Gaffin calls the church “a congregation of wilderness-aliens” and argues that this theme is central to a right interpretation of Hebrews 3–4.<sup>25</sup> Yet he fails to see how the situation of the church is greater than the people of old. Although the fundamental need for exhortation is grounded in the reality that the church has not yet arrived, the church now lives in light of Christ’s

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wrote was God given, true, and authoritative. However, they might not, and probably did not, understand where the entire revelation was going, given the fact that God had not yet disclosed all the details of his eternal plan. Thus, as more revelation is given through later authors, we discover more of God’s plan and where that plan is going. It is for this reason that the New Testament’s interpretation of the Old Testament becomes definitive, since later texts bring with them greater clarity and understanding. In other words, we must carefully allow the New Testament to show us how the Old Testament is brought to fulfillment in Christ.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 111–12.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 74.

<sup>23</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 89.

<sup>24</sup> Jared C. Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary: Access to God in the Letter to the Hebrews and Its Priestly Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 64.

<sup>25</sup> Gaffin, “Sabbath Rest Awaits the People of God,” 38.

fulfillment work and inauguration of the rest he has achieved in his entire cross work. In Christ, Christians have already received God's promises, yet they must persevere in their journey toward the heavenly city in order to obtain them fully.<sup>26</sup>

The prevalence of warnings in the New Testament reinforces this exodus motif in order to call the church to live in light of what Christ has inaugurated in his fulfillment of the Old Testament. The church "is not immune from the recalcitrant spirit expressed by the generation in the desert,"<sup>27</sup> but the situation they face is much greater because they are living in the last days to which the Old Testament pointed. The phrase "just as" in 4:2 denotes the analogous nature of the groups being compared. The recipients of Hebrews are like Israel in the wilderness. They "are the people of God to whom the good news has been preached, but they, when juxtaposed to the wilderness generation, hear the voice of God at another time and in another situation."<sup>28</sup> Yet, the new covenant people have experienced a greater exodus and find themselves journeying toward the true and better promised land—"the city with foundations whose designer and builder is God" (Heb 11:10), something the Old Testament only looked forward to and anticipated. The wilderness of life in this fallen world is tempting God's people to turn back, much like the Israelites who preferred to turn back to Egypt rather than trust that God could bring them safely into his promises. However, now that Christ has come there is no place to turn back to.

The author exhorts his readers to guard against an unbelieving heart, tracing their situation back to the one facing Israel in the wilderness in Numbers 14—still the situation is far more serious "in these last days" now that the hope of Psalm 95 has come. Psalm 95—written much later—looks back upon the experience of the wilderness

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<sup>26</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 87.

<sup>28</sup> George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 955.

generation to remind his contemporaries why God “was angry with that generation” (3:10) and why he took an oath that, “They shall never enter my rest” (3:11). The psalm looks forward to the era in which the church now finds itself. The sharpness of the warning from Psalm 95 relies on the reality that the rest to which it pointed has come in Christ—to turn back from him would be catastrophic. The author of Hebrews relates these circumstances to his audience to foster persevering faith. The church must recognize that it is the recipient of the eschatological hope extended to Israel throughout the Old Testament. Until the consummation of God’s promised rest, believers must persevere in clinging to Christ who secures the true rest to which the land pointed (11:10; 13:14) and restores the rest of covenant relationship lost in the fall (4:4, 11).

### **Typology, Eschatology, and the Nature of God’s Rest**

The author pivots to express the superiority of the Son from yet another angle. He develops his hearers’ understanding of the nature and availability of God’s rest by constructing an argument through direct quotation and allusion from each division of the Old Testament: The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. In other words, the entire Old Testament supports his understanding of the rest theme and establishes the typological relationship between God’s rest at creation, the land, the institution of Sabbath, and the fulfillment of what they pointed to. Rather than develop his argument from a single passage, he presents an Old Testament mosaic of rest and unites them by showing how they have reached their God-intended fulfillment in Christ.<sup>29</sup> He then expands on the notion of God’s rest as a means of exhorting them to not merely avoid the sin of unbelief but to embrace the arrival of his covenant rest in Christ. Hebrews links the rest God enjoyed on the seventh day in Genesis 2:2 with the rest unbelieving Israelites failed to enter in Numbers 14. This indicates that entrance into the land pointed both backward and

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<sup>29</sup> France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” 255.

forward to something greater than acquiring property in the Middle East.

Aubrey Sequeira and Samuel Emadi's definition of typology is helpful: "Types are historical, authorially-intended, textually rooted, tied to Scripture's covenant structure, and undergo escalation from old covenant shadow to new covenant reality."<sup>30</sup> The interpretive framework for accurately discerning biblical types is guarded by a commitment to divine inspiration and a grammatical-historical hermeneutic that extends beyond the passage into the context of the entire canon of Scripture.<sup>31</sup> The author appropriates and develops types already established in the Old Testament to demonstrate their eschatological fulfillment in Christ.<sup>32</sup>

The author of Hebrews demonstrates a canonical awareness informed by the progress of redemptive history brought to fulfillment in the person and work of Christ in the new covenant. He weaves a typological tapestry of Sabbath rest out of threads drawn from the Old Testament. His exegesis is rooted in both history and the text making clear the prophetic and predictive nature of the Sabbath. Hebrews sheds light on numerous shadows that have found their substance in Christ: the priesthood, temple, exodus, land, and Sabbath. There are no grounds to conclude that the institution of the Sabbath is a specific day of rest that continues in the new covenant era according to the context of Hebrews. The priesthood, temple, and sacrifices have come to their designed end in

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<sup>30</sup> Aubrey Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, "Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (January 2017): 12. See also E. Earle Ellis, foreword to *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, by Leonhard Goppelt, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), ix–xx; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 129–37; James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Virgin Will Conceive: Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18–23," in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 228–47; David Schrock, "What Designates a Valid Type? A Christotelic, Covenantal Proposal," *Southeastern Theological Review* 5, no. 1 (Summer 2014): 3–26.

<sup>31</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Harris, *Hebrews*, 6. Harris terms this "typological trajectory": "By intentionally choosing later theological reflections on earlier historical events, the author can establish a typological trajectory from *within* the OT that points beyond itself toward its fulfillment in Christ" (emphasis original). In this sense, the author of Hebrews is not doing anything novel with the Old Testament passages quoted. He merely shows the connections already presently established by Moses and David in order to present a Christological interpretation of rest.

Christ according to the author. Each is a type pointing to Christ who is greater in every way. He treats the Sabbath in the same manner. He concludes that true and final rest has come in him.

The author's quotation of Genesis 2:2 indicates that the Sabbath must be understood as an expression of a greater reality that originated at creation. His argument provides a redemptive-historical interpretation of covenant rest under the new covenant that far surpasses Sabbath observance under the old. The rest enjoyed by God's people under the law-covenant was a sign and shadow that looked backward and forward.<sup>33</sup> God's rest in Genesis 2 is portrayed by Moses as entering into covenant relationship with humanity.<sup>34</sup> The rest theme of the Old Testament is rooted in the covenant rest established at the dawn of creation. God's rest at creation is the lens through which he views all other references to rest in the Old Testament (i.e. Sabbath, land, temple, and kingdom). The author of Hebrews unites God's purposes for creation with his redemptive work in Christ. God's rest in Genesis 2:2 is the archetypal pattern of the rest he established in Christ through the new covenant. God's rest at creation becomes prospective after the fall and is tied to his promise of redemption and covenant restoration. The creation week serves as the pattern for the Israelite week under the old covenant; a weekly reminder that the goal of creation is to join God in covenant rest that was lost because of sin.

James Dennison coined the term "pre-redemptive eschatology" to express the idea that there is a prior goal for creation that preceded the fall and so, redemption. "There is an absolute end posited for the universe before and apart from sin. The

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<sup>33</sup> Jason S. DeRouchie, "Reflections on the Lasting Message of the Decalogue," in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 431. Gamble, "A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God," 39. This assertion will be examined further in the next chapter.

<sup>34</sup> For a convincing exegesis of Gen 1–3 that demonstrates such a covenant relationship between God and man at creation, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 211–38. More will be said about this in the next chapter.



universe, as created, was only a beginning, the meaning of which was not perpetuation, but attainment.”<sup>35</sup> The perpetual rest of the seventh day is presented as the goal of creation without reference to the fall; “it is a consummation order where sin and death are not relevant or conditional factors.”<sup>36</sup> Hebrews views God’s rest at creation as the enjoyment of covenant relationship unhindered by sin. Man was created for the purpose of enjoying this covenant relationship. Christ’s redeeming work is the restoration of this covenant rest and in fact, is greater than that which was lost.

Revelation looks back at the garden utopia of Genesis 1–2 as the reference point for the consummation of all things. William Dumbrell asserts: “in terms of biblical eschatology, moving from localized Eden in Genesis 2 to the new creation as a universal Eden in Revelation 22:1–5” is God’s purpose from the start.<sup>37</sup> Eden is the place of God’s presence where his image-bearers enjoy access and fellowship in his resting presence. God’s ordinance to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and exercise dominion are a commission to expand Eden throughout the world. G. K. Beale argues, “God’s ultimate goal in creation was to magnify his glory throughout the earth by means of his faithful image-bearers inhabiting the world in obedience to the divine mandate.”<sup>38</sup> Christ’s redeeming work is the recovery of God’s creation purposes and the restoration of sinful man into God’s covenant presence. Thus, coming to him is the equivalent of entering God’s rest (Matt 11:28–30). Old Testament rest was a type pointing forward to this greater rest in Christ.

The seventh day of creation is distinct from the previous six in two important

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<sup>35</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 73.

<sup>36</sup> Gaffin, “Sabbath Rest Awaits the People of God,” 48.

<sup>37</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 20.

<sup>38</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 81–82.

ways. First, it is the only day of which it is said, “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (Gen. 2:3). For the first time in the biblical narrative, something is declared, “holy.”<sup>39</sup> The seventh day is unique because it is the day God’s work was finished and he entered into his rest. The distinctive nature of the final day of creation suggests that God’s rest is the climax of the creation account. The purpose of creating was to enter into covenant relationship with those created in his image the previous day. Second, it is the only day devoid of the closing formula, “And there was evening and there was morning,” followed by the notation of which day was completed. Schreiner and others suggest significance to the absence of this formula. In a sense, the seventh day never ended.<sup>40</sup> God’s covenant rest with man was intended to be everlasting. The covenant relationship that was lost in the fall has been restored again in Christ but is even better than what was lost.

Gaffin—and others—wrongly conclude that the Sabbath is a creation mandate in Genesis 2. He asserts from Hebrews: “It appears that in Gen. 2:2b (in its context) he finds not only a reference to the existence of God’s rest, but the *design* and *mandate* that others should enter and share it.”<sup>41</sup> There is no warrant for this conclusion in Genesis 2. Were God’s rest a mandate for humanity to rest one day in seven, one would expect to see a command or observance of Sabbath prior to Exodus 16. No such observance is present in the text because that is not the point. There is no imperative for man to join God in his rest in Genesis. God places Adam into his covenant rest to fulfill his mandate as a king-priest in order to fill the earth and exercise dominion (Gen 2:15). The next chapter will

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<sup>39</sup> George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 957.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers,” in *Progressive Covenantalism*, ed. Stephen P. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 161.

<sup>41</sup> Gaffin, “Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God,” 39–40. Randall Gleason says, “when God provided rest for himself he also provided rest for his people.” However, Gleason wrongly concludes from this that the institution of the Sabbath—articulated further in the Mosaic law—is a mandate for all of humanity. Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7–4:11,” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 627 (July–September 2000), 298.

unpack this further.

Hebrews helps us understand that God’s rest in Genesis 2 is the archetype and pattern of covenant rest that God has restored through the redemptive work of Christ. Rest in Christ is better than what was lost. Therefore, they must hold their “original confidence firm to the end” (3:14). The author’s argument throughout the epistle is that if they return to the shadows of the old covenant, they forfeit the greater reward secured under the new covenant (10:35). Hebrews’ exhortation is not grounded in a creation mandate. It is rooted in the full and final fulfillment that Christ has accomplished.

In 4:9 the author makes a redemptive-historical argument that in the Old Testament the ultimate recovery of covenant rest never occurred but was anticipated. He presents the various Old Testament expressions of rest as a pattern to demonstrate that true and final rest was still anticipated in the future. Psalm 95 reveals that the Old Testament anticipated a future rest—Joshua did not give them true rest. Hebrews’ argument is this: now that Christ has come, the future rest of Psalm 95 has arrived. The author is exhorting the church to have faith in Christ and press on to the finish line. To return to old patterns is equivalent to unbelief (3:19).

Some have argued that verse 10 refers specifically to Christ, not generally to “whoever” as the ESV renders it.<sup>42</sup> Nicolas Moore develops an interesting argument in favor of a Christological reading, linking the rest motif to the surrounding context and the session of Christ drawn from Psalm 110 in Hebrews. Moore suggests that the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God in verse 10 points to the finished work of Christ

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<sup>42</sup> Nicolas J. Moore notes that the famous Puritan John Owen understood the one who entered to be Christ in Owen’s commentary on Hebrews. See Nicolas J. Moore, “Jesus as ‘the One Who Entered His Rest’: The Christological Reading of Hebrews 4.10,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36, no. 4 (2014): 383–400. See also John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980). Gareth Cockerill acknowledges the possibility, but most commentators have not seen the warrant for doing so. See Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 211–12.

who has gone before us and entered God's rest.<sup>43</sup> Understood this way, the author links the completed priestly work of Christ that bookends 3:7–4:13 with the more developed Christology found later in 6:20 and 10:11–23. The significance of this argument for chapter 4 is that it further develops the author's case: Christ is superior to Moses and Joshua as the one who ultimately and finally opened the way for God's people to enter God's rest.<sup>44</sup> Moore's interpretation is compelling and is not ruled out by the text. If indeed verse 10 refers to Christ resting from his salvific work, it provides the grounds for the exhortation that follows in verse 11. The church can have confidence to enter the rest that her apostle and high priest (3:1) has fully secured.

In Christ they have already entered the rest to which the Old Testament looked forward to. In verse 10, the author coins a phrase used only here in the Bible: "sabbatismos" translated "Sabbath-rest."<sup>45</sup> Given the backdrop of the entire biblical witness related to the Sabbath, verse 11 strikes a chord of irony at this point in his argument. Rather than calling the church to cease from work, the new covenant community is exhorted to "strive" with vigor in order to remain in the rest to which the Sabbath pointed.<sup>46</sup> Of any discourse in the New Testament, the warning passage of Hebrews 3–4 provides the most natural opportunity to exhort the church to continue to observe the Sabbath in anticipation of the eschatological reality to which it points. No such exhortation follows. The author's clear purpose is not to promote ceasing from work one day in seven, but persevering in the faith in order to reach the full and final rest

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<sup>43</sup> Moore, "Jesus as 'the One Who Entered His Rest,'" 389–91.

<sup>44</sup> Moore, "Jesus as 'the One Who Entered His Rest,'" 397.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and ed. F. W. Danker, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 909.

<sup>46</sup> The word used here for "strive" means to "be zealous, eager." Harris asserts, "Together with v. 10, this v. suggests that the effort (e.g., "work" in v. 10) is perseverance." Harris, *Hebrews*, 101. This interpretation most closely fits the context of the passage, with perseverance being understood as the broad application of the exhortation. The author does not expand on this idea by articulating the specific "work" that believers are to busy themselves with in order to persevere. That is not his objective. He relies on the rest of the New Testament's teaching to bear this out. His aim is to stimulate faith in Christ.

secured by Christ.<sup>47</sup> The “wilderness-aliens” of the new covenant community are called to *strive* in order to arrive at the ultimate cessation of work in the age to come. The tenor of the message of Hebrews is consistently “The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). In Christ, they have already entered God’s rest. If they continue by faith in the rest inaugurated by Christ, they will enjoy the consummation of final rest on the last day.

Gaffin and Beale both argue for a continuation of Sabbath observance as a sign of faith in the eschatological promise of rest.<sup>48</sup> Schreiner rightly argues: “even though the complete new covenant blessings are not consummated, believers do not continue to offer sacrifices; and in the same way they are not obligated to observe the Sabbath, for now that the fulfillment has come, the type has ceased.”<sup>49</sup> The author of Hebrews interprets the Sabbath as a type within the stream of redemptive history. Now that the substance has come, the shadow no longer has any bearing on the people of God because it has reached its God-intended fulfillment in Christ. On this point, the writer of Hebrews agrees with the thrust of Paul’s argument in Colossians 2:16–17.<sup>50</sup> Under the new covenant the church “observes” the Sabbath by coming to and remaining in Christ by faith, (Matt 11:28-30).<sup>51</sup> He fulfills the Sabbath by restoring covenant rest that was lost in the fall.

Hebrews 4:1 begins with “While the promise of rest still stands,” namely, the promised rest from the Old Testament that is now fulfilled in Christ. The author’s exhortation that the church “fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” in

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<sup>47</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, “The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ,” in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, ed. Christopher John Donato (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 350.

<sup>48</sup> Gaffin, “Sabbath Rest Awaits the People of God,” 47; Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 796.

<sup>49</sup> Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 185.

<sup>50</sup> The Pauline corpus is examined in chap. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Arguments in favor of observing Sunday as the Christian Sabbath are grounded in the assertion that the sign continues until the consummation. This debate is discussed in chap. 6.

4:1 is followed by the assurance that “we who have believed enter that rest” in 4:3. This reveals that he understands rest in the Old Testament as a progressively expanding concept. This is made clear by his interpretation of God’s rest in 4:3b and following. His explanation presents two complementary options as to what rest in Christ is: (1) a place and (2) a state of being.<sup>52</sup> Hebrews appears to have both in view.

The journey toward the heavenly city (11:10, 13–16) and exhortation to “enter that rest” in verse 11 indicates that rest is associated with a place, namely the new creation. Yet, verse 10 suggests that it is more than a place. It is the condition whereby the saints have ceased from their work as God did from his because of the covenant relationship he has re-established in Christ. Schreiner relates verse 10 to the difficulty that the curse introduced to man’s work in Genesis 3 when he defines rest as “an everlasting rest, a rest that means the cessation from the toil and labor of life in this world.”<sup>53</sup> The effects of sin’s curse have been lifted by Christ. Rest in the new covenant has begun through the redeeming work of Christ and is entered into now by faith. Dumbrell asserts: “Sabbath expresses the divine intention for creation (see Gen 2:1–4a) and thus directs attention to what will be realized in the future.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, the Sabbath sign of the old covenant points back to the covenant relationship that was lost in the fall. The sign of the old covenant is God’s promise to restore the relationship that was broken by sin.<sup>55</sup> Where the first Adam failed, the second Adam succeeded and opens the way back into the rest of God’s presence—the ultimate goal of creation from the start.

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<sup>52</sup> Harris, *Hebrews*, 95. See also Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130, no. 518 (April 1973): 4.

<sup>53</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 148.

<sup>54</sup> Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 40. Dumbrell argues, “Sabbath and rest coalesce as factors expressing the purpose and result of the exodus.” Schreiner contends that in light of the fulfillment of that which the exodus pointed to, namely Christ’s sacrifice to free sinners from the bondage of sin, new covenant believers see the seventh day as eschatological in nature. Thus the Sabbath points to new creation rest. Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 161.

The already-not yet tension that runs through the New Testament provides the framework for this question: To what degree has the church been brought into God's rest? Many scholars conclude that entrance into God's promised rest is entirely future.<sup>56</sup> The arguments in favor of this reading should not be dismissed out of hand. O'Brien summarizes this position with several observations from the text.<sup>57</sup> First, the promise to enter God's rest remains and is ongoing. Second, the promise has not yet been obtained. Third, the present tense of 4:3 does not necessarily designate the present time. Fourth, the context of the entire pericope is to cultivate perseverance in the saints so they might enter God's rest. Fifth, entering rest depends upon striving to do so according to 4:11. Finally, believers do not rest from their works until they enter God's rest.

However, Schreiner contends that the future consummation must be kept in tension with the present reality inaugurated by Christ.<sup>58</sup> Schreiner balances O'Brien's reading by highlighting that elsewhere the author speaks of believers *already* being citizens of the heavenly eschatological city.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the premise of the author's argument is grounded in the present reality of the new covenant. His emphasis on "today" from Psalm 95 is to establish that the Old Testament looked forward to the day in which the church is now living. Fulfillment has come in Jesus Christ.

The church "has entered God's rest" in Christ (4:11). God's rest at creation is the archetype of the new covenant relationship ushered in by Christ. The consummation of the Christian's rest is certainly future, in the same way that the believer's entrance into the heavenly city is future. Yet, the consistent pattern established by the writers of the

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<sup>56</sup> O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 165–66; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 246; Gaffin, "Sabbath Rest Awaits the People of God," 41–44; Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary*, 60–69; John Laansma, "I Will Give You Rest," 387.

<sup>57</sup> O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 165–66. The following list is selected from his summary argument in favor of a strict future fulfillment.

<sup>58</sup> Schreiner, "Good-bye and Hello," 184.

<sup>59</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 137; "Good-bye and Hello," 185.

New Testament is that the present reality of blessing in Christ awaits a fuller and more glorious experience in the age to come.<sup>60</sup> Guthrie favors this reading by connecting the author's view of the ongoing nature of the seventh day of creation, the ever-present availability to enter God's rest, and the emphasis upon responding "today" throughout the passage.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, he notes over twenty verbal parallels between Hebrews 3:1–4:13 and 10:19–25 making the case that in the author's mind, entrance into God's rest is none other than entrance into the new covenant.<sup>62</sup> These considerations favor a present experience of God's rest without compromising the overall message of Hebrews that looks ahead to the future heavenly city as the moment of total consummation.

One potential casualty of emphasizing a future-only fulfillment is a deficient understanding that believers presently enjoy rest under the Lordship of Christ.<sup>63</sup> The inauguration of the new covenant places the church firmly in the sphere of God's rest. The author presents this glorious truth to motivate his audience to persevere. An overemphasis on the future unintentionally downplays the reality that believers now enjoy access to the presence of God through Christ, the very conclusion the author makes in 4:16.<sup>64</sup> Whether one holds to a strict future fulfillment or maintains the already-not yet tension, the author's larger aim in the book is to articulate the magnificent wonders that have arrived in Christ and await the church in fullness if they run the race to the end. The sin of unbelief endangers the recipients, so they must recognize what is at stake with soberness, and exercise persevering faith to reach God's full and final rest.

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<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere in Hebrews salvation itself is understood as both a present reality with a future completion (Heb 7:25). In 2 Cor 5:17 Paul claims that in Christ one is a new creation, yet there awaits a future day when all things will be made new. In Eph 2:6 the Christian is already seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

<sup>61</sup> Guthrie, "Hebrews," 959.

<sup>62</sup> Guthrie, "Hebrews," 960.

<sup>63</sup> DeRouchie, "Making the Ten Count," 431.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 596.



The perpetuation of Sabbath observance is another byproduct of understanding the promise of rest as solely in the future. Beale acknowledges that Sabbath observance under the old covenant served a typological function that has been fulfilled in Christ. Nevertheless, he argues that the fourth commandment is based upon a creation ordinance or mandate.<sup>65</sup> Beale's argument is that a weekly Sabbath continues for the purpose of pointing forward to the consummation. Gaffin likewise asserts that the eschatological nature of God's rest grounds its continued function for the church today.<sup>66</sup> Schreiner rightly counters these argument when he says, "The rest is fundamentally eschatological, and yet the eschaton has penetrated the present."<sup>67</sup> There is no textual warrant in Hebrews 3–4 (or elsewhere in the New Testament) that the church is to observe the Sabbath until Christ returns. There is no indication of a transference of practice under the new covenant. Even if the rest Christ has secured is entirely future, it does not necessitate a weekly sign be maintained by Christians until that rest is fulfilled. The sign of the old covenant has now been displaced in the new. The author's entire argument is grounded in the reality that God's promised rest is present in Christ and the old institutions have completed their purpose of pointing to him. In fact, the temptation to return to old covenant practice is what the author is combatting.

The author's presentation of Sabbath rest under the new covenant demonstrates the nature and purpose of God's promised rest for his people. It is the enjoyment of his covenant presence made possible by Christ's redeeming work. Hebrews 3–4 is fundamentally concerned with presenting new covenant realities that make returning to the types and shadows impossible. The author is unconcerned with re-establishing an old

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<sup>65</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 793. Arguments like Beale's depend upon what is referred to as a creation mandate. The present study rejects the creation mandate position as noted already. An investigation of the Pentateuch's presentation of the creation account will be addressed in chapter 3.

<sup>66</sup> Gaffin, "Sabbath Rest Awaits the People of God," 47.

<sup>67</sup> Schreiner, "Good-bye and Hello," 184.

covenant sign under the auspices of the new covenant.

The author of Hebrews makes his argument based on a redemptive-historical understanding of the progressive and unfolding nature of God’s covenants. Gentry and Wellum argue that greater realities have been introduced through the inauguration of the new covenant era even though consummation awaits.<sup>68</sup> Schreiner rightly concludes, “Now that fulfilment has come the type has passed away.”<sup>69</sup> The author of Hebrews grounds his argument about the priesthood, sacrifices, temple, and other Old Testament institutions in the fact that Christ has ushered in the new covenant era, making the old obsolete (7:12; 8:6–13). To deviate from this line of reasoning with regard to the Sabbath is unwarranted by the text. In fact, the author’s decisive conclusion that the old covenant is obsolete (8:13) would be contravened by a continued practice of the very sign of that covenant. Arguments for continued Sabbath observance (on a different day of the week no less) seem to be brought to the text based on prior theological commitments and lack hermeneutical consistency with the author’s arguments throughout the book.

### **Hebrews 3–4 and the Church Today**

If Sabbath observance is no longer binding on Christians today, how is the church to be faithful to adhere to the author’s exhortation? What can be gleaned from the author’s interpretation and application of the Old Testament? These questions will be addressed more fully as the present study progresses. However, a few conclusions can be made at this point.

Hebrews makes clear that the promises revealed in the Old Testament find their fullest expression and ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The historical events, institutions, and people of the Old Testament were ordained by God as types to be

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<sup>68</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 135.

<sup>69</sup> Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 182. Against Gamble.

fulfilled by Jesus Christ. The institution of the Sabbath under the old covenant finds its fullest expression and ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. No other type declared as fulfilled in Christ by the New Testament is to be maintained by the new covenant community. However, there is freedom to disagree on this issue (Rom 14:4; Col 2:16). The gospel is to fuel charity and love among the body (Rom 14:19). Whether or not one believes the Sabbath issue is a matter of conscience and freedom, humility marked by the fruit of gentleness and love ought to characterize any disagreement on interpretation and application of a third tier issue.<sup>70</sup> Hebrews 3–4 exhorts the church to embrace Christ as the fulfillment of God’s promised rest. The author’s concern is fidelity to him not whether or not the church preserves an Old Testament practice. In that sense, he does not prohibit or promote Sabbath observance under the new covenant. To argue in either direction reaches beyond what the text says.

God’s promised rest is available now in Jesus Christ. The church has already entered God’s rest through him. The author’s chief concern is perseverance in faith. Unbelief—the very thing that prevented the wilderness generation from entrance into God’s rest—threatens to harden hearts. To “strive to enter that rest” (4:11) is to exercise faith “today,” a subject he returns to in chapter 11 as a means of exhorting believers to “run with endurance” (12:1). They are to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:12). As the church gathers regularly (10:25) they are to “exhort one another” (3:13), “stir up one another to love and good works” (10:24), and “encourage one another” (10:25). The weight of the warning and earnestness of his exhortation ought to shape pastoral ministry in the local church. If Moore is correct and Jesus is our forerunner into God’s rest, we can be assured that entrance does not depend

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<sup>70</sup> The reference to “third tier” is tied to R. Albert Mohler Jr.’s proposed ordering of theological issues in addressing and determining fellowship in the church. “Third order issues are doctrines over which Christians may disagree and remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations.” R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Disappearance of God: Dangerous Beliefs in the New Spiritual Openness* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2009), 6.

on our striving, but on faith in him. The urgency of the warning and the glory of this reality are compelling.

Hebrews 3–4 demonstrates how the church relates to the Old Testament. The author’s interpretation and application of the Old Testament serves as a model for the church. Teaching and preaching that is faithful to the text will be Christological and maintain the same urgency as Hebrews. In other words, all of Scripture—including the Old Testament—is to be interpreted as Christian Scripture. In that sense, the unity of the Bible according to the progression of the covenants influences interpretation and application for the church today.<sup>71</sup>

The dire warning of Psalm 95 applies to the recipients of Hebrews because the Spirit continues to speak *today*. Psalm 95 pointed to a future rest that has now come in Christ. “Today” functions to exhort the church to remain in the promised rest that is now here in Christ. The writer of Hebrews was addressing a historical situation in which the audience was struggling to keep the faith in the midst of suffering and pressure to revert back to Judaism. Yet, his hermeneutic in applying the Old Testament to his hearers is the same interpretive method one ought to employ for the church today. The Holy Spirit spoke first through the Psalmist to Israel, then through Hebrews to the early church; he continues to speak to the church today. The author exemplifies the truth that “all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable” (2 Tim 3:16).

R. T. France’s analysis of the author’s use of Psalm 95 is helpful.<sup>72</sup> Just as the psalmist assumed the wilderness events typified the experience of later generations, the author of Hebrews employs the psalm as an exhortation to his. The pastoral impact of the psalm is amplified by the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant. “In

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<sup>71</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 128.

<sup>72</sup> The following conclusions depend heavily upon France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” 268–72.

as much as their leader is now no less than the Son of God, their response to him and to the words of God which they hear through him is of even more ultimate significance. The ‘today’ of which the psalmist speaks is for them a crucial time of decision; there has never before been a ‘today’ of such ultimate significance.”<sup>73</sup>

The author’s repeated use of *today* throughout the warning of chapters 3–4 is also instructive for the church. He highlights the *present* need to hear, believe, and obey God’s Word (4:1–3). *Today* is repeated five times in twenty verses. The reason for this is obvious: perseverance is a present-day concern because the fulfillment of God’s promised rest has arrived. This is established by the command that the church exhort one another “as long as it is called ‘today,’” in 3:13 and his later focus on the ongoing nature of God’s invitation in 4:6–7. The rest the psalmist looked forward to has arrived in Jesus Christ.

God’s Word functions to foster an urgent response from his people. William Plumer—commenting on Psalm 95—says, “In the scriptures amazing urgency is manifest that men should pay immediate attention to the concerns of their souls, and that they should today hear God’s voice, v. 7.”<sup>74</sup> The church is to exhort one another with God’s Word as his ordained means of persevering in the faith. The seriousness of such a warning ought to lead to immediate action corporately and individually. Churches that only call unbelievers to repentance and faith and fail to exhort believers to do so continually, are out of step with the pastoral ministry modeled in Hebrews. *Today* has now come in Christ. The opportunity to respond to Christ is today. They must cultivate responsiveness in the present or else run the risk of hardness of heart (3:13).<sup>75</sup> Both the Old and New Testaments are relevant for the church today because they are God’s Word. Well-known pastors diminish the veracity and relevance of the Old Testament in the lives

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<sup>73</sup> France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” 270.

<sup>74</sup> William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1866), 876.

<sup>75</sup> France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” 270.

of Christians because they fail to acknowledge this truth. The living and active Word of God continues to speak to God's people today and should be heeded with the same eagerness the author of Hebrews expected of his audience. All Scripture must remain central to the ministry of the local church or else it runs the risk of being like the unbelieving generation in the wilderness

Hebrews is not a theological dissertation, though it is often approached as one. It is a letter written to the church that brings theological realities to bear upon everyday Christian living. Two hortatory exhortations draw the entire passage together. In light of God's warning, amplified by the landscape of a better promise, the author calls them to fear the Lord in 4:1. He gives feet to this exhortation in verse 13, reminding them of their accountability before the Lord. Christians seeking to apply and obey these exhortations will maintain a reverence and fear of the Lord.

Faithful shepherds will follow the example of the author by regularly warning the sheep of the consequences of unbelief. Pastors must be discerning of their flocks as they do so, lest they crush those weak in conscience or fail to confront those who trample upon God's Word by their lifestyle. The promise of God's rest is both a glorious reality for the saint and a reminder that it has yet to come in its fullness. Pastors must be compelled by this tension and proclaim the promises and judgments of God to encourage a sober-minded fear of the Lord. The author's objective is not to articulate a sort of new covenant law regarding Sabbath observance for the church, but to motivate the worship of Christ and mitigate apostasy.

The author of Hebrews calls the church to exhort one another as long as it is called "today." The regular gathering of the body most effectively enables the saints to fulfill this exhortation. The corporate nature of the exhortation in 3:13 is inescapable. The centrality of the local church for the perseverance of the saints undergirds the entire

letter.<sup>76</sup> A commitment to the local church is to characterize all believers in order to fulfill the author's appeal. Confidence that one will enter God's rest is directly related to being "united by faith with those who listened" (4:2). "The doctrine of perseverance is no 'a priori guarantee' that enables believers 'to get along without admonitions and warnings.'" <sup>77</sup> The warnings in Hebrews are to be received and heeded corporately.

Finally, advocates of a Sabbath as fulfilled in Christ view are equally concerned with the reality that finite creatures would be wise to maintain balance between work and rest.<sup>78</sup> The Sabbath was made for man, not only to promote faithful remembrance of redemption toward the goal of consummation, but to practically benefit fallen creatures whose work is now marked by pain and sweat (Gen 3:17–19). Anticipation of full and final rest in the heavenly city does not require a ceasing from work one day in seven. However, freedom in Christ does not justify a lack of stewardship of our time and bodies. Viewed rightly, in the context of the United States where Sundays continue to enjoy an unusual reprieve from the demands of the work week, Christians may mark off the Lord's Day as an opportunity for spiritual and physical refreshment.

### Conclusion

Hebrews provides the most comprehensive treatment of Sabbath rest in the New Testament. His purpose is to preserve faith and stimulate obedience in the saints. God's rest is an eschatological state established archetypically at creation and fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Yet his theology is not articulated for theology's sake. The purpose of this sermonic letter is to exhort the church to run the race with endurance, striving together in

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<sup>76</sup> The plural, inclusive language presupposes corporate adherence in the context of life in the local church: 2:1; 3:1, 12–13; 4:1, 11, 14; 6:1, 18; 10:19–25; 12:1–15, 25–28; 13:1–17.

<sup>77</sup> Christopher W. Cowan, "The Warning Passages of Hebrews and the New Covenant Community," in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 205.

<sup>78</sup> See Schreiner, "Good-bye and Hello," 188; see also Blomberg, "The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ," 352–55.

the unity of the gospel by the means of grace God has established in the life of the body: the ministry of the Word, regularly assembling, and ongoing exhortation. Jesus Christ is the true and better Sabbath. The church must remain united to him by faith.

In this chapter, I sought to provide a broad overview of the theme of rest by beginning with Scripture's conclusion on this theological reality. The next chapter will take our study to the beginning to take a closer look at how Moses presents rest in the Pentateuch and lays the groundwork for how the remainder of the Bible presents rest as a type of what has now been fulfilled in Christ through the new covenant.



### CHAPTER 3

#### SABBATH REST IN THE PENTATEUCH

Hebrews is a masterwork in biblical interpretation and application. The author demonstrates a Christological reading of the Old Testament and exemplifies the hermeneutic tradition of the New Testament Church.<sup>1</sup> Hebrews presents an interpretation of Genesis 2:2 that unites God's purposes for creation with his redemptive work in Christ. In the previous chapter we gave a broad overview of the new covenant's fulfillment of God's rest secured by Jesus Christ. This chapter will investigate what Genesis 1–2 teaches about God's rest and its purpose for humanity.

Hebrews 4 goes back to creation to show that God's rest is the archetype of all rest that follows in the biblical storyline and culminates in the person and work of Christ. Hebrews' extensive appropriation of Old Testament texts indicates that the opening chapters of Scripture anticipate an expansion of what was then only revealed in seed form. Warren Austin Gage asserts, "If the author of Hebrews assumes that beginning with Abel men of faith have believed in and looked for the heavenly city, then surely the Old Testament must contain explicit teaching about it."<sup>2</sup> The objective of this chapter is to demonstrate that God's rest in Genesis 1–2 is explicitly protological once rest is lost in the fall. The protological nature of rest carries through every expression of this theme through the Old Testament.

Hebrews demonstrates that Moses's presentation of rest in the Pentateuch lays

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<sup>1</sup> R. T. France, "The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor," *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 2 (November 1996): 250.

<sup>2</sup> Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter Books, 1984), 49.

the groundwork for Psalm 95. The fourth commandment directs Israel to look back at God's rest at creation and remember the covenant relationship that was lost in the fall. The Sabbath also commands God's people to remember his redeeming work in order to look forward to the covenant rest he promises to provide in the land. As the Old Testament unfolds and God's rest still remains in the future (Ps 95) it becomes clear that something greater than the land awaits God's people.

Hebrews 3–4 follows the plotline of Scripture through the covenantal unfolding of God's purposes worked out in redemptive history—from Genesis to Christ. In the last chapter we traced the author's argument to show the new covenant's conclusion: God's rest is an eschatological state established archetypically at creation and fulfilled by Jesus Christ. The author appeals to creation to ground his argument in 4:4. In this chapter we will explore the Pentateuch to confirm the conclusions of the previous chapter's study of Hebrews 3–4. Hebrews' conclusions regarding rest help the church understand the introduction of the Sabbath and its function in the biblical storyline. To validate this thesis, an exposition of Genesis 2:1–3 will reveal Moses's understanding of God's creative purposes and their relationship to the Sabbath under the old covenant in God's redemptive program. Other key texts in the Pentateuch will be considered in view of their relationship to Genesis 2:1–3 with the aim of showing the “explicit teaching” the author of Hebrews relied upon for his interpretation of Sabbath rest.

One qualification is worth mentioning regarding the approach of this study on the Sabbath in the Pentateuch. Our study of the Pentateuch involves the whole Pentateuch because it comes to us in its final inspired form as an entire book. Some details of the text must be zoomed in on in order to gain an accurate understanding of the theology of the Pentateuch. However, the overall approach of this chapter will endeavor to zoom out and observe big picture themes to help readers grasp the biblical narrative of the Sabbath. Therefore, the approach taken here will not survey the various commands associated with Sabbath observance under the old covenant. T. Desmond Alexander's observation

explains this approach:

The scholarly tendency to “atomize” biblical texts is often detrimental to understanding them. By stripping passages out of their literary contexts meanings are imposed upon them that were never intended by their authors . . . , for biblical scholarship as a whole has not articulated clearly the major themes that run throughout Scripture. Since these themes were an integral part of the thought world of the biblical authors, an appreciation of them may significantly alter our reading of individual books.<sup>3</sup>

The Sabbath is introduced to the covenant community within the context of “the thought world” of Moses. Tracing the interrelated themes of rest, tabernacle/temple, and royal priesthood provides insight concerning Hebrews’ treatment of Sabbath rest within the literary context of the Old Testament.

### **Creation: Protology and Eschatology**

The opening chapters of Genesis function as an introduction to the book, the Pentateuch, the Old Testament, and ultimately the entire Bible. It must be read with this in mind.<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1–2 is filled with anticipatory activity: the very nature of a beginning anticipates an end (1:1). Geerhardus Vos is right: “Eschatology is not necessarily bound up with soteriology. So conceived, it does not take into account that a whole chapter of eschatology is written before sin. Thus, it is not merely an omission to ignore the pre-redemptive eschatology; it is to place the sequel in the wrong place.”<sup>5</sup> The creation narrative sets the trajectory for God’s purposes. Vos argues that consummation is the aim of eschatology not mere restoration. The subsequent fall of humanity into sin accompanied by God’s promise to destroy the serpent anticipates redemptive work to restore and *complete* the purposes inaugurated by God in the creative week.

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<sup>3</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 11.

<sup>4</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 81. Sailhamer argues that Moses arranged Gen 1–11 to serve as an introduction of key themes, narratives, and theological purposes. The covenants are “marked off as the way to the new Creation.”

<sup>5</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 73.

Understanding what Moses portrays during the week of creation—specifically the role and function of the seventh day—will lay the groundwork for an interpretation of the Sabbath across the canon of Scripture.

God’s rest in Genesis is archetypical. The goal and purpose for creation is joining God in covenant relationship. This covenant rest was subsequently threatened by the fall and to be restored through the finished work of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> The seventh day is the capstone of the creation week. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum express the significance of the seventh day: “The account of creation does not conclude with man and his mandate, for humankind is not the consummation of all things, even though he is the agent through whom the aims of creation will be realized.”<sup>7</sup> The space given to this final day by Moses is indicative of its importance to God’s agenda for creation. God’s rest becomes prospective when rest is lost at the fall. Moses’s presentation of the creation account contains several features that validate this claim. The dawning of the seventh day is markedly different from every other day. Several features of Genesis 2:1–3 set it apart from days 1–6.

First, the absence of the concluding formula “And there was evening and there was morning,” followed by the notation of which day was completed, suggests distinctiveness.<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Mathews concludes, “Theologically the absence of the refrain implies that creation was intended to enjoy a perpetual rest provided by God, although

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<sup>6</sup> G. K. Beale rightly understands that “the ultimate goal of humanity was to enter into the kind of consummative rest into which God himself had entered (Gen. 2:2).” G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 280.

<sup>7</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 244.

<sup>8</sup> Most interpreters see hints of eternity in the unique way the seventh day is presented by Moses. See Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 53; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 181; John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis–Leviticus*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 72.

that rest was disrupted by human sin.”<sup>9</sup> God’s rest is not presented as perpetual inactivity. The creative work of God flows into a state of completion. Yet, he continues his work of sustaining the universe and sovereignly directing history. God’s rest is his entering into the enjoyment of covenant relationship with humanity. Some of the features of this will be unpacked below.

Second, God does not speak or create on the seventh day. The only activity God performs is blessing and sanctifying. Third, the number seven features prominently in chapters 1–2, particularly on the seventh day. Numerous scholars have noted that the form and content of the passage is structured around the number that denotes completion which builds toward the climax of the account in 2:1–3.<sup>10</sup> Reference is made to the seventh day three times in verses 1–3, each time using seven words.<sup>11</sup> Not only is the creation pericope structured around the number seven, readers are repeatedly told that God completed his work and rested on the seventh day in 2:1–3 linking the two concepts together. Moses’s emphasis on the “seventh” day signifies its uniqueness among the rest of the days. Such an emphasis is intended to convey the perfection or completion of God’s work in making the heavens and the earth. There is nothing more to do but to take his rightful place on the throne and enjoy all that he has made.<sup>12</sup>

That God “blessed the seventh day and made it holy” is another unique feature

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<sup>9</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 176.

<sup>10</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 181; Harrold H. P. Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1982), 29; Jeffrey Morrow, “Creation as Temple-Building and Work as Liturgy in Genesis 1–3,” *Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009), 1–3.

<sup>11</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 6–7. Further, Mathews shows that the very structure of vv. 2–3 is intended to connote completion: vv. 2–3 “contain four lines, the first three of which are parallel, each possessing seven words (in the Hebrew), with the midpoint of each line having the same phrase, ‘the seventh day.’” Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 176.

<sup>12</sup> Jason S. DeRouchie, “Making the Ten Count: Reflections on the Lasting Message of the Decalogue,” in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 429.

that sets day seven apart from the others. To this point in the narrative God's blessing has only been given to enable creation to fulfill his mandate to fill the earth (1:22, 28). The next appearance of God's blessing signifies his gracious activity to bring man into his covenant rest and carry out his purposes. The covenant features of the narrative convey that God entered into a special relationship with humanity.

God's blessing and sanctifying the seventh day is a direct result of his ceasing or finishing his work of creating. The emphasis on completion by the recurrence of "sevens" throughout the account suggests that God's blessing of the seventh day is the culmination of the whole of the creative work and not bound only to that day. God's blessing is "a spiritual power, which streamed forth as a blessing upon the creation itself, bringing it into the blessedness of the rest of God and filling it with His peace."<sup>13</sup> In other words, God's blessing of the seventh day is granted to the whole of creation to function according to his purpose as his temple whereby he will exercise dominion through his image. The seventh day represents much more than one day in seven. It is the goal and purpose toward which all of creation is moving with God's blessing enabling it to ultimately achieve this end. "The seventh day . . . may also be viewed as an eschatological term. The Sabbath finds its prototype in the life and works of God. Thus, it means fulfillment; not cessation and weariness, but consummation."<sup>14</sup>

Moses's repeated emphasis on the seventh day is intentional. Advocates of a continuing Sabbath under the new covenant often substitute terminology to broaden or generalize the intent of Genesis 2:1–3. Instead of referring to the seventh day, phrases such as "rhythm of work and rest" or "one day among seven" are used.<sup>15</sup> Such an

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<sup>13</sup> C. F. Kiel and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 of *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 42.

<sup>14</sup> Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 796. Also, Kidner, *Genesis*, 56. Joseph A. Pipa, "The Christian Sabbath," in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, ed. Christopher John Donato (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 123.

interpretation cannot be established from the text and doing so undermines the point Moses is making. The seventh day is literally the last day of the creative week. It is the culmination and completion of the creation event resulting in a covenant relationship that establishes the ultimate goal of history. It is not a mandate to imitate God.

Beale rightly observes the connection between temple-building and God's rest but then goes on to state that "there is, therefore, still a *one-day* special observance on Sunday for the church, the purpose of which is to look forward to the consummation of the end-time rest in the new heaven and earth."<sup>16</sup> Whether or not the early church viewed Sunday as a new covenant Sabbath, the substitution of terminology from the clear emphasis Moses places on the seventh day dismisses its eschatological significance *a priori*. The structure of the creation narrative that culminates on the seventh day is foundational to the storyline of Scripture. The seventh day served as a model for the fourth commandment with the ultimate aim of remembering God's creative purposes infused with the hope of his redemptive promises (Exod 20:11; Deut 5:15). However, Hebrews 4 makes clear that the Sabbath's fundamental purpose is resting in God's presence in covenant relationship. After the fall its purpose becomes prospective pointing forward to the restoration of humanity into God's rest, namely his presence.

The word for "rest" means to "to cease, to be finished."<sup>17</sup> Derek Kidner rightly concludes, "it is a rest of achievement, not inactivity."<sup>18</sup> God did not cease from the work of creation until he had completed it in every part; continuing to sustain the world by his power and to govern it by his providence.<sup>19</sup> Divine rest is an expression of God's

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<sup>16</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 798 (emphasis added). The assertion that the Sabbath has been transferred to Sunday will be addressed in chap. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, trans. Edward Robinson (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 991–92. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," 24.

<sup>18</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 53.

<sup>19</sup> See Heb 1:3. For other references, see John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 1, *The First*

sovereign rule over all that he has made. He assumes “a position of kingly rest further revealing his sovereign power.”<sup>20</sup> This conquering, kingly rest typifies what God promises elsewhere to Israel, David, and Solomon (Josh 23:1; 2 Sam 7:11; 1 Kgs 5:4). The omnipotent creator never tires and therefore does not *need* rest.

Ancient Near Eastern readers would identify God’s rest with his sovereign rule in conjunction with the temple features of the creation account. To emphasize refreshment and rest from labor misses the fundamental meaning Moses intends. The *Enuma Elish* shares many similarities with the biblical account of creation. Its presentation of the exaltation of Marduk, who takes the throne and exercises dominion as the world is created, parallels Moses’s account in Genesis.<sup>21</sup> These similarities provide insight related to authorial intent and the original audience of the account. The completion of creation closes with the exaltation of God to his throne as the sovereign.

The divine rest of Genesis 2:1–3 shares a number of features common with similar creation accounts in the Ancient Near East. Yet the biblical account is distinct from other Ancient Near Eastern accounts in ways that are further developed throughout the rest of Scripture. These unique features are tied to the covenants and are interpreted by the New Testament writers as culminating in Christ. Temple/land, kingship, and priesthood are archetypically established in Genesis 1–2. Divine rest—and by extension the covenant rest offered to humanity—is inseparably linked with each throughout the Bible. The interwoven nature of these themes starts in creation. After the fall they are

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*Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 103. William Dumbrell’s summary is helpful: “The Hebrew root *shabat* can mean ‘stop’ or ‘rest,’ but the underlying meaning points to that which gives completeness, usually by bringing a series to an end (see Gen 2:1–4), and thus to that which provides a culminating point or purpose.” William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 39.

<sup>20</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 62.

<sup>21</sup> Stephanie Dalley, ed. and trans., *Oxford World’s Classics: Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 228–74. Peter Gentry (personal correspondence, March 12, 2020) was helpful in highlighting this parallel.



unpacked and brought to fulfillment through the unfolding of the covenants tied to God's promise of reconciliation and restoration. The Sabbath is situated within this framework and must be understood in relationship to each of these covenant institutions because they all find their *telos* in Christ.<sup>22</sup> Creation grounds the teaching of Hebrews 4:4–10. The author's conclusions are drawn from the Bible's storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation revealed and fulfilled through the biblical covenants.

### **Garden/Temple and Priest/King**

Genesis 2 reveals that Eden is more than a mere garden as a westerner might understand it today. Moses's original audience would have understood his presentation of Eden through the lens of the covenant, particularly the presence of God made accessible by the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 33:14–16; Lev 26:11–12).<sup>23</sup> Later Old Testament writers viewed the temple in garden terms (1 Kgs 6; Ps 48:1–3; Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:13–14, 47:1–12).

Several features of Genesis 1–2 associate Eden with the tabernacle/temple.<sup>24</sup> First, the same verb for God's walking in the garden is used to describe God's presence in the covenant community (Gen 3:8; Lev 26:12; Deut 23:15; 2 Sam 7:6–7). Second, the cherubim set to guard the east entrance to the garden in Genesis 3:24, are also present to guard the entrance to the temple which faces east (1 Kgs 6:23–28). Third, the tree of life

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<sup>22</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 60–63. See also Andrew T. Lincoln, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 207–10.

<sup>23</sup> John Walton's work to help modern readers locate Gen 2 within the context of the Ancient Near East is especially helpful. At the time of Moses, an Israelite would have read Gen 2 within "the ANE cognitive environment." In other words, an Israelite would have readily identified certain features of the text and associated them with temples in light of similar accounts of the day. "What any ancient knew and few modern readers realize is that divine rest takes place in a temple. In the ancient world as soon as 'rest' is mentioned in connection with God, everyone would have known exactly what sort of text this was: gods rest in temples, and temples are built so that gods can rest in them." John H. Walton, "Reading Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology," in *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 157–58.

<sup>24</sup> The following list is taken from Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies Division A: The Period of the Bible* (1985): 20–22, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23527779>.

appears to be symbolized by the golden lampstand comprised of branches and flowers (Exod 25:31–40). Fourth, Adam’s responsibilities to “work and keep” the garden are associated with the priestly responsibilities of the Levites (Gen 2:15; Num 3:7–8). Fifth, the garden is presented as elevated, whose river divides into four rivers flowing to the four corners of the earth (Gen 2:10–14). Later temple imagery speaks of a life-giving river flowing out of the temple which rests on a mountain (Ezek 28:14; 47:1–12; Rev 22:1). Sixth, precious stones and metals adorn the garden just as Solomon’s temple and ultimately the New Jerusalem (Exod 25:7; 1 Chr 29:2; Rev 21:10–21).

Moses’s arrangement of Genesis 1–2 parallels other Ancient Near Eastern temple-building accounts. John Walton demonstrates the relationship between the creation account and the inauguration ceremonies of temples in the Ancient Near East. The narrative of the creation week presents temple-building culminating in God “taking up residence in this cosmic temple that he has made and assuming control of the cosmos.”<sup>25</sup> Walton helpfully connects the activity and progression of the creation week with the seventh day. “When a temple was built, it became functional not when all of the material work had been done . . . but in an inauguration ceremony that in a variety of texts throughout the ancient world lasted seven days.”<sup>26</sup> He goes on to observe that priests who represented the deity would be commissioned and brought to the temple where the god rested (Gen 2:15). Therefore, Eden is a sacred space characterized by God’s presence and is to be extended throughout the world by the dominion of his image bearers.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Walton, “Reading Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology,” 160.

<sup>26</sup> Walton, “Reading Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology,” 161.

<sup>27</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 81–82; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 247, 381; Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 19. Dumbrell adds, “The placement of humankind as the image in the garden furthers the association between image and temple, drawing kingship and temple together at the beginning of the Bible . . . in terms of biblical eschatology, moving from a localized Eden in Genesis 2 to the new creation as a universal Eden in Revelation 22:1–5.”

In this sense, full and final rest will only be experienced when the work of filling the earth and subduing it is complete. This further supports the assertion that the seventh day is the end toward which creation is moving. The fall disrupts this movement but does not alter God's creative purpose. He will exercise dominion over all the earth and extend the sacred space pictured by Eden through a son of man who will restore and ultimately achieve the rest intended for humanity. He will accomplish this by building his temple (the church) and expanding that temple throughout the world. Thus Genesis 2:1–3 establishes the foundational covenant relationship lost in the fall. The promise of redemption is the restoration of this relationship but with a far greater fulfillment through Christ. This restoration was inaugurated in Christ and is what the author of Hebrews exhorts his readers to persevere in until the end.

This interpretation is not dependent on outside sources alone but more importantly is confirmed internally by the way in which Moses presents the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–40.<sup>28</sup> Beale highlights the parallelism between the narratives of creation and construction of the tabernacle: “Both accounts of the creation and building of the tabernacle are structured around a series of seven acts.”<sup>29</sup> Subsequently the temple was constructed in seven years and “appears to have been modelled on the seven-day creation of the world.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, each account concludes with God resting within (Ps 13:7–8, 13–14) and inviting man into his presence (Gen 2:15; Exod 40:32; 1 Kgs 8:54–61).<sup>31</sup> God's presence and the rest he offers to his people are consistently bound together through the establishment of the covenants and linked to the priestly-rule man is to exercise as God's image. Divine rest, man's purpose, and the goal

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<sup>28</sup> Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Eden Story,” 23. See also Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 177.

<sup>29</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 61.

<sup>30</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> So Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 251.

of creation are interwoven and accomplished through Christ according to Hebrews.

The progressive presentation of the creative week naturally links the sixth and seventh days. The creation of man in God's image anticipates the activity of the seventh day.<sup>32</sup> In Ancient Near Eastern culture, "image" and "likeness" to God denotes a special relationship between God and man involving sonship and rulership.<sup>33</sup> Man as the divine image and his placement in the garden (2:15) establishes humanity as God's representative in the world to exercise dominion (1:26, 28).<sup>34</sup> Just as images of the deity were placed within ancient temples upon their completion to denote residence and rule, God places his image in the garden-temple. Adam is created outside the garden and subsequently placed within it, signifying that God has conferred royalty upon man to fulfill the mandate of 1:26–28.<sup>35</sup> However, man's royal rule in the presence of God will be priestly in nature. His work is service to God. This priestly link is established by the word-pairing "work" and "keep" in 2:15 used by Moses elsewhere to describe the work of the Levitical priests in the tabernacle/temple.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the functional purpose of working and keeping, man's placement in the garden by God in 2:15 introduces an important word for the present study. The term "put" in Genesis 2:15 is used elsewhere by Moses to convey placing or putting aside

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<sup>32</sup> The scope of this chapter cannot fully address the differing interpretations of the "image of God" in Gen 1:26–28. However, the functional relationship between the image of man as God's vice-regent and placed within the presence of God in 2:15 supports the thesis of this project.

<sup>33</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 230–31. Adam, Israel, and David's son are all referred to as God's son in Scripture, culminating with the Son of God being sent to represent the Father as a substitute and second Adam for the redemption of humanity.

<sup>34</sup> Ian Hart, "Genesis 1:1–2:3 as Prologue to the Book of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 320. Hart continues, "Exercising royal dominion over the earth as God's representative is the basic purpose for which God created man" (322).

<sup>35</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 245.

<sup>36</sup> See Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 67. See also Hart, "Genesis 1:1–2:3 as Prologue to Genesis," 333; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 247; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 209–10; Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 79.

for the Lord, (Exod 16:23-24, 33-34; Lev 16:23; Num 17:4; Deut 26:4, 10).<sup>37</sup> Beale incorrectly argues that the word here means “to cause to rest.” He wrongly concludes that it was God’s intention for Adam “to observe a Sabbath rest every seventh day.”<sup>38</sup> However, as Gentry and Wellum point out, there are two different verb forms of the word that are distinguished from one another.<sup>39</sup> They conclude that, “there is therefore no basis for the claim that the verb in Genesis 2:15 has anything to do with the Sabbath.”<sup>40</sup> An argument for the Sabbath as a creation ordinance based on Gen 2:15 cannot be established from the text.

The cumulative impact of these associations establishes a clear link between Eden, the temple, and the land. Eden is the “archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him.”<sup>41</sup> The upshot of interpreting God’s rest in temple terms demonstrates from the text that first and foremost God’s rest is not presented as an ordinance for humanity to imitate. It is presented as God taking up sovereign residence in the cosmic temple in which he will “place” his image-bearers to join him in exercising dominion (Gen 1:28; 2:15). In other words, the establishment of a covenant relationship. Moses’s appeal to creation in the fourth commandment must be interpreted accordingly.

Like most typological structures, the Sabbath functions in a number of ways. As a command under the old covenant it is to be obeyed. It also taught Israel very practically about physical labor and rest as expressions of covenant faith in God’s

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<sup>37</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 628. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 79. See also Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 208-9. In Gen 19:16, the angels bring Lot and his family to safety by “putting” them outside the city.

<sup>38</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 39.

<sup>39</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 382. See also, Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 628. They distinguish between the *hiphil A* and *B* forms.

<sup>40</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 383.

<sup>41</sup> Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Eden Story,” 19.

sovereign provision and care for his people. Yet it also prophetically points forward to Christ and a greater redemption that will secure a greater rest and restore what was lost in the fall. Israel's ceasing from work on the seventh day is *patterned* after God's rest at creation; a weekly reminder of humanity's purpose as image-bearers (2:15) inviting Israel to anticipate redemption that will culminate with fully and finally entering God's rest—the goal of creation from the beginning.

Derek Kidner is right: "God's rest was pregnant with more than the gift of the Sabbath: it is still big with promise for the believer, who is summoned to share it (Heb 3:7–4:11)."<sup>42</sup> In other words, the institution of the Sabbath under the old covenant flows out of Genesis 2:1–3 and finds its true meaning in God's purpose for resting. The sign of the old covenant does not import meaning into Genesis 2 but derives its significance from it. The fourth commandment draws an analogy between the Sabbath and God's rest. "The emphasis on God's 'rest' forms an important part of the author's understanding of what lies in the future. At important points along the way, the author will return to the theme of God's 'rest' as a reminder of what lies ahead (2:15; 5:29; 8:4; 19:16; Exod 20:11; Deut 5:14; 12:10; 25:19)."<sup>43</sup>

The restoration of God's covenant rest with humanity sets the agenda for God's redemptive work through the covenants and characterizes the future hope of the entire Old Testament. The fourth commandment looks both backward and forward. As the culmination of the creative work of God, Genesis 2:1–3 serves as the archetypal backdrop for the later installment of the Sabbath as a cultic institution and sign of the law-covenant. Moses's audience would have understood this early account within the covenant structure of the Pentateuch. The institution of Sabbath fits within the larger covenantal framework of the seventh day. God entered into the enjoyment of what he had made and into

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<sup>42</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 53.

<sup>43</sup> Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 97.

covenant relationship with man.

Adherence to the regulations of the Sabbath provided a covenant-specific expression that God's people are a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6) who have taken up the mantle of Adam in mediating God's presence to the world. Later Old Testament writers make clear that the Sabbath also anticipated a greater rest under a better covenant that God would accomplish through the son of David, revealed in seed form by God's covenant with David (2 Sam 2:11) and the ongoing invitation to enter his rest (Ps 95).<sup>44</sup>

### **Exodus 16: Testing Covenant Faith**

Exodus 16:23 is the first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible. Its position prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments makes it an important passage for the present discussion. Exodus 16 is cited as proof that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance established prior to the ratification of the old covenant at Sinai. Therefore, it must be understood as part of God's moral law.<sup>45</sup> Others argue that Israel had not kept the Sabbath prior to this event nor were they familiar with what it was. Thus, a fuller explanation is given by God (16:23–26).<sup>46</sup>

The redemption of Israel in the exodus typifies God's redemption of humanity from enslavement to sin and death. As Israel makes the journey to Sinai, "the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (16:2). They were hungry and doubted God's goodness in delivering them

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<sup>44</sup> The progressive unfolding of God's promised rest outside the Pentateuch, particularly within the Davidic covenant, will be examined in the next chapter.

<sup>45</sup> Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *This Is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in Its Jewish and Early Church Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1978), 4–5. See also Pipa, "The Christian Sabbath," 123–25.

<sup>46</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 132. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, "Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, ed. Stephen P. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 168–69; Kiel and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 365; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Exodus*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis–Leviticus*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 458.

from slavery (16:3). God speaks and reveals that he will graciously provide bread from heaven. However, his provision is not merely to satiate the hunger of his people, but to “test them, whether they will walk in my law or not” (16:4). The introduction of the Sabbath served a number of purposes. It provided Israel rest from their labors. It called on them to trust God’s sovereign provision for their daily needs. Its introduction to Israel in Exodus 16 is also directly connected to the testing of their faith taking on a prophetic function.

Under the old covenant the Sabbath shared these same purposes (i.e. rest from labor, encourage faith in God’s providence, etc.). Yet it also served this important prophetic function. Moses’s original audience would have associated this introduction of the Sabbath with the sign of the old covenant (Exod 31:16–17). In this sense, its introduction as a test for the people was representative of the law-covenant as a whole. “The people’s willingness to obey the manna-gathering law (torah) would show God whether or not they would be inclined to keep his covenant law (torah) as revealed at Mount Sinai. It was not just a test to see if they could follow instructions but a test to see if their hearts were inclined to be his covenant people.”<sup>47</sup>

This interpretation is confirmed elsewhere in the Old Testament as the charge of Sabbath-breaking often represented Israel’s failure to keep the whole of the covenant and thus face the curses of Deuteronomy 28.<sup>48</sup> In Ezekiel 20:10–24 the Sabbath(s) is highlighted six times as both the sign of the covenant and a primary reason for the exile. “His elevation of the Sabbaths to this inordinate height may reflect the influence of

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<sup>47</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 372.

<sup>48</sup> Deut 28:65: “And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and languishing soul.” The root word for “resting place” here is the same used in Gen 2:15, 2 Sam 7:11, and 1 Kgs 8:56, already noted above as uniting God’s purpose of God placing man within the safety and joy of his presence and rest. Jeremiah 17:21–27 is a word of judgment and promise to Israel that appears to hinge on Sabbath-keeping. It is obvious from the rest of the book that Israel broke God’s law at numerous points. Yet here, the Sabbath is representative of the whole. See also Isa 56:2–6.



Jeremiah, for whom the keeping of the Sabbath had become a primary determinant of Yahweh's favor."<sup>49</sup> The covenant sign represented the covenant as a whole.

God's testing of Israel in Exodus 16 is "to see whether the people will obey and trust God by faith."<sup>50</sup> To this point in the narrative the only other mention of God's "testing" is found in Genesis 22. Like Exodus 16, Moses presents God's test as a test of faith. Will Abraham express faith by obeying God's command? Unlike Israel, Abraham obeys God so completely that—prior to the giving of the Mosaic law—it can be said that "Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen 26:5). In light of Moses's summary statement here, Sailhamer concludes, "It is as if the author of the Pentateuch has seized on the Abrahamic narratives as a way to explain his concept of 'keeping the law.'"<sup>51</sup>

Exodus 16 must be interpreted within the broader context of the Pentateuch and Moses's presentation of what it means to live by faith: the very heart of the covenant relationship. The introduction of the Sabbath is not intended to convey a moral law to which God was bringing Israel back into alignment. Its use as a test serves as an antecedent to the faith God requires for covenant-keeping upon its ratification in Exodus 19–24. Faithfulness to the Sabbath represents nothing less than faithfulness to God's covenant with Israel. The sign of the covenant was representative of the whole.

### **The Ten Words: The Creation and Redemption of a People**

The old covenant established at Mount Sinai is the gravitational center for the remainder of the Old Testament. The message of the prophets draws upon God's promises of blessing and judgment flowing out the establishment of his covenant with

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<sup>49</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 632.

<sup>50</sup> Kaiser, *Exodus*, 458.

<sup>51</sup> Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 71.

Israel (Deut 28). According to Exodus 19:3–6, the covenant will mark off Israel as God’s treasured possession that they might be a kingdom of priests who mediate the presence of God to the world. The land of promise is described in Edenic terms where the temple is to serve as the epicenter of God’s presence in the world (Exod 15:17; Deut 28:4, 11).<sup>52</sup> God will “walk among” Israel just as he once did in the garden (Gen 3:8; Lev 26:8). Adam’s role as a priest-king will be continued by corporate Israel (Gen 49:8–10; Num 8:5–22). Like Adam, the priests will have the responsibility to “work” and “keep” the sanctuary of God (Num 3:6–8). Exodus 20 inaugurates this progression of redemptive history with the creation of a new humanity through which God will carry out his creative purposes.

This creation of a new humanity sets the larger context for the Ten Commandments. Gentry and Wellum demonstrate that Moses is making a connection between the Ten Words of Exodus 20 and the creation account in Genesis 1.<sup>53</sup> In Genesis 1 God created everything by his word. The verb “he said” appears ten times in the text. Similarly, God creates a people for himself at Sinai using ten words. The Ten Commandments, as they are more commonly known today, form the heart of the old covenant, representing the covenant between God and Israel when placed within the ark in the most holy place. Their significance is not merely rooted in their representative function of the law-covenant but in their use within the narrative to establish the creation of a people.

Sailhamer argues that there are two other parallels between Moses’s account of creation and the completion of the tabernacle.<sup>54</sup> The first parallel is the pattern of rest

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<sup>52</sup> This will take on even greater significance when Israel’s attention is turned to the new covenant promise of a greater exodus, greater temple, and greater land (Jer 16:14–16; Ezek 36:33–38; Hag 2:9).

<sup>53</sup> The following assertions rely upon the evidence presented by Gentry and Wellum in *Kingdom through Covenant*, 365–66. The Ten Commandments are referred to as the Ten Words by Moses in Exod 34:28. His reference to them as “the words of the covenant” indicate their representative function of the entire covenant. This must be kept in view in any articulation of their purpose within the Old Testament and the entire canon of Scripture.

<sup>54</sup> Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 299.

upon the completion of the work. Just as God rested when he finished the construction of the earth as temple (Gen 2:1–3), so God calls Israel to observe the Sabbath when the tabernacle was completed (Exod 31:12–18). The second parallel is the assessment and blessing of the work. God “saw everything that he made” and it was very good (Gen 1:31). Furthermore, he set his blessing on Adam and Eve to carry out his mandate as his image-bearers (1:28). When the tabernacle was finished Moses similarly “saw all the work” that they had done and declares that it was in accordance with God’s Word. He then blessed them to carry out their purpose according to God’s design (Exod 39:43). Moses wrote the narrative of the Ten Words and building of the tabernacle to remind the reader of the creation account and conclude that just as God created all things, he is now creating a people for himself.<sup>55</sup>

This recapitulation establishes that the narrative flow of the Pentateuch is intended to advance the story of God’s creative purposes as God’s redemptive program unfolds. To rightly interpret and apply the Ten Commandments they must be located within their covenantal and canonical context.<sup>56</sup> Most interpreters rightly recognize that the righteous requirements of the Ten possess moral value for the church today because they express God’s moral will.<sup>57</sup> However, to rightly apply the Ten Commandments to the church today they must be understood in accordance with their function across the

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<sup>55</sup> Victor Hamilton quotes B. D. Napier in observing the specific link the Sabbath command has with creation by joining both versions together: “The fundamental sanction of the Sabbath in both statements of commandment is *creation*—in Deuteronomy the creation of a people, in Exodus the creation of the world.” B. D. Napier, *The Book of Exodus* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969), 82, quoted in Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 204.

<sup>56</sup> Gentry and Wellum state, “Given the fact that Scripture is *God’s Word* and is a *unified* revelation, texts must be understood in relation to the entire canon. We cannot adequately interpret and apply Scripture if we ignore the canonical level.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 126 (emphasis original). Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum help clarify how reading the Bible with a covenantal context in mind helps us understand the Bible on its own terms. “It’s equally important to think through how each covenant uniquely contributes to God’s overall plan as it is fulfilled in Christ. Each covenant has its own part to play in preparing us for the coming of Christ and the culmination of God’s glorious and unified plan of salvation.” Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 60.

<sup>57</sup> See Pipa, “The Christian Sabbath,” 123–24.

covenant eras in relationship to Christ who is the fulfillment of the law (Matt 5:17). More on this in chap. 5.

The Ten Words were delivered through Moses upon Israel's arrival at the mountain God chose for his people to meet and worship him (Exod 5:2–3). God was faithful to his word (Gen 15:13–14; Exod 6:6–7) and Israel now stands before him as his redeemed people. The fourth commandment is the longest of the ten. It is the first command not delivered as a prohibition. It positively calls Israel to “remember” and “keep it holy” (Exod 20:8). Seven living beings are listed as responsible for observing the Sabbath.<sup>58</sup> Given Moses's use of the number seven in the Pentateuch, this is not incidental. He intends to convey that complete observance by the covenant community is the expectation. In an agrarian civilization where servants and animals may have been substituted in order to maintain productivity, God closes the door on any creative workarounds to his command. The work week builds toward the Sabbath which is immediately associated with the seventh day in verse 10. The weekly pattern comprised of six working days and the seventh being set apart for rest echoes the creation week, even before the analogy is made explicit in verse 11.

The Sabbath is patterned after the creative week, not grounded in it. Keil and Delitzsch argue that the grounds for the Sabbath is in the fact that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day. “The reason for the keeping of the Sabbath is not to be found in this parallel, but in the fact that God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it . . . raising it to a participation in the pure light of His holy nature.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, the fourth commandment codifies a weekly observance of joining God in his rest, not pointing back to God's pattern at creation to establish an ordinance for all humanity. Keil and Delitzsch go a step further calling it “a foretaste of the blessedness into which the

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<sup>58</sup> Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 204.

<sup>59</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 399.

people of God are at last to enter;” rightly interpreting the command through the lens of Hebrews 4:10.

Verse 11 indicates that the reason God blessed the seventh day and made it holy was because he rested on it. Thus, the fourth commandment points to a partial restoration of the covenant rest that was lost in the fall. The institution of the Sabbath typifies God’s rest and looks forward to a greater fulfillment (Heb 3:7–4:11). Jason DeRouchie links the fourth commandment’s purpose with the redemption of creation: “Israel’s Sabbath identity is directly linked with the purpose of humanity at creation—namely, for God-imaging families to expand and rule the earth (Day 6, Gen 1:26–28) in a way that would culminate in the world being reconciled and at rest with its Creator King (Day 7).”<sup>60</sup>

One popular approach within historic covenant theology is to categorize the Mosaic law as moral, civil, and ceremonial in order to preserve the moral application of the old covenant but treat as abrogated what the New Testament indicates has been fulfilled in Christ. Joseph Pipa acknowledges the unity of the law in terms of the ceremonial, civil, and moral nature of the Ten Commandments.<sup>61</sup> However, he goes on to articulate a division between the moral and ceremonial to conclude that “seventh day worship, special Sabbaths (new moon, seventh year, and jubilee), and religious feasts” are all ceremonial features of the command given to Israel.<sup>62</sup> Doing so allows him to distill the fourth commandment down to the moral principle of keeping one day in seven holy—in essence, separating the moral from the ceremonial as grounds for a binding law upon God’s people. This is simply another path toward separating the moral law from the ceremonial.

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<sup>60</sup> DeRouchie, “Making the Ten Count,” 430.

<sup>61</sup> See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 393, 785–88, for a helpful discussion on rejecting the tripartite division of the law as unnatural to the text.

<sup>62</sup> Pipa, “The Christian Sabbath,” 128.

Pipa's study of Jesus's interaction with the Sabbath in his earthly ministry leads him to three principles to guide application of the Sabbath for the church today: (1) "We are to do those things that strengthen us for the Lord's work;" (2) Man is to "do those things necessary to promote the purposes of the day;" (3) "The Sabbath is to be a day for the exercise of mercy."<sup>63</sup> Pipa goes on to articulate numerous specific applications of these principles for the church today. The end result relies upon the same tripartite division of the law to maintain a commitment to Sabbath observance under the new covenant.<sup>64</sup>

Dividing the law into civil, ceremonial, and moral categories is unnatural to the old covenant as presented in Scripture. "Scripture views the law-covenant as a covenant package that serves a specific role in God's plan for the life of Israel, and as an entire covenant, it is brought to fulfilment in Christ and the new covenant."<sup>65</sup> All the laws of the old covenant are moral and were so judged by God.<sup>66</sup> Separating the Ten Commandments from the rest of the old covenant is not warranted by the text.<sup>67</sup> Jason Meyer stresses that the Mosaic law must be viewed through the gospel-event in such a way that "the whole system be recalibrated around Christ as the center of the Christian faith."<sup>68</sup> Therefore, one can recognize the fulfillment of the law-covenant by Christ, and yet strive to obey the

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<sup>63</sup> Pipa, "The Christian Sabbath," 137–38.

<sup>64</sup> Pipa's list of applications reads like old covenant law, binding Christians to a set of practices that maintain proper adherence to the Sabbath under the new covenant. This sort of law-keeping tends to be the logical outcome of maintaining the binding nature of the fourth commandment, even if the ceremonial aspects of it have been stripped away.

<sup>65</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 785. See Matt 5:17; Heb 8:13.

<sup>66</sup> David Dorsey rightly asks, "Which of the 613 laws is not 'moral?'" David A. Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 3 (September 1991): 331.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Hill rightly concludes, "The Old Covenant is seen as a discrete unified package with a number of aspects, not parts. These various aspects cannot be unraveled and treated as parts." Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2002), 74.

<sup>68</sup> Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 284.

tenets of the moral norms of the law in the freedom and empowerment of the new covenant. The Sabbath must be viewed through the lens of Christ. After the inauguration of the new covenant, no New Testament passage upholds the fourth commandment as binding on Christians today. In fact, the opposite is taught by Paul and the writer of Hebrews (Rom 14:5; Heb 3–4).

Others argue that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance and is therefore binding upon humanity for all time. Richard Gaffin interprets God’s example of resting from his work on the seventh as a “design and mandate that mankind enter and share it.”<sup>69</sup> He concludes that the author of Hebrews is not only describing God’s rest at creation but implying that contained within Genesis 2:1–3 is a mandate for humanity. Beale uses less definitive language but follows the same logic in his interpretation of Hebrews 3–4. He concludes that the author’s argument *implies* a mandate to “enter and enjoy God’s rest” and that he does so by observing one day in seven as a day of rest.<sup>70</sup> Beale argues that “the repeated mention of God’s resting in the Gen 2:3” is equal to a mandate for humanity, asserting that an eschatological goal is synonymous with an “eschatological mandate.” This assertion misses the point of the text entirely as demonstrated above.

Thomas Schreiner offers four compelling reasons that the Sabbath should not be understood as a creation ordinance.<sup>71</sup> First, the absence of the Sabbath and its required observance by the Patriarchs suggests that it was not mandated. Some may object on the grounds that this is an argument from silence. Even so, the prominence placed on the Sabbath from Sinai forward in the Old Testament indicates an odd omission of what is argued to be a universal moral norm regardless of whether or not the old covenant added

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<sup>69</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God,” in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 47.

<sup>70</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 789.

<sup>71</sup> The following paragraph draws heavily from Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 168–70.

ceremonial features unique to Israel.<sup>72</sup> This is amplified when one considers the severe penalty associated with breaking the Sabbath—an argument often used for the universal moral nature of the fourth commandment.<sup>73</sup> What Scripture makes plain is that the Sabbath was first introduced to Israel (Exod 16) and given its fullest expression and purpose when it was instituted under the old covenant.

Second, the mere presence of something in the creation account does not equate it with a mandate for humanity. Genesis 1:28 is a clear mandate for man to fulfill God’s ordained purpose for those who bear his image. No such instruction (or mandate) is present in relationship to God’s rest on the seventh day. Third, as already stated, consideration must be given to what Schreiner refers to as “covenantal shifts” that occur across the canon as revelation progresses. Appeals to creation to establish moral norms across covenant eras appear in the New Testament to articulate the law of Christ and uphold theological realities under the new covenant era. The appeal made in the fourth commandment is distinct from other such appeals because the New Testament demonstrates that the Sabbath command is no longer in force (see Rom 14:5–6; Col 2:16–17).<sup>74</sup> Another notable distinction is where this appeal is located covenantally. The purpose of the appeal to creation in the fourth commandment establishes the old covenant institution and sign patterned after God’s purpose for the seventh day. The covenantal and eschatological features of the seventh day provide the framework of the Sabbath rhythm for Israel as noted above. When the old covenant becomes obsolete, so does its sign.

Finally, the analogous nature of Exodus 20:11 is made clear by the author of

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<sup>72</sup> Many of those who argue the Sabbath is a moral command grounded in creation will concede that there are ceremonial features to the institution under the old covenant. See Calvin, *Genesis*, 106–17; Kaiser, *Exodus*, 481. See also Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014), 478; Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 793; Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 161. However, this approach still fails to express how one might neatly distinguish between what is deemed a moral mandate and what is treated as ceremonial in the text. Such a division is foreign to the Old Testament. The law-covenant is a unified whole.

<sup>73</sup> Pipa, “The Christian Sabbath,” 126.

<sup>74</sup> The Pauline Epistles will be investigated in chap. 6.



Hebrews, whose appeal to God's rest at creation in 4:4 is not introduced as a model to imitate but as the establishment of a state of being he desires his readers to enter into. In a passage concerned with faith that results in obedience, at best it is a missed opportunity to exhort the new covenant community to be faithful to observe the Sabbath, even if transformed through the finished work of Christ. No such exhortation is present. Rather, the Sabbath is incorporated into his argument as a call to look back at creation rest as an eschatological state established archetypically at creation and fulfilled in Christ. God's rest has now been secured for the church by Christ—a rest that will be fully and finally consummated when Jesus returns. Persevering faith in Jesus Christ will guarantee entrance into the rest God prepared for his people from the very beginning.

God gives another reason for the Sabbath's institution in the reaffirmation of the covenant in Deuteronomy 5:12–15, namely redemption. Israel is commanded to “observe” (12) and “remember” (15) the Sabbath, keeping the day because of God's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. To “observe” and “remember” are covenant words denoting faithfulness on behalf God's people.<sup>75</sup> Israel was redeemed out of slavery to be led into the land God promised to give them rest (Deut 12:8–11). Observance of the Sabbath looked forward to the covenant rest of dwelling in the safety of God's presence. Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 complement one another and ground the Sabbath in creation *and* redemption. The Sabbath looked backward and forward.

### **The Church and the Law**

Faithful Christians have long wrestled with how the church is to relate to the Old Testament law.<sup>76</sup> The believer's relationship to the Ten Commandments is

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<sup>75</sup> Tony Costa, “The Sabbath and Its Relation to Christ and the Church in the New Covenant,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 132.

<sup>76</sup> Numerous works devoted to defining “law” have been produced over the past forty years. The scope of this project does not allow for a substantive interaction with this subject. For a helpful overview of the debate, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books), 1993. For the purpose of this project, the “law” is primarily understood to be

particularly important for Christians, and rightly so. Is there any continuity between the old and new covenants that requires adherence to the Ten Commandments by the church today? The scope of this subject cannot be addressed in full here. However, the overall purpose of the law-covenant will inform how the Christian is to relate to the fourth commandment and make clear the Sabbath's function across the canon. First, a brief examination of the purpose of the old covenant according to Moses will underscore the old covenant's relationship to the redemptive storyline from Genesis 1–2. Second, a concise interpretation of the Sabbath through the new covenant lens will support the validity of the present thesis.

Stephen Dempster's summary of Exodus 19:5–6 is instructive: "If Israel obeys the divine commandments, it will become God's 'treasured possession among all the peoples,' 'a kingdom of priests' and 'a holy nation,' with the goal that they would "image God to the nations."<sup>77</sup> Israel is a new Adam, charged with mediating God's presence and righteousness to the world.<sup>78</sup> Within this narrative context the fourth commandment instituted a weekly sign in Israel under the old covenant era that proclaimed God's purpose from creation: an invitation for humanity to enter into and enjoy God's rest (Ps 95; Heb 4:1–11). No other nation observed such a practice.<sup>79</sup> Ceasing from work on the seventh day was not only about rest or refreshment from one's toilsome labor. It also served as the culmination of each week, symbolizing entrance into God's rest. The Sabbath witnessed to Israel's unique Adamic role in the world. It also pointed to God's redemptive work. Remembering their redemption was an important part of observing the

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the law-covenant as a whole.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 101.

<sup>78</sup> Wellum and Gentry, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 341–42.

<sup>79</sup> For a helpful overview of the history and origin of the Sabbath, see Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," 22–23. Garrett concludes, "In the exodus narrative, the Israelites themselves had no awareness of a Sabbath concept until the manna incident of Exodus 16, so it is hardly likely that we will find the origin of the Sabbath outside of Israel." Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 477.

Sabbath (Deut 5:15) because the exodus pointed to a greater salvation that would provide a way back into the rest of God’s presence.

The righteous standards God set forth in the Mosaic law set the nation apart.<sup>80</sup> The law was not given to provide salvation but was an expression of God’s righteousness so that the people would reflect His holiness to those around them (Lev 11:44–45). God’s redemption of Israel was already accomplished (Exod 20:4). Consequently, “the basis for the covenant from the point of view of the human partner was confidence and trust in as well as gratitude to Yahweh as established by the events of the exodus.”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, keeping the Mosaic law was not to be an act of living righteously in order gain entrance into the covenant community, but was a demonstration that they already were. The law was God’s gracious expression of his righteous character. It was a means by which Israel could express faith and maintain their covenant relationship with him.

The decalogue—as representative of the covenant—is a succinct expression of the unchanging righteousness of God in the old covenant era. Jesus did not abolish the law-covenant; he fulfilled it (Matt 5:17).<sup>82</sup> In that sense, “the righteousness of God codified, enshrined, and encapsulated in the old covenant has not changed, and . . . this same righteousness is now codified and enshrined in the new” as the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2).<sup>83</sup> In other words, the old covenant was an expression of the righteous character of God for that era of redemptive history. Gentry and Wellum assert: “Though *all* scripture is our standard, its moral instruction requires careful application depending

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<sup>80</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 173.

<sup>81</sup> Wellum and Gentry, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 350.

<sup>82</sup> Greater attention will be given to defining this in chap. 5. R. T. France’s interpretation is helpful here: “They [the law and prophets] remain the authoritative word of God. But their role will no longer be the same, now that what they pointed forward to has come, and it will be for Jesus’s followers to discern in light of his teaching and practice what is now the right way to apply those texts in the new situation which his coming has created. From now on it will be the authoritative teaching of Jesus which must govern his disciples’ understanding and practical application of the law.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 183.

<sup>83</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 355.

on our covenantal location . . . it is crucial to distinguish between biblical morality and Christian ethics.”<sup>84</sup>

Under the new covenant God’s rest is centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the true Sabbath rest for the people of God. The substance to which the shadow of the fourth commandment pointed has now come. The old covenant has passed away and therefore so has its sign.<sup>85</sup> Types are not perpetual. Their fulfillment in Christ completes their historical purpose and brings them to a close. When the substance of the shadow arrives the shadow no longer functions under the new covenant. This appears to be the very thrust of Paul’s argument in Colossians 2:16–23.<sup>86</sup>

The Sabbath is to be understood within this covenantal framework. The author of Hebrews exhorts the church to strive to enter God’s rest through faith in Christ (3:12–4:3). Rest has been inaugurated through the atoning work of Christ. Genesis 1–2 reveals that the work assigned for man to accomplish occurs within the covenant rest he enjoys with God (Gen 1:28; 2:5, 15, 18–20; Heb 4:10). Sin’s curse means that man’s work is now characterized by pain and toil (Gen 3:17–19) as a result of the broken covenant. Keil and Delitzsch’s commentary on the fourth commandment is helpful on this point:

For this reason His people Israel were to keep the Sabbath now, not for the purpose of imitating what God had done, and enjoying the blessing of God by thus following God Himself, but that on this day they also might rest from their work; and that all the more, because their work was no longer the work appointed to man at the first, when he was created in the likeness of God, work which did not interrupt his blessedness in God (Gen 2:15), but that hard labour in the sweat of his brow to which he had been condemned in the consequence of the fall.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 784 (emphasis original). Wellum and Gentry refer readers to Michael Hill (*The How and Why of Love*, 43–54) on the distinction being made between biblical morality and Christian ethics.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Forty Questions about Christians and Biblical Law*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 214.

<sup>86</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 222. See also A. T. Lincoln, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 368.

<sup>87</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 399.

Hebrews' association of man's rest with God's links the church's present work with his commissioned work at the dawn of time. The redeeming work of Jesus enables humanity to once again work according to the purposes of God established at creation within the bounds of covenant rest. While it may be marked by toil and sweat, the burden is light (Matt 11:30) and will ultimately result in glorious rest in the presence of God (Rev 14:13). "For the believer in Christ Jesus, fulfillment of God's sovereign rest has been inaugurated, the 'shadow' finding its 'substance' in Christ (Col 2:16–17), so that we already enjoy peace under the Lordship of God seven days a week (Matt 11:28–29, Heb 4:8–11; cf. Rom 15:5–6)."<sup>88</sup> The context in which this new humanity (2 Cor 5:17) carries out its work is the local church (Heb 10:24–25), fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) as a kingdom of priests.

### **Conclusion**

Hebrews presents an interpretation of Genesis 2:2 that unites God's purposes for creation with his redemptive work in Christ. This chapter has sought to demonstrate that God's rest at creation is his entrance into the enjoyment of covenant relationship with his people. After the fall it becomes the archetype of all other rest in the Old Testament—including the Sabbath. Adherence to the fourth commandment looked both backward (at creation and the exodus) and forward to God's promised restoration of the covenant relationship—a new creation rest that will surpass all other rests: entrance into the full and final rest of his presence to reign and rule as his image forever.

The church today is not bound by the fourth commandment because it is no longer under the administration of the old covenant. The Sabbath is no longer in force because Christ has fulfilled the law (Matt 5:17). The purpose and function of the Sabbath under the old covenant has been completed and brought to an end because that to which it

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<sup>88</sup> DeRouchie, "Making the Ten Count," 431.

pointed has come (Col 2:17). Each of these points will be established by the following chapters.

The next chapter will trace the rest theme from the Davidic covenant through Psalm 95. The psalmist's anticipation of future rest is the hope of the post-exilic community at the close of the Old Testament. Hebrews understands Psalm 95 to anticipate a future rest that was greater than the land promise and sees the church as living in the time of fulfillment.

## CHAPTER 4

### PSALM 95: SABBATH REST AND THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

The writer of Hebrews applies Psalm 95 to the church in order to exhort and warn the saints that the rest spoken of by the psalmist has arrived in Christ. If they abandon him, they abandon the true and greater rest to which the psalm—and all of the Old Testament—pointed. That which anticipated fulfillment has now been accomplished and they must not turn away. His interpretation and application of Psalm 95 builds upon the covenantal progression of the Old Testament canon. The inauguration of the new covenant in Christ is the fulfillment and realization of God’s promised rest.

The establishment of the Davidic covenant advances God’s redemptive plan by focusing God’s work through an individual king-son rather than a corporate son or nation (Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1; Hos 11:1). The covenant blessing promised to Abraham and Israel will be channeled through the seed of the woman that will come from David’s line. God’s redemptive plan will be accomplished through a king who will be a son to God just like Adam and Israel (2 Sam 7:14). Covenant rest will be restored through this Davidic son.

The previous chapter argued that Moses provided the framework to understand the Sabbath as a type that looks back to creation and forward to a greater rest that God will accomplish for his people in the future. In the last chapter we sought to use the entire Pentateuch to look back at the archetype of creation rest and then forward to the greater rest that the Sabbath typifies. This chapter will investigate how the Psalter and post-exilic Israel expressed God’s promised rest within the framework Moses set forth in the Pentateuch. The psalmist presents God’s promised rest to his contemporaries as an ongoing covenant promise that anticipates a greater fulfillment through a future son in

light of the covenant God established with David in 2 Samuel 7.<sup>1</sup> It will be argued below that the arrangement of the Psalter in the post-exilic era portends this hope.

Psalms 95 provides further textual warrant in the Old Testament for concluding that God's rest is an eschatological state established archetypically at creation and fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Hebrews makes it clear that the Pentateuch's presentation of rest not only functions as a command to obey (Sabbath) but is to be understood as hope of the restoration of God's covenant presence lost in the fall. The rest spoken of by the psalmist prophetically anticipates a greater fulfillment of rest that was not exhausted by entrance into the land of Israel under Joshua. It anticipates a greater restoration of rest that will restore the covenant rest of creation lost at the fall.

In the previous two chapters, I have sought to show how Hebrews 3–4 presents God's rest as fulfilled in Christ by highlighting the covenantal features of rest from Genesis through the Pentateuch. This chapter will argue that Psalm 95 unpacks the Psalter's understanding of the covenant God established with David in 2 Samuel 7.<sup>2</sup> Psalm 95 confirms that post-exilic Israel expected a greater rest even after they returned to the land. The "today" in verse 7 is post entrance into the land which was the primary expression of promised rest throughout the Old Testament. The fact that Psalm 95 was written so many years later reveals that the land is a type of God's promised future rest.

The interrelated themes of rest, tabernacle/temple, and royal priesthood converge in the Davidic covenant. God's promise to give his people rest in the land from surrounding enemies (2 Sam 7:11; 1 Kgs. 8:56) is ultimately achieved through the

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews attributes the authorship of Ps 95 to David. He is likely dependent on the LXX, which attributes the psalm to David. Derek Kidner contends that this should be understood as a general reference to the Psalter, taking the reference to David—the Psalter's most prominent author—as representative of the whole. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150, Kidner Classic Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 376. The position of this project is that the author of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, confirms Davidic authorship.

<sup>2</sup> To further establish this argument, a brief overview of the final arrangement of the Psalter will demonstrate that the post-exilic community understood this to be David's point in Ps 95.



finished work of Christ (Ps 2; Col 2:15; Heb 3–4; 10:12–13; 11:8–16). Hebrews 4:8 demonstrates that this interpretation of the typological pattern is correct. The writer presents Joshua’s land conquest as a partial recovery of the rest lost in creation. However, it later becomes clear that it is only a type and shadow anticipating a greater restoration of what was lost in the fall. Psalm 95, many years after the conquest, is still holding out hope of entrance into rest. This confirms that Joshua’s entrance was only a type of what is ushered in by Christ. This is the argument of Hebrews. This chapter highlights the relationship between the Davidic and Mosaic covenants in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 95. The final arrangement and narrative features of the Psalter provide further evidence that there is a greater rest to come for the people of God.

### **The Davidic Covenant: Rest through the King**

Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum stress that the unfolding of redemptive history sets the context for rightly understanding the Davidic covenant. “A canonical reading indicates that the Davidic king is inheriting the role of both Adam as son of God and Israel as son of God according to the instructions of Deuteronomy 17.”<sup>3</sup> The progression of God’s purposes through his covenant with David becomes apparent when one accounts for the canonical context of the Old Testament leading up to 2 Samuel 7. Furthermore, Psalm 95’s hope in future rest is grounded in the covenant promises God made to David in 2 Samuel 7. First, the redemptive-historical context will be established followed by an analysis of 2 Samuel 7. Finally, a study of Psalm 95 will unpack the post-exilic hope for future rest.

Moses’s presentation of the creation narrative culminating with God’s rest on the seventh day is foundational to the storyline of Scripture as demonstrated in the previous chapter. God’s rest is best understood as God entering into the joy of covenant

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<sup>3</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 455.

relationship with humanity in Eden. Moses's portrayal of the role and function of the seventh day in the Pentateuch is essential for rightly understanding the Sabbath's purpose within each covenant era. God's rest at creation is the archetype for all rest that follows in the Pentateuch. Humanity is exiled from Eden and covenant rest because of sin. However, hope for restoration and reconciliation with God is extended through the covenants God established with Abraham, Israel, and eventually David.

As the Pentateuch unfolds, God progressively reveals his purpose to accomplish this restoration through re-creation by redemption. This pattern is established in the flood narrative, the exodus event, entrance into the land, and is anticipated to occur again in the future (Ps 95). God establishes covenants to realize his purposes. The function of the sign of the old covenant, namely the Sabbath, is multi-faceted: (1) It was a command to Israel to rest from their labor; (2) it directed them to trust in God's providence; (3) it directed them to remember God's covenant rest at creation (Exod 20:11) and (4) to recall God's redemptive work in the exodus (Deut 5:12–15). God's rest had not been lost forever. Deuteronomy 5 hints that God's redeeming work in the exodus infuses the fourth commandment with a prospective function, prophetically urging God's people to await a fuller and greater redemption.

The sign of the old covenant shaped Israel's eschatology by building anticipation for God's consummative work in the future. Therefore, a key function of the covenant sign was to point to the covenant's purpose of restoring God's people into God's presence—of which the priesthood, land, and temple were types. The Mosaic law revealed how a sinful people could enjoy God's holy presence once again—faith and obedience. The Davidic covenant advances these purposes by focusing God's redemptive activity in his king. This too is anticipated in the Pentateuch in a number of ways: (1) through the sonship of Adam;<sup>4</sup> (2) God's declaration to Abraham that kings would come

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<sup>4</sup> So Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 220–38.

from him (Gen 17:6); (3) Jacob's blessing to Judah (Gen 49:8–10); and (4) the kingship law given in the reaffirmation of the covenant with Israel (Deut 17:14–20).

Deuteronomy 12:5–12 is significant because it portrays rest in the land as a restoration of Eden. Entrance into the land was a recovery of what was lost in the garden, namely access to the presence of God through a covenant relationship. The promises given here are foundational to rightly understanding 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 95. Israel's lack of rest as they wandered toward the land of promise anticipates that one day, they would know the peace and security of being planted in the land promised to the patriarchs (Deut 12:8–12). However, the point of Psalm 95 is that even after Joshua secured rest in the land—and the people returned from exile—a fulfillment yet remained.

The wilderness generation's sinful rejection of God results in judgment: they would “not see the land that I swore to give to their fathers” (Num 14:23). Psalm 95 recalls this event using Deuteronomy 12 language. God personalizes the rest he promised in Deuteronomy 12 by referring to it as “my rest,” suggesting that the land was understood as a place of rest and recovery of what was lost in Eden (95:11). Deuteronomy 12:9–10 makes clear that the rest promised to Israel is God's to give. Israel is a corporate Adam whose entrance into the land where God would dwell with them is a restoration of what was lost in Eden as a result of the fall.<sup>5</sup>

The narrative of the Old Testament following the death of Joshua emphasizes the absence of a king devoted to the Torah. Although rest had been secured (Josh 22:4), there are hints that a truer and fuller rest still awaited God's people. The rest Israel experienced following Joshua's conquest is immediately undone during the period of the judges. The cycle of Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant should have amplified to Israel the built-in inadequacies of the old covenant. As important as the law-covenant

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<sup>5</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1984), 151.

was, it could not bring ultimate restoration of sinners into God’s rest. Their disobedience resulted in God’s discipline through oppression—or the absence of rest—by Israel’s enemies (Judg 2:1–4, 11–15). The book concludes on a somber note and sets the stage for the next phase of God’s covenantal program: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25).

The kingship law in Deuteronomy 17 anticipated a king committed to God’s law who would “continue long in his kingdom” (Deut 17:20). The need for God’s king was further emphasized during the period of the judges. Israel needed a king after God’s own heart. Gentry and Wellum conclude: “The only positive requirement is that the king embodies Torah as a model citizen,” which they see repeated in 2 Samuel 7:14–15.<sup>6</sup>

Rest, temple/land, and God’s priestly king converge in the Davidic covenant, uniting the fulfillment of God’s covenant purposes to a future king. Second Samuel 7 opens by stating that the Lord had given David “rest from all his surrounding enemies” (7:1). William Dumbrell observes, “The occurrence of this phrase [rest] in 2 Sam 7:1 reminds us forcibly of the platform and the promises of the book of Deuteronomy, where the notion of ‘rest’ is the great blessing associated with the prosperous life in the land (cf. Deut 12:10).”<sup>7</sup>

David is God’s king whose throne has been established in Jerusalem where God will make his name to dwell (Deut 12:5). As the chapter unfolds, the implication is that Deuteronomy 12:5 and 10–11 is being realized under David’s reign as king.<sup>8</sup> David’s immediate response is to establish a permanent dwelling place where God’s covenant presence could be known and experienced (7:2). The enthronement of God and rest are

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<sup>6</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 456.

<sup>7</sup> William J. Dumbrell, “The Davidic Covenant,” *Reformed Theological Review* 39, no. 2 (May–August 1980): 42.

<sup>8</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 473.

joined together just as they are in Genesis 2:2–3.<sup>9</sup> David embodies the kind of king God’s people were to expect. In God’s plan, he becomes a type pointing forward to the king God will use to restore God’s covenant presence—or rest—with his people.

Moses and David—the primary human parties through whom the old and Davidic covenants are expressed—understood that restoration into God’s presence is the aim of his redemptive work (Exod 33:14–16;<sup>10</sup> 2 Sam 7:2; 1 Kgs. 8:15–21). God’s covenant with David inaugurates the next phase of God’s redemptive plan.<sup>11</sup> “The covenant that the Lord established with the house of David became the nucleus around which the messages of hope proclaimed by Hebrew prophets of later generations were built.”<sup>12</sup> The throne of Israel becomes the locus of God’s activity for the remainder of the Old Testament. The books of Kings and Chronicles record the few highs and many lows of Israel’s rulers demonstrating, in part, their representative function for the nation (Isa 55:3–4).<sup>13</sup> The Davidic covenant shaped messianic expectations which the New Testament presents Jesus as fulfilling.<sup>14</sup>

The Davidic covenant builds upon previous covenants and further reveals how God’s redemptive plan will be carried out in the future. It unpacks the Abrahamic covenant indicating that God’s promises to Abraham will be fulfilled through a Davidic

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<sup>9</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 19. See also John H. Walton, “Reading Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology,” in *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 157–58; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 62.

<sup>10</sup> Moses uses the word *nwh* here, demonstrating that rest is the result of God’s redeeming work.

<sup>11</sup> John H. Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 82.

<sup>12</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 337.

<sup>13</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 469–71.

<sup>14</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 337.

king.<sup>15</sup> First, God will give David a great name (2 Sam 7:9). Second, he will provide his people a place to dwell in peace (7:10). Furthermore, an offspring will be raised up “from your body” who will rule (7:12). Fourth, obedience by the human party is required by the Lord (Gen 17:1–2; 2 Sam 7:14–15).<sup>16</sup> Finally, God’s promised blessing through David will spread to all nations (7:19). The Davidic covenant reveals that the families of the earth will experience this glorious restoration of rest through Abraham’s offspring.

David’s response to God’s promises indicate at least a partial understanding of the significance of this covenant’s role in God’s redemptive purposes for the world. David’s use the phrase “instruction for mankind” in 7:19 has been the subject of much debate. His use of the word “torah” here may have a broad meaning. However, within the covenantal structure of the Old Testament, it seems best to conclude, like Dumbrell, that David “well understood this covenantal significance of the divine promises and their effect upon humanity as a whole.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, since the king—David in this case—represented God as a son, David understood his role as a mediator of God’s purposes to all nations built upon the covenant God established at creation to rule through Adam.<sup>18</sup> Gentry and Wellum suggest that Psalm 2 articulates this interpretation and conclude that the worldwide implications of this covenant stand behind David’s response in 2 Sam. 7:19.<sup>19</sup> Psalm 72:17 connects the Davidic covenant to the Abrahamic blessing to all

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<sup>15</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 343. See also Dumbrell, “The Davidic Covenant,” 44.

<sup>16</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 455. See also Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 477, 481.

<sup>17</sup> Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant*, 151. Dumbrell acknowledges that the word “torah” has a wide range of meaning within the Old Testament but contends that in the Ancient Near East the notion of a law for mankind would not have been foreign to the meaning.

<sup>18</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 457. See also Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant*, 34.

<sup>19</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 457–58: “[Second] Samuel 7:19 is the key to the universalization of the messianic vision in the Psalms and Prophets.”

nations.<sup>20</sup> It appears David understood—at least in part—that God’s promises to him were moving his covenant purposes forward when he declares that this is a “charter for humanity.”<sup>21</sup>

Second Samuel 7 uses language that alludes to Deuteronomy 12 revealing that the covenant with David advances God’s covenant with Israel. It is through the Davidic king that God will give his people rest.<sup>22</sup> Samir Massouh identifies four covenant promises in Deuteronomy 12 that God appropriates to David establishing its connection to the covenant with Israel. These covenant connections ground a proper understanding of God’s rest in Psalm 95.<sup>23</sup>

First, the expectation of entering the land of promise represents entrance into God’s rest (Deut 12:5, 9–10). God will establish the eternal throne of David’s offspring as the means by which he will restore what was lost because of human sin. Refusal to obey will result in the same outcome as Eden and the wilderness (Ps 95:11). Second, they will experience peace and rest from their surrounding enemies (Deut 12:10). Third, Israel will worship God in the place—or temple—he chooses to dwell (11–14) and fourth, subsequently encounter God’s presence there. “The temple . . . secures the blessing of ‘rest’ in God’s presence, and this in the book of Deuteronomy constituted the ingredient by which the land might become a virtual second Eden in which the covenant blessings of creation might be restored.”<sup>24</sup> However, even as Israel lived in the land, the period of the judges revealed that the people have not changed. Something more than getting them

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<sup>20</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 482.

<sup>21</sup> W. C. Kaiser, “The Blessing of David, The Charter for Humanity,” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies in Honor of O. T. Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 311.

<sup>22</sup> Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 473.

<sup>23</sup> The following summary is taken from Samir Massouh, “Exegetical Notes: Psalm 95,” *Trinity Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 87.

<sup>24</sup> Dumbrell, “The Davidic Covenant,” 45.

into the land is needed for the realization of God’s rest: a heart change hinted at by Moses in Deuteronomy 30:6 and eventually promised in the new covenant (Jer 31).

Each of these old covenant promises will be realized through David and his offspring. God’s promises to David possess both an immediate and future fulfillment.<sup>25</sup> “While David captured Jerusalem . . . , and while Solomon built and dedicated the temple, it was when God’s glory filled the temple that all the four promised things in Deut 12:4–14 were fulfilled.”<sup>26</sup> However, complete fulfillment awaited a future son whose throne would be established forever. Furthermore, Psalm 95 exhorts the people to enter God’s rest “today” even though they were already in the land, indicating that the land was only a type of something greater.

The covenant God establishes in 2 Samuel 7 builds upon the old covenant and reveals that “kingship in Israel was to be a means of accomplishing Exodus 19:3b–6.”<sup>27</sup> Dumbrell concurs and asserts “that in the person of the king, the covenant demands contemplated for all Israel in Exodus 19:3b–6 has been embodied.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, God intends to restore rest for his people through a future Davidic king whose priestly rule will bless the families of the earth. With the arrival of kingship in Israel, “God deepens and furthers his promises to Abraham and confirmed by the Mosaic covenant.”<sup>29</sup> In one sense, the old covenant brought the people into the rest of the land and God’s presence. However, the remainder of the Old Testament makes clear that it could not ultimately restore the rest that was lost in the fall. The Davidic covenant will restore the rest lost in the fall through a Davidic king whose rule will culminate in the fulfillment of God’s

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<sup>25</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 479.

<sup>26</sup> Massouh, “Exegetical Notes: Psalm 95,” 87.

<sup>27</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 480.

<sup>28</sup> Dumbrell, “The Davidic Covenant,” 46.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 485.



creation purpose to enjoy covenant rest with his people.

### **The Psalter and Covenant Rest**

In order to trace the development of the rest theme according to the Bible's own presentation and categories, one has to consider the canonical context. Later authors developed Israel's understanding of God's rest in ways that are consistent with Moses. This project has argued that God's rest in Genesis 2 is archetypal of these later expressions of rest. Later authors did not read meaning back into the text. They simply expounded upon earlier texts in light of further revelation. The rest promised to David in 2 Samuel 7—and reiterated in Psalm 95—provide a broader context within which to interpret rest in the Pentateuch, including the Sabbath. The arrangement of the canon in its final form serves as an internal witness to the progression of revelation and grounds the interpretation of earlier texts in light of later ones.<sup>30</sup>

Recent scholarship has convincingly argued that the Hebrew canon has an intentional shape to it. Stephen Dempster's extensive study of what he calls "the seams" of the Hebrew canon demonstrates uniformity and intentionality to its final form.<sup>31</sup> For example, he argues that the centrality of God's Word in the opening chapters of each section of the tripartite division of the Old Testament denote intentional editorial work to make a theological point.<sup>32</sup> Dempster makes several helpful observations in his study but the primary thrust of his work is that the final form of the canon provides a canonical context within which to interpret God's unfolding plan across redemptive history. The

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<sup>30</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, "An 'Extraordinary Fact': Torah and Temple and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon: Parts 1," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (1997): 31. Dempster contends that the canon itself contains the earliest witness to an intentional canonical form.

<sup>31</sup> See Dempster, "An 'Extraordinary Fact,'" 31–46. Although Dempster's "seams" may not provide every answer behind the editorial work in the formation of the Hebrew canon, they do provide compelling evidence of intentionality.

<sup>32</sup> The tripartite division of the Hebrew canon refers to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The first book of each division is Genesis, Joshua, and Psalms, respectively.

shape of the canon sheds light on the development of rest from Genesis 2 forward.<sup>33</sup>

The arrangement of the canon played an important role in how the inspired authors unpacked theological realities introduced by earlier authors. Gentry and Wellum summarize the framework within which these developments took place: “The very ‘form’ and ‘shape’ of Scripture reminds us that God disclosed himself not in one exhaustive act but in an organic, progressive manner.”<sup>34</sup> The canon’s final form reflects the theology of the covenant community responsible for arranging it.<sup>35</sup> Dempster’s study highlights the need to account for the literary features of the canon for the insight they provide to interpret Scripture according to Scripture.<sup>36</sup> The Psalter is a collection of writings by various authors from Moses to David and beyond. Its final form and placement within the Hebrew canon are important to the exegetical task of tracing and developing a theology of rest according to the Old Testament.

The shape of the Psalter within the larger canonical framework of the Old Testament has theological intentionality. Recent studies of the book of Psalms have made a compelling case that the present-day Psalter was organized into its current form during the post-exilic period.<sup>37</sup> Jamie Grant asserts that the Psalter “should be read in the light of

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<sup>33</sup> The approach of this project understands that a “fuller meaning” of Scripture is grounded in earlier texts “yet is also sensitive to interbiblical development across the canon. In this way, we discover God’s intent through the human authors of Scripture at the canonical level. God says more than the individual authors may have known, yet he does not contravene what the authors wrote and intended.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 111.

<sup>34</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 118.

<sup>35</sup> Peter J. Gentry, “The Text of the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 1 (March 2009): 19. Gentry argues that the content of the Hebrew Bible was fixed and stable as the authoritative text of the covenant community and trusted as reliably transmitted over time. Therefore, he concludes “that what is authoritative as inspired Scripture is the canonical text.” James Hamilton concurs: “In my view, the canonical form of the biblical text is the form that is to be regarded as inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore inerrant and authoritative.” James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, 2 vols., *Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, forthcoming).

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 24–25.

<sup>37</sup> See Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), xviii. See also Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 3. Many have attributed canonical redaction to Ezra and his contemporaries.

the post-exilic era during which the editors of the Psalter carried out their final work.”<sup>38</sup> The Psalter further illuminates the covenant structure of the canon as Gentry and Wellum assert, “The placement of Psalms 2 and 72 at the beginning of the first book and ending of the second book in the Psalter” is indicative of the eschatology of the redactors and demonstrates “that the blessing to the nations promised to Abraham is coming through the Davidic king/kingdom.”<sup>39</sup>

Gordon Wenham concludes, “This final-form approach licenses the modern exegete to call on other texts in the Psalter, especially those in adjacent psalms, to clarify what the editors of the Psalter meant in problem passages—a procedure that may be questioned if one holds that the texts in question are from different hands.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, acknowledging the arrangement of the Psalter can shed light on the interpretation of particular psalms. If the editors organized the Psalter with theological purpose then interpreting individual psalms within the context of the book in which they are placed can benefit exegesis. The Psalter needs to be read as an entire book now located in the post-exilic period. As a book, it is important to understand its literary features in the exegetical task.

Robert Wallace has identified what he calls “a narrative impulse” in the Psalter in his stimulating book, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*.<sup>41</sup> Wallace acknowledges that the literary genre of Psalms is not narrative. “There is, however, a narrative effect that results from looking at the Psalter holistically.”<sup>42</sup> His study focuses

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<sup>38</sup> Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 484–85.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 78.

<sup>41</sup> Robert E. Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). Hamilton, Wallace, and Wilson focus on the narrative and theological threads in the Psalter and within each book division.

<sup>42</sup> Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of the Psalter*, 11.

on the relationship between books 3, 4, and 5 to demonstrate in the text that a narrative thread binds them together and advances the overall narrative of the canon.

The arrangement of the Psalter is informed by the progression of the covenants and shaped by Israel's history and eschatological hope. This is especially noticeable as book 3 moves into book 4. Wilson's study of the "seams" between the Psalter's books leads him to the conclusion that the Psalter pivots in book 4 from a human perspective of despair over the state of the Davidic throne (Ps 89) to an emphasis on the divine kingship in Psalms 90–106 to inspire confidence that God remains committed to his covenant program.<sup>43</sup> Psalm 95 advances this theme as the psalmist declares that Yahweh is "a great King above all gods" (v. 3) worthy of worship and devotion. With the Davidic covenant firmly fixed as the backdrop of Israel's Messianic hope, Psalm 95 serves as a warning that if the covenant people refuse to obey the Lord, they will not enter into the rest that this future king will usher in. The author of Hebrews confirms this reading by appropriating Psalm 95 to Jesus, the Davidic Son who sits "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3–5; 3:7–4:7). In this way, Psalm 95 serves as hinge within book 4's narrative movement from Davidic failure to Messianic triumph. Rest will come through the Davidic king but will only be accessible by faith.

Wilson notes the distinctive elements within book 4 that demonstrate editorial purpose. He argues that the unusually high proportion of psalms lacking superscriptions in book 4 give it a distinctive character.<sup>44</sup> This collection of psalms is less focused on highlighting Davidic authorship given the state of the Davidic throne. While his throne has yet to obtain the glory promised in 2 Samuel 7, the mention of the rest associated with his throne indicates that it will not remain vacant forever. The placement of Psalm

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<sup>43</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11, no. 35 (June 1986): 92.

<sup>44</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 214.

95 within this context of the Psalter is foundational to Hebrews' argument. Rest may have been secured by Joshua and furthered by David, but true rest still awaits a future fulfillment (Heb 4:8). This is why the word "today" is so prominent in Hebrews' argument.

Wilson argues that book 4 serves as the "editorial center of the final form of the Hebrew Psalter" and answers the dilemma posed by the last psalm in book 3, Psalm 89.<sup>45</sup> Dennis Tucker and Jamie Grant similarly conclude that "the two books do provide a theological response to the crisis of exile articulated in the first three books."<sup>46</sup> However, commentators tend to interpret the influence of the covenants on the Psalter in isolation rather than seeing how the editors of the Psalter further develop the covenant progression of the Old Testament. The Mosaic theme of book 4 demonstrates that the Davidic covenant is the means by which God will fulfill the old covenant and bring about a greater redemption for his people. More on this below.

Gordon Wenham proposes that the arrangement of the Psalter into five books like the Pentateuch reflects the law's influence over the structure of the Psalter. He concludes, "The structure of the Psalter, which commends the law in the opening psalm and makes it the theme of the longest psalm, immediately draws attention to the law's importance."<sup>47</sup> Wenham observes that the centers of the first and last books are psalms extolling the law: "Psalm 19 is found at the midpoint of Book 1, while Psalm 119 comes about halfway through Book 5."<sup>48</sup> The placement of the five-book Psalter at the head of the section of the Old Testament referred to as the Writings makes it a kind of Torah for

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<sup>45</sup> Wilson, *The Editing of the Psalter*, 215.

<sup>46</sup> W. Dennis Tucker Jr. and Jamie A. Grant, *Psalms*, vol. 2, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 27.

<sup>47</sup> Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 78. See also Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, xix. However, Alter argues that the five-book structure was intended to mirror the Pentateuch for lectionary purposes in the Jewish synagogue. This theory has little to no textual warrant in the Psalter itself and has been argued against by Gerald Wilson. See Wilson, *The Editing of the Psalter*, 200.

<sup>48</sup> Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 79.

the exilic and post-exilic communities. Wenham concludes, “that the law that the righteous should delight in is not just the law of Moses in the Pentateuch, but the law of David enshrined in the Psalter.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, the organization into five books and the emphasis upon the law throughout the Psalter indicate that the post-exilic community affirmed the authoritative function of the psalms.<sup>50</sup> Tremper Longman concurs: “If so, then the editors may have been making a statement that, although the psalms are prayers by people to God, they nonetheless have the same authority as word of God as the Torah.”<sup>51</sup> David, the Psalter’s most prominent author, embodies Deuteronomy 17—a king who extols the law and leads God’s people to do the same.

John Walton proposes that the Psalms are “a cantata around the theme of the Davidic covenant.”<sup>52</sup> Like a musical cantata, the diverse psalms were compiled into a song book that the editors harmonized with a Davidic musical score. His cantata analogy suggests that the editors pieced together the various psalms purposefully, even if the individual composition of each was unrelated to the others. Gerald Wilson’s research confirms such a reading. In his view, the “seams” of books 1–3 are royal in nature and point to a Davidic thread woven throughout.<sup>53</sup> For instance, Psalm 2 opens book 1 echoing the covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7. The psalms of book 1 are primarily attributed to Davidic authorship and close with his confident declaration that

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<sup>49</sup> Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 79.

<sup>50</sup> This point should not be pressed too strongly. However, Gentry’s assertion that “a fixed arrangement of content” produced an authoritative text for the covenant community assumes theological intentionality in the shape of the Psalter shaped by the canonization of earlier Scripture. See Gentry, “The Text of the Old Testament,” 19.

<sup>51</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: 2014), 36. Of course, no observation is more compelling than the inspired witness of the New Testament writers who cite the Psalter over seventy times, more than any other book of the Old Testament, as noted by David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 27.

<sup>52</sup> John H. Walton, “Psalms: A Cantata about the Davidic Covenant,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 1 (March 1991): 24.

<sup>53</sup> Wilson, “Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Psalter,” 87.

his enemies will not triumph because God will set him in his presence forever (Ps 41:11–12). A fitting conclusion to the resoundingly triumphant introduction of Psalm 2.

Walton’s proposal is appealing given these covenantal features.

Psalm 95 and Deuteronomy 32 have several features in common that connect the Mosaic and Davidic covenants and encourage the post-exilic community to trust that God will fulfill his promises to them. Both reference God as their Rock (Deut 32:18; Ps 95:1). Not only has God redeemed them, but he is their maker (Deut 32:18; Ps 95:6). David Howard charts numerous other links.<sup>54</sup> He suggests that the general situation facing the audience parallels that of Deuteronomy 32 with correspondence to the rebellious wilderness generation and exhortation to not harden their hearts like their fathers. The use of the rebellious generation to warn a later generation is shared by both passages. “In the Song, Moses is seen exhorting them at some length not to repeat the mistakes of their fathers. In the psalm the message of the prophetic oracle is the same.”

Israel’s exile can be traced back to God’s promised judgment in the Song of Moses (32:23–30). It is not surprising to find a literary connection between book 4 and Deuteronomy 32 as the narrative movement of the Psalter transitions from Davidic failure to Messianic triumph in book 5. The failure of the human parties in both the covenants with Israel and David prepare the way for David’s Lord—the Melchizedekian priest-king—to rule with covenant faithfulness and with a mighty scepter (Ps 110).<sup>55</sup> Both passages close with a warning against disobedience (Deut 32:46; Ps 95:7). God’s rest is not explicitly mentioned in Deuteronomy 32. However, the destruction of God’s enemies in verses 41–43 is the same Messianic hope of Psalm 2: the hope that God’s rest will be accessible when the Davidic king is enthroned, securing rest from all her enemies (2 Sam

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<sup>54</sup> David M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93–100* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 60.

<sup>55</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 281–88. See also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 479–81.

7:11). This future hope will be missed if his audience does not obey God's voice (Ps 95:11).

Book 4 anticipates God's glorious and gracious response to the dilemma regarding the Davidic throne facing Israel at the end of book 3. The use of types—such as rest—is rooted in history and they were designed by God to be predictive with an expectation of future fulfillment.<sup>56</sup> Francis Foulkes expresses how the Psalter's typology functions: "The hope of a personal Messiah is based firmly on the experiences and traditions of the greatest anointed king that Israel had ever had; like David, he would be, but far greater than David."<sup>57</sup> God's future activity will correspond to what he has accomplished for Israel in the past. "By such an assumption the whole of the Old Testament is bound together and given unity."<sup>58</sup> Grant concludes that "the editors' presentation of kingship is meant to speak to the people's eschatological image of a restored Davidic king."<sup>59</sup> The rest of Psalm 95 is connected to the fulfillment of the future Davidic king. The nature of that rest will be like Deuteronomy 12 but far greater.

Despite the exile and state of the Davidic throne, entrance into God's rest is still possible "today." Psalm 95 was situated within book 4 by those who experienced a return from exile. Yet their return fell short of the glorious return spoken of in Jeremiah 23. It "cautions the people of God not to sin like those who experienced the exodus from Egypt," presenting the wilderness experience as a type functioning as a prophetic warning.<sup>60</sup> The offer of rest remains despite Israel's utter failure to obey the covenant. The warning in Psalm 95 recalls Israel's past failure in order to convey theological and

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<sup>56</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 130.

<sup>57</sup> Francis Foulkes, "The Acts of God: A Study of the Basis of Typology in the Old Testament," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 358.

<sup>58</sup> Foulkes, "The Acts of God," 343.

<sup>59</sup> Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, *Psalms* (forthcoming).



moral truths to the contemporary audience. “These retellings of the past are not merely historiographic, written to record events; their purpose is to educate the user of the psalms in both theology and ethics.”<sup>61</sup> The thematic connection between verses 1–7a and 7b–11 of Psalm 95 is the affirmation that God’s invitation to his covenant people remains. Failure to believe God’s Word is the cause for the current state of the kingdom and throne. Psalm 95’s warning sets the context for the following four psalms which strike a hopeful tone emphasizing God’s sovereign rule: He is their king regardless of the state of the Davidic throne.

The Psalter increasingly anticipates that the Davidic king who will bring rest for God’s people will be God himself. This is the very argument Jesus makes with his opponents in Matthew 22:44 when he applies Psalm 110:1 to himself as evidence of the divine nature of the Davidic heir. It is within this canonical context that the author of Hebrews interprets and applies Psalm 95 to Christ and the church. The ongoing nature of the warning anticipates the fulfillment of God’s promise to David to provide rest for his people through one of his heirs. Hebrews unites Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7, and Psalm 95 in chapters 1–3 to present Jesus as the faithful son who is worthy of praise because he has secured rest for God’s people once and for all.<sup>62</sup>

### **Psalm 95: Rest as Messianic Hope.**

Psalm 95 has intrigued and challenged interpreters. The psalm initially reads as two disjointed halves leading interpreters to ask what unites verses 1–7a with 7b–11? Jewish tradition held that Psalm 95 was a Sabbath psalm used in preparation for the

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<sup>61</sup> Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 119.

<sup>62</sup> Beale asserts, “My view is that if a later text is truly unpacking the idea of an earlier text, then the meaning developed by the later text was originally included in the ‘thick meaning’ of the earlier text.” In other words, later biblical writers were not reading meaning into earlier revelation but were discerning authorial intent that warranted their conclusions in light of the gospel event. The Messianic nature of Ps 95 is confirmed by Hebrews. G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 26.

gathering of God's people at the temple complex to worship.<sup>63</sup> The psalmist links God's creative activity (5–6) with his rest (11). The two-fold call to worship in the first half of the psalm echoes the purposes given for observing the Sabbath in the fourth commandment: creation and redemption (Exod 20:11; Deut 5:15). Wallace suggests that the Sabbath Psalms of 92 and 95 indicate the post-exilic hope that “a Sabbath could come as a resolution to the exile.”<sup>64</sup> Hebrews 3–4 unpack this expectation further by applying it to Christ, the Davidic king whose redeeming work has ushered in the true Sabbath for God's covenant people.

Commentators have noted a Mosaic influence on the psalm as demonstrated above.<sup>65</sup> The psalm opens with a call to worship God because of who he is and what he has done using language drawn from the Pentateuch. He is their redeemer, the rock of their salvation (1). The psalmist's reference to God as “the rock,” echoes the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 (4, 15, and 31). The Psalmist's allusions to creation and the exodus set the context for worship (4–6).<sup>66</sup> God's people are to kneel before him as their covenant God (6–7).<sup>67</sup> Finally, the warning in the latter half points back to the rebellious generation led by Moses through the wilderness (8–11).

The invitation and warning form an *inclusio* connecting God's presence with rest (2 and 11) and look both backward and forward. “The festival call to worship in verses 1–2 would then be in anticipation of the restoration of temple worship and the

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<sup>63</sup> See Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas, Word Books: 1990), 499. See also Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 336.

<sup>64</sup> Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of the Psalter*, 89.

<sup>65</sup> See Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter,” 75. Wilson suggests a Mosaic emphasis throughout book 4. He cites the fact that book four opens with the only psalm attributed to Mosaic authorship, the use of El Shadday and El Elyon to refer to God, additional references to Moses and Aaron (Ps 99:6), and the retelling of the exodus event (Ps 105). See also Tucker and Grant, *Psalms*, 28; Howard, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*, 118.

<sup>66</sup> Tucker and Grant, *Psalms*, 402.

<sup>67</sup> Tucker and Grant, *Psalms*, 403.

reconstruction of the sanctuary.”<sup>68</sup> The post-exilic community is called to anticipate entering God’s rest upon their return to the land. Marvin Tate observes a three-fold progression in verses 1, 2, and 6 calling worshippers to expect even greater intimacy with God.<sup>69</sup> God’s presence is associated with the temple. Therefore, a renewed invitation to “come into his presence” anticipates renewed temple worship after the exile. Despite their unfaithfulness to the covenant, God continues to invite his people into the safety and security of his presence. The corporate call to worship is to be characterized by “joyful noise,” “thanksgiving,” and loud singing following the pattern of other festival psalms (1–2).<sup>70</sup>

The narrative flow of the Psalter suggests that Psalm 95 is to be understood in light of Psalm 89. The concluding psalm of book 3 is not the last word regarding God’s covenant with David despite the lingering questions it raises. God will fulfill his promises to David and thus be their rock of salvation once again. The current state of the monarchy is God’s discipline and judgment against sinful Davidic heirs (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:30–32). Psalm 95 calls the post-exilic community to trust that God will be faithful to his promises even as it appears that he has “renounced the covenant” (Ps 89:39). Despite their present circumstances, God’s rest remains open to them, but they must not harden their hearts and risk forfeiting entrance just like the wilderness generation.<sup>71</sup>

As book 4 progresses, readers are led to marvel at the incredible grace of God’s faithfulness to his promises. The righteous will “be planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God” (Ps 92:13) because God “will not forsake his people; he

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<sup>68</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, *Psalms*, vol. 2, *Psalms 73–150*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 170.

<sup>69</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 498, 501.

<sup>70</sup> Tucker and Grant, *Psalms*, 402. See also Bullock, *Psalms 73–150*, 170; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 503.

<sup>71</sup> Massouh, “Exegetical Notes: Psalm 95,” 88.

will not abandon his heritage” (Ps 94:14). This hopeful message flows into Psalm 95 where the language of warning is balanced by these precious promises. God’s tender care for his people is expressed in pastoral imagery reflective of the exilic period marked by the distress of failed Davidic leadership (Isa 40:11; Jer 31:10; Ezek 34). While Israel has yet to see a son of David installed on the eternal throne, God is “a great King above all gods,” and will tend his sheep until he installs his king and brings them into the safety of his rest (3, 7, 11). This narrative movement reminds the covenant community of God’s intention to bring them back from exile in language reminiscent of Eden. Like Eden, they will be a flourishing garden with access to the presence of God (Pss 92 and 95). God’s presence is still accessible (Ps 95:2) but they can only enter if they “do not harden [their] hearts” (95:8). Verse 11 implies that if they have tender hearts inclined to obey the Lord, they will enter God’s rest. God intends on restoring the covenant rest that was lost in the garden.

The covenantal context in which Psalm 95 was originally written and arranged within the Psalter provides further insight as well. The continuing invitation to enter God’s rest, along with the warning to obey, appears long after the covenants with Israel and David were established. The Mosaic overtones and exodus imagery complement the Messianic narrative of book 4 to assure Israel of God’s covenant faithfulness and demonstrate that his covenant purposes still stand in spite of Israel’s utter inability to remain faithful. The past and future salvific work of their rock is the foundation of the invitation and results in exuberant praise in the psalms that immediately follow.

The invitation in verse 6 contains a key lexical link to the latter half of the psalm and establishes another point of continuity between both parts. The psalmist uses the same Hebrew word for “enter” in verses 6 and 11, linking God’s rest and presence together.<sup>72</sup> The warning in the latter half of the psalm is a clear reference to the journey

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<sup>72</sup> Massouh, “Exegetical Notes: Psalm 95,” 87. The word rendered “come” in v. 6 is the same

from Egypt to Canaan but is now applied to the present audience as they experience their journey back to the land. The exodus event is a type that points forward to a greater redemption through the Davidic king. Mitchell concludes that Hebrews' appropriation of Psalm 95 suggests that the New Testament church understood it as a reference to the latter-day exile.<sup>73</sup> The exodus and Babylonian return are types of the greater exodus by a future Davidic king. The church is living in the days of fulfillment and must not turn away from Christ—the culmination of Old Testament rest. The warning of the psalm is prospective and reveals the post-exilic hope of entering God's rest through the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. The warning in verse 11 denotes that God's presence in verse 2 is synonymous with his covenant rest.

David Howard observes that verses 6–7 form the structural center of the Psalm, with the sections preceding and following being nearly identical in length.<sup>74</sup> God's covenant with Israel undergirds the psalm and serves a two-fold purpose as a result of this intentional arrangement: (1) It is the basis for the invitation to worship, and (2) it bridges both halves of the psalm (7).<sup>75</sup> Israel should draw near to God because of their special covenant relationship; but they must also “hear his voice,” just as the wilderness generation was exhorted to at the foot of Sinai in Exodus 19 (7b). The summons to “hear” is not merely about listening. It is a call to obedience.<sup>76</sup> The use of past events to prophetically warn the covenant community is characteristic of the exilic and post-exilic community.<sup>77</sup> The same prophetic instinct marks the author of Hebrews who uses Psalm

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word in v. 11 translated as “enter.”

<sup>73</sup> Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, 287–88.

<sup>74</sup> Howard, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*, 58.

<sup>75</sup> Bullock, *Psalms 73–150*, 170.

<sup>76</sup> Bullock, *Psalms 73–150*, 170. See also Tucker and Grant, *Psalms*, 404, who add, “The issue is not about whether God's voice is audible to his people—it is rather that the worshipping community should be careful to *listen* to his voice when they hear it” (emphasis original).

<sup>77</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 503. Tate points to passages like Isa 42:18–43:28, where Israel's

95 as a warning to the early church (Heb 3:7–4:7). Psalm 95 is “living and active” (4:12) therefore the church is called to be “united by faith with those who listened” (4:2). Marvin Tate summarizes the psalm well: “Jubilation is one pole of worship; obedience of the demands of God is the other. The ‘resting-place’ of God is closed to those who only jubilate.”<sup>78</sup>

Peter Enns contends that there is a thematic unity to Psalm 95: creation/re-creation.<sup>79</sup> Enns demonstrates the unity of the psalm by highlighting how the creation language used as the motive for worship is directly associated with the exodus and the establishment of the old covenant.<sup>80</sup> The call to worship of the first half of the psalm shares the exodus backdrop with the prophetic warning of the last half, establishing “a clear connection with the otherwise distinct second half.”<sup>81</sup> Not only is God the creator and owner of “the sea” and “dry land,” he is the creator or “maker” of a people by bringing them out of slavery on the “dry land.” By using the same word for “maker” in verses 5 and 6, the psalmist echoes Moses presentation in Exodus 19–34. Enns notes the correspondences in structure between verses 1–5 and verses 6–7 of Psalm 95 and concludes that the latter verses are “a reference to Israel’s ‘creation’ as a people when they came out of Egypt.”<sup>82</sup>

The previous chapter demonstrated the intentional parallels between the creation event and the establishment of the covenant at Sinai. Moses’s narration of the Ten Words and building of the tabernacle echoes the creation account. Just as God

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history is recalled in order to admonish the current generation and exhort them to obey in faith.

<sup>78</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 503.

<sup>79</sup> Peter E. Enns, “Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and Its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1–4:13,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 256.

<sup>80</sup> Enns, “Creation and Re-Creation,” 258–61.

<sup>81</sup> Enns, “Creation and Re-Creation,” 261.

<sup>82</sup> Enns, “Creation and Re-Creation,” 258.

created all things, he is now creating a people for himself. Rest is the capstone of both accounts—God’s and Sabbath observance respectively—making it clear that resting in the enjoyment of covenant relationship is the goal. Psalm 95 is structured around this theological reality. Enns’s thematic proposal further demonstrates the thesis of this project. Psalm 95 expresses rest as a type of God’s creation rest that anticipates a future restoration through the Davidic king.

Enns presents a number of lexical and thematic links with the major and minor prophets to establish that “the language of creation and redemption are juxtaposed to a re-creation event.”<sup>83</sup> In other words, the arrangement of Psalm 95 shares these features with a larger Old Testament tradition and need not be viewed as two distinct compositions joined together. The theme of creation and re-creation permeate the Old Testament and indicate that one expectation of the Sabbath is the completion of the new creation when God’s people will join him fully in covenant rest. Psalm 95 advances this agenda and validates a typological understanding of Sabbath rest within the Old Testament. This project’s contention is that the way in which the author of Hebrews unpacked Psalm 95 is consistent with Moses and the psalmist which explains his use of the psalm to demonstrate the Bible’s presentation of Sabbath rest as a type.

The upshot of Enns’s work establishes that the post-exilic hope of Israel is the same eschatological hope presented in the Pentateuch: restoration of covenant relationship with God resulting in rest. The covenantal progression from Moses to David grounds the argument for the author of Hebrews. The Davidic hope of 2 Samuel 7 anticipates that God will fulfill the promises of the old covenant through his king and restore covenant rest. Adherence to the fourth commandment was an ongoing reminder of God’s work in the past (creation and redemption) while also anticipating his work in the future (re-creation through redemption).

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<sup>83</sup> Enns, “Creation and Re-Creation,” 260.

The writer of Hebrews points to the Psalmist's declaration in Psalm 95 as confirmation that the Sabbath was a type that pointed to entrance into God's rest and has now been fulfilled in Christ (Heb 4:6–9). The narrative of book 4 is moving the audience from despair at the state of the Davidic throne (Ps 89) to a future hope when God will fulfill all that he has promised. "The Psalms repeatedly use what God has done in history in giving deliverance and victory to his people, as reasons for the praise of his mercy and might, but also as a basis of faith in his power to deliver from present enemies, and to continue to guard and to guide whatever problems and difficulties of the future might be."<sup>84</sup>

The arrangement of the Psalter presents a narrative shaped by the covenants. Israel awaits a greater exodus when the Davidic king will usher God's people into his rest once and for all. The foundation for this future hope is God's promise in Jeremiah 23:7–8:

Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when they shall no longer say, "As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt," but "As the Lord lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them."

Psalm 95 bridges past Davidic failure with confidence in future fulfillment. What God has done in the past will be surpassed by something greater.

Hebrews unpacks and applies Psalm 95 in light of the inauguration of the new covenant. With the coming of Christ, God's rest has arrived. However, the church must take heed and strive to enter by continuing in the faith. "By ending on this note the psalm sacrifices literary grace to moral urgency."<sup>85</sup> The urgency for the church is far greater. To turn away from Christ is to forfeit the true covenant rest to which verse 11 points. Unlike

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<sup>84</sup> Foulkes, "The Acts of God," 345.

<sup>85</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150, Kidner Classic Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 378.



Israel, the church is the last days people of God to whom Psalm 95 fully and finally applies. To “share in Christ” (Heb 3:14) is to know and experience true rest, “for we who have believed enter that rest” (Heb 4:3). Schreiner rightly concludes, “the writer reads the OT temporally and historically, finding significance in the epoch in which people lived.”<sup>86</sup> Psalm 95 looked ahead to the rest that would be secured by the Davidic heir. Like Hebrews, his concern is that his hearers not harden their hearts to God’s covenant promises but strive to enter God’s rest by faith.

### **Conclusion**

Psalm 95 unpacks and builds upon what the Old Testament has revealed about the rest God promised to his covenant people. The rest offered to the wilderness generation was not the ultimate rest God would provide for his people. The Psalmist looked ahead with confidence that—based upon the covenant God established with David in 2 Samuel 7—rest would be restored for the people of God through one of his sons. The editors of the Psalter placed Psalm 95 purposefully to communicate this same message to the post-exilic community. In the wake of failed Davidic leadership (Ps 89), hope of entering God’s rest remained.

The previous chapter contends that the theology of the Pentateuch informs Israel’s understanding of God’s promised rest and the Sabbath’s connection to it. The weekly pattern of observing the seventh day consummation of each week pointed backward to creation and redemption and forward to re-creation and final redemption as Psalm 95 further develops. Humanity will dwell with God in covenant rest once again when his rule is expanded to all the earth, (Gen 1:28; 2:15; Ps 95). Israel’s role as a kingdom of priests under the old covenant continues to move this plan forward. The

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, ed. Stephen P. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 181.

inauguration of the Davidic covenant focuses God's redemptive plan on a king-son who will restore humanity to God's presence and the joy of covenant rest lost in the fall.

Hebrews' interpretation and application of Psalm 95 builds upon the covenantal progression of the Old Testament canon. The inauguration of the new covenant in Christ is the fulfillment and realization of God's promised rest. Now that the Son of David has arrived (Heb 1:5), true rest is available and already entered into by those who believe the good news (Heb 4:3, 10). The "today" of Psalm 95 has arrived in Jesus Christ. God's creation rest, Joshua's conquering rest, and David's future rest are fulfilled in Christ. The true Sabbath to which the fourth commandment pointed has arrived in him.

## CHAPTER 5

### SABBATH REST IN THE GOSPELS

Having traced the Old Testament's presentation of rest from the Pentateuch through the Psalter, we now turn our attention to the inauguration of the new covenant in the Gospel accounts to understand how the life and death of Christ fulfills and restores covenant rest to sinful humanity. Jesus's invitation to find rest in him (Matt 11:28–30) and his declaration of lordship over the Sabbath (Matt 12:8) mark turning points in the Bible's presentation of rest. The progressive development of rest from the Old Testament into the New comes into sharper focus in the Gospels and will be the subject of this chapter.

This project has followed the interpretive priority articulated by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum:

The New Testament's interpretation of the Old is definitive in interpreting the details of the Old but *not* in such a way that contravenes the earlier texts. This is why we must carefully allow the New Testament to show us how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ, while also doing justice to texts in their Old Testament context.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, Hebrews is the starting point for this study and serves as a controlling passage that informs a canonical interpretation of earlier Scripture. By controlling, we simply mean that the key passages in the Pentateuch, the Davidic covenant, Psalm 95, the Gospels, and Paul's Epistles are to be understood in light of Hebrews 3–4. The author's covenantal and canonical interpretation of rest is the definitive word on how the church is to understand the Sabbath's purpose and function as fulfilled in Christ. Hebrews'

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 145 (emphasis original).

interpretation of God's rest at creation reveals that it is the archetype of all rest that follows, from the garden, to the land, to the tabernacle/temple, and ultimately Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews does not contravene Scripture's earlier presentation of rest but in light of Christ's fulfillment, takes what was seen dimly and lets the glory of Christ's person and work shine brightly. The arrival of Jesus Christ is portrayed by the Gospel writers as the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament (Matt 5:17). The Sabbath controversies provide a platform upon which Jesus reveals himself to be the source of true and ultimate rest for God's people. He is the true Sabbath and restoration of the covenant rest lost in the fall.

I have endeavored to demonstrate that God's rest at creation is the archetype of eschatological rest, the goal of creation—and redemption—and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God's offer of rest to humanity comes through his covenant promises from creation through consummation; each covenant expressing God's promised rest in its own way and yet dependent on what came before it. This chapter limits the investigation to a few key texts in the Gospels that will provide the framework for a new covenant understanding of rest as fulfilled in Christ.

### **New Covenant Inauguration**

The arrival of Jesus signals that the fulfillment of the Old Testament is at hand. The Gospels further reveal the nature of the covenant rest God promised to restore throughout the Old Testament. Their four-fold witness holds the Old Testament and New Testament together. Jonathan Pennington expresses this truth well:

The fourfold Gospel book functions as the portion of Holy Scripture that is so fitted and placed that it holds together the archway with its two sides—the Old Testament Scriptures on the one side and the rest of the New Testament writings on the other. The Gospel accounts complete and make ultimate sense of the story of God's work in the world as found in the Jewish Scriptures, while at the same time they serve as the fountainhead for the rest of the apostolic witness and teaching.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological*

Understood this way, the Gospels serve as a hinge on which progressive revelation turns, laying important groundwork for the development of the new covenant's presentation of rest. The fulfillment of God's promises is bound up in the person and work of Christ. The arrival of the promised Davidic king inaugurates a new era in God's redemptive plan,<sup>3</sup> including the beginning of the fulfillment of the archetypal rest prepared for his people.

Controversy quickly erupts between Jesus and the religious leaders regarding the lawful observance of the Sabbath. Jesus does not simply justify his actions by rightly interpreting God's law, though he could have done so as the Word incarnate. Instead, the narratives focus on his unique messianic identity to reveal that the Sabbath ultimately points to him. Donald Hagner captures the essence of the Sabbath controversies: "Since the Sabbath was an anticipation of the eschaton, Jesus regarded it as the perfect day for bringing wholeness to those in need. These Sabbath deeds are an indispensable part of the kingdom he brings, and thus they point to his messianic mission, his authority, and his identity."<sup>4</sup> In other words, the restoration promised in the Old Testament through the Davidic king is now being ushered in by Jesus. The Sabbath—weighed down with numerous regulations installed by the religious leaders of the day—will be re-calibrated by Jesus and brought back into alignment with its purpose and function as revealed in the Old Testament. The inauguration of the new covenant introduces a change in the law-covenant which the remainder of the New Testament fleshes out (Heb 7:12).

Thus far this project has argued that God's rest at creation exemplifies the enjoyment of covenant relationship between God and humanity. Therefore, it is the

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*Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 231.

<sup>3</sup> The question of what makes the new covenant "new" cannot be addressed here. For helpful treatments of this important subject, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B & H, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Donald A. Hagner, "Jesus and the Synoptic Sabbath Controversies," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19, no. 2 (2009): 215.

archetype of all other expressions of rest in Scripture (i.e. temple, land, kingdom, Sabbath). Those expressions of rest are tethered to the covenant structure of the Bible—from the creation covenant to the new covenant. Each covenant further unfolds and develops the rest theme by anticipating God’s redemptive work to restore the rest that was lost in the fall. In light of Hebrews 3–4, the previous two chapters unpacked the relationship between the Mosaic and Davidic covenants and God’s offer of rest through his saving work by tracing the Old Testament’s development of rest through the Pentateuch, 2 Samuel 7, and Psalm 95. Jesus’s offer of rest in Matthew 11:28–30 grows out of the pattern established through the covenants that came before yet exceeds them all as he establishes the new covenant.

The Synoptic Gospels share much of the same content in their respective reports of the Sabbath controversies. Together they introduce and anticipate the nature of Christ’s fulfillment of the Sabbath. However, this is to be understood within the larger program of covenant fulfillment under the umbrella of the covenant rest God promised to his people. Thomas Schreiner concludes that in the Gospels “we have a hint that the Sabbath (like the temple!) must be reinterpreted now that the Son of Man has arrived.”<sup>5</sup> This chapter will investigate significant passages in the Gospels that demonstrate the inauguration of a new covenant era in which the purposes of God for the Sabbath center on the person and work of Christ: Matthew 11:27–12:14, Mark 2:27–28, and John 5:17.

### **Matthew 11:27–12:14**

Davidic fulfillment is front and center as the New Testament opens.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, ed. Stephen P. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 172.

<sup>6</sup> What is known as the “Synoptic problem” has been the subject of numerous works. The dating of the Gospels and dependence of Matthew and Luke on Mark’s account have produced notable insights regarding the context of the Synoptics and the unique theological purposes of each. However, this study will follow the ordering of the final form of the New Testament to trace the Gospels’ presentation of rest. For a helpful overview of the “problem,” see D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible*

Matthew's genealogy focuses the reader's attention on Jesus's descent from David (1:1), establishing a fulfillment theme from the start. James Hamilton concludes, "The genealogy points to the realization of God's promises to David."<sup>7</sup> Matthew then widens the scope of fulfillment to include the myriad ways he fulfills the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup>

The clearest expression of this central idea is Matthew 5:17 where Jesus himself testifies that he has come not to "abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . but to fulfill them." The word "fulfill" carries the idea of making full, to complete, or to bring to a designed end.<sup>9</sup> The contrast between "abolish" and "fulfill" conveys the fact that Jesus has not come to undo or abrogate the law-covenant but to complete its purpose. Here, the Law and the Prophets represent the whole of the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup> R. T. France concludes, "It denotes the coming into being of that to which Scripture pointed forward . . . . He 'fulfills' the pattern laid down in the law and the prophets."<sup>11</sup> The best way to understand fulfillment is in terms of the prophetic function of the Old Testament which pointed forward for its ultimate significance.<sup>12</sup> Jesus asserts that the pattern set forth in the Old Testament pointed to him and his work as the Messiah. The Old Testament theme of rest comes into sharper focus through Matthew's presentation of the Sabbath controversies,

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*Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew–Mark*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 34–43.

<sup>7</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 364. See also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 700–4.

<sup>8</sup> Carson observes that Matthew displays a "colorful mosaic" of "vignettes linked together in diverse ways" and concludes that to reduce his presentation of Jesus to a single theme or focus detracts, rather than enhances, the account. See Carson, *Matthew*, 51. Fulfillment is a key theological purpose in Matthew but only in conjunction with the covenant structure that underlies the book and shapes Matthew's message of fulfillment. Everything that Jesus fulfills is tethered to the covenants God made to his people.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and ed. F. W. Danker, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 828–29.

<sup>10</sup> The "Law" is a designation for the Pentateuch as a division in the OT.

<sup>11</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 182.

<sup>12</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 720–21. They assert, "Jesus was not abolishing the canonical authority of the Old Testament but correctly orienting it to terminate in his own teaching."

particularly the pericopes in 11:28–12:14.

Matthew juxtaposes chapters 11–12 to present Jesus’s declaration about rest as the fulfillment of the Sabbath. Jesus’s claim to offer rest is paired with an encounter he has with the religious leaders over the Sabbath. His invitation in Matthew 11:28–30 is the clearest expression of his identity as the fulfillment of the Sabbath. This invitation immediately follows his shocking claim to have sovereign authority to decide who he will reveal the Father to (27). Matthew counterbalances divine election with the open-ended invitation for “all who labor and are heavy laden” to come to him (28)—a theological tension maintained throughout the New Testament.

Jesus makes clear that those to whom he reveals the Father are the humble and lowly who look to him to find rest for their souls. His is the voice God’s people are to listen to and not harden their hearts (Deut 18:15; Ps 95:7; Matt 17:5). A number of suggestions have been offered to define the “yoke” that is burdensome.<sup>13</sup> The contrast in Matthew seems to be between Jesus’s “easy yoke” and the “heavy” burden of submission to the Pharisaic interpretation and application of the Old Testament.<sup>14</sup> This is confirmed by the reasoning of Jesus’s argument in the following episode. More on this below.

Jesus “invites them to follow his own teaching as the definitive interpretation of the law” since he is the “designed end” of the Law and the Prophets.<sup>15</sup> Carson asserts,

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<sup>13</sup> For brief summaries on OT background, suggested contrasts between the yokes presented, and similar uses of the term in the New Testament, see France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 448–49; Carson, *Matthew*, 322.

<sup>14</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 322. See also Blomberg (*Matthew*, 195), who references Matt 23:4 and the later reference to “yoke” by the apostles in Acts 15:10 as they addressed the controversy stirred by the Judaizers.

<sup>15</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 324. Craig Keener adds, “By speaking of God’s law as Jesus’s own, Jesus implicitly claims authority from the Father greater than that of Moses himself (11:27).” Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 348–49. Jesus is calling his hearers to come to his teaching and submit to his yoke. In essence, he is supplanting the Mosaic law with his own and promising that rest will result from obedience to him. Most commentators observe the similarities between Jesus’ invitation and that of Sirach 51 in which Wisdom is personified, inviting the simple to take on its yoke to find rest. While Matthew may have borrowed from this familiar Jewish Wisdom tradition, it seems more likely that he is continuing to impress upon the reader the reality of fulfillment (5:17).



“Jesus’ teaching must be adopted, not Torah.”<sup>16</sup> Matthew 11:28–12:14 presupposes such a reading. In fact, Jesus is presented as sovereign lawgiver which anticipates that his authority will surpass even Moses (Matt 5:22–48; Heb 1:1–3, 3:1–6, 8:6–13).<sup>17</sup> Verses 28–30 contain no direct quotations from the Old Testament. However, dependence on key Old Testament passages is clear and connect Jesus’s words to the covenant rest anticipated by the Law and the Prophets.

In Exodus 33:14 Moses prays, “show me now your ways, that I may know you and find favor in your sight.” God’s response in verse 14 is “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” God’s presence is closely associated with the rest he promises. Jesus now claims that “all things have been handed over to me by my Father” (11:27) and that it is in taking up *his* ways that one can enjoy his presence and find rest (28–29).<sup>18</sup> Hagner comments: “Astonishingly Jesus calls people in the first instance *to himself* and only subsequently to the yoke of discipleship. It is moreover he, rather than God, who gives rest.”<sup>19</sup> The allusion to Exodus 33:14 establishes the Christological significance of verse 28: Jesus is God the Son. Though not fully expressed, this conclusion is hard to miss. The Sabbath must be understood within the framework of rest ultimately being found in the LORD. At the Christological level, Jesus’s claim is quite radical. However, the divine offer of rest in God himself is not new in the storyline of Scripture. Even at the outset of the fourth commandment, true rest is revealed to be experienced in God alone.

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<sup>16</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 321.

<sup>17</sup> The phrase “But I say to you” throughout the Sermon on the Mount sets Jesus as a definitive and divine authority of the law and Moses who mediated the law given to Israel. So France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 198, 463.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Hagner and David Turner both argue that Exod 33:14 stands behind Jesus’s words in Matt 11:28. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 323; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 305.

<sup>19</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 323 (emphasis original).

Commentators<sup>20</sup> also see a direct allusion to Jeremiah 6:16: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.’” Carson suggests that “if this is intended to be not just an allusion but a fulfillment passage, then Jesus is saying that ‘the ancient paths’ and ‘the good way’ (Jer 6:16) lie in taking on his yoke because he is the one to whom the OT Scriptures point.”<sup>21</sup> If fulfillment is a central theme of Matthew’s Gospel, his presentation of Jesus’s offer of rest in himself indicates the culmination of promised rest throughout the Old Testament. Moreover, the means of securing rest is obedience to Jesus’s final and authoritative interpretation of the Torah.<sup>22</sup> Those who “labor and are heavy laden” must come to him in faith. Later in Matthew we discover that taking Jesus’s yoke is nothing less than “observing” all that he commanded (Matt 28:20). Jesus’s superiority to the Mosaic law is further established by the following two pericopes where the Sabbath takes center stage.<sup>23</sup> The arrangement of Matthew’s narrative demonstrates that the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ who is the Lord of the Sabbath. Tony Costa’s conclusion is helpful: “Jesus is declaring himself to be the Sabbath, the one who ideally and truly gives eternal rest, not a twenty-four hour rest once in a seven day week.”<sup>24</sup> Jesus is the way back into covenant rest with God.

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<sup>20</sup> So Carson, *Matthew*, 322; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 450; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 324; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 349.

<sup>21</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 322. Grant Osborn aptly observes, “The promise here quotes Jer 6:16, where Jerusalem is under siege because they have rejected God’s promise of rest for those who ‘walk in the good way.’ Jesus’s followers who take his yoke will find the rest the Israelites of Jeremiah’s time forfeited.” Grant R. Osborn, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 444. The judgment experienced by Jeremiah’s audience is the very outcome God promised would befall his people if they did not listen to his voice (Ps 95:7–11).

<sup>22</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 450–51.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Schreiner points out that of the ten occurrences of the word “Sabbath” in Matthew, eight are in chapter 12. Patrick Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 222. As the old covenant sign, these Sabbath episodes serve to present Jesus’s authority over the law itself, determining both its meaning and exceptions to it.

<sup>24</sup> Tony Costa, “The Sabbath and Its Relation to Christ and the Church in the New Covenant,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 133.

Elizabeth Talbot’s comprehensive study of the word “rest” in Matthew 11:28–30 demonstrates Christ’s intentional use of covenant language to claim fulfillment of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. She compares Matthew’s use of the word *anapausis* with the Septuagint’s—the primary Old Testament text upon which he relied.<sup>25</sup> “That Matthew is presenting Jesus in a Mosaic context is strongly suggested by the narrative order: the intimate, reciprocal knowledge is then followed by the promise of rest.”<sup>26</sup> As noted above, the allusion to Exodus 33:14 expresses Jesus’s unique status as the ultimate mediator of the knowledge of God and the covenant rest he promised by his presence. Such a claim puts Jesus on par with God himself. Talbot concludes that Jesus is the new and greater Moses. This assertion fits the context of Matthew’s presentation of Jesus as the ultimate interpreter of the law in the Sabbath pericopes that follow in chapter 12. Furthermore, Talbot’s study reveals that the exact wording “I will give rest” “appears only three times in the LXX, and all three come from the mouth of the Lord . . . . The first two occurrences are promises to the Davidic dynasty and the third relates to the future Davidic king.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus is announcing that the rest promised through the Mosaic and Davidic covenants is found in him. One must come to him to enjoy the covenant blessing of God’s rest. The following scenes hint at what this will mean for the Sabbath.

Matthew connects 11:28–30 to the two subsequent Sabbath controversies using the temporal phrase “At that time,” a device he has used previously (11:24). By connecting the accounts, Matthew introduces the scene as an example of the heavy yoke

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<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Talbot, “Rest, Eschatology and Sabbath in Matthew 11:28–30: An Investigation of Jesus’s Offer of Rest in the Light of the Septuagint’s Use of *Anapausis*,” in *What Does the Scripture Say? Studies in the Function of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Synoptic Gospels*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (New York: T & T Clark International, 2012). Talbot’s unique contribution to the study is her exhaustive examination of the word *anapausis* to demonstrate fulfillment of Old Testament promises. She concludes that there are three main potential backgrounds for Jesus’s offer of rest: “wisdom’s repose,” “Sabbath rest,” and “peaceful inheritance” (58).

<sup>26</sup> Talbot, “Rest, Eschatology and Sabbath in Matthew 11:28–30,” 61.

<sup>27</sup> Talbot, “Rest, Eschatology and Sabbath in Matthew 11:28–30,” 62. Talbot identifies 2 Sam 7:11, 1 Chr 22:9, and Ezra 34:15.

of Pharisaic application of the law.<sup>28</sup> The Sabbath's purpose is central to the narrative but only so far as it establishes Jesus's authority. That is made explicit by Jesus's remarkable claim to be "lord of the Sabbath" (12:8). The outcome of the narrative is not an abrogation of the Sabbath, but "it raises the possibility of a future change or reinterpretation of the Sabbath."<sup>29</sup> It anticipates that the fulfillment Jesus just announced will result in a yoke characterized as easy and light when contrasted with the Pharisees. The precise meaning of Jesus's arguments has been widely debated. However, what is often overlooked is the larger covenantal context wherein Jesus is ushering in the new covenant and establishing himself as sovereign over it. This point is more clearly introduced by Mark's account discussed below.

The first scene in chapter 12 is an encounter in a grain field. The disciples pluck grain to eat as they walk through the fields and are immediately accused of "doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath" (12:2). Jesus confronts the strict interpretation and application of the fourth commandment by recalling two complementary but distinct Old Testament encounters with the law. He does not engage them at the level of their accusation—halakah<sup>30</sup> regulations—but rather takes them to the Old Testament to establish his authority. Jesus's use of David in this context fits with Matthew's fulfillment program. As the promised Son of David, Jesus has more in mind than merely providing an example to prove his innocence.

Commentators have struggled to establish the grounds for Jesus's argument from 1 Samuel 21. In the account, David and his men are on the run from Saul. He does what is unlawful and eats the showbread from the tabernacle and gives some to his

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<sup>28</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 323.

<sup>29</sup> D. A. Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Gospels," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock: 1982), 66.

<sup>30</sup> The halakah is the catalog of regulations, contained in the Mishnah, that fenced the law to prevent law-breaking by faithful Jews.

companions—none of which are priests. Some have suggested that this occurred on the Sabbath, the day on which the bread was changed (21:6).<sup>31</sup> However, that is irrelevant to Jesus’s argument. David’s authority is the point. The account presents his setting aside a clear command (Lev 24:9) implying that he was guiltless in doing so.<sup>32</sup> “It was David, *as David*, who was permitted to do what was not lawful; and now Jesus places his own authority alongside that of David.”<sup>33</sup> The inference is made explicit by Jesus’s next example: “the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless” (12:5). The argument relies upon *a fortiori* reasoning—the lesser to the greater. In verse 6, Jesus makes the first of three statements that “something greater” is here. The example of the priests’ service in the temple is parallel to 1 Samuel 21. The argument Jesus makes only holds “if Jesus is at least as special as David.”<sup>34</sup> France summarizes Jesus’s reasoning within the framework of typology: “‘If David had the right to set aside a legal requirement, I have much more.’ The unexpressed premise is ‘a greater than David is here’: indeed, the parallel argument in Matthew 12:5–6 introduces an equivalent formula.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, Jesus’s argument is not that the circumstances are parallel and they are therefore guiltless but that the Greater David has come and has authority to determine the right application of the Mosaic law. If Israel’s greatest king could set aside the law, certainly the Son of David has the authority to do so.

The same logic undergirds the reason why the priests were guiltless. The inference regarding David is now made explicit. The Levitical priests regularly set aside

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<sup>31</sup> According to commentators, a rabbinic tradition states that this event occurred on a Sabbath, thus grounding Jesus’s argument. See France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 458; Also, Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 329.

<sup>32</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 324.

<sup>33</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 459 (emphasis original).

<sup>34</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 325.

<sup>35</sup> R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1998), 46.

Sabbath regulations to perform their priestly service in the temple and yet were “guiltless” (v. 5). Jesus’s pointed to David to show that as the Davidic successor he has authority that surpasses David himself. Here he highlights the importance of the temple to demonstrate that legal adherence to the Sabbath was not the primary concern even within the law itself. If the priests can “profane” the Sabbath and be guiltless, then so can he and the disciples. Rather than justify the actions of the disciples, he boldly claims that “something greater than the temple is here” (v. 6). “Jesus’s argument, then, provides an instance from the law itself in which the Sabbath restrictions were superseded by the priests because their cultic responsibilities took precedence: the temple, as it were, was greater than the Sabbath. But now, Jesus claims, ‘something’ greater than the temple is here.”<sup>36</sup>

Jesus is antitype and fulfillment of all that the temple anticipated. Hagner rightly concludes that “the demands of the sabbath commandment, however they be construed, must give way to the presence and purpose of Jesus, and not vice versa.”<sup>37</sup> That much is clear by the third Old Testament passage Jesus quotes in response to the Pharisees. Jesus cites Hosea 6:6 for the second time in Matthew’s account (9:13) to conclude that they simply do not know the heart behind God’s commands. If they had they would not condemn the guiltless. What is implicit in Matthew’s account, Mark makes explicit: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). In other words, the fourth commandment is no static law to keep regardless of the law’s other mandates. This is the very point Jesus makes in the following scene: doing good on the Sabbath is declared lawful (12:12). The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 is a parallel instance where Jesus’s main point is that mercy displaces sacrifice. The priest and Levite were condemned for placing the clean/unclean regulations before love for

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<sup>36</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 326.

<sup>37</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 330.

neighbor.

The pericope concludes with an even more controversial statement: Jesus's claim to be "lord of the Sabbath." In one sense, the narrative has been building toward this climactic statement. Jesus has already declared himself to be greater than David and greater than the temple. "In the same way, Jesus is greater than the Sabbath."<sup>38</sup> Carson suggests that the "for" in verse 8 functions to show the reasoning behind the argument: the disciples are guiltless *because* Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.<sup>39</sup> The disciples should not be condemned since they are guiltless (v. 7). They are guiltless because Jesus has judged their activity on the Sabbath as permissible on his own authority as sovereign over the Sabbath.<sup>40</sup> "The authority of the temple laws shielded the priests from guilt; the authority of Jesus shields his disciples from guilt."<sup>41</sup> Turner rightly concludes, "Davidic promises, priestly activities, and Sabbath rest all find fulfillment in him."<sup>42</sup>

Advocates for Christian Sabbath observance interpret Matthew 12 to derive moral principles and miss the main point of the narrative. For example, Joseph Pipa argues that Jesus's lordship over the Sabbath is presented as the vehicle for correctly interpreting the command. This is true enough. However, his conclusion is only a springboard to assert that Jesus is extracting perpetual moral principles from the fourth commandment. On this premise, he outlines specific principles<sup>43</sup> from the narrative in order to apply them to the church today: (1) "we are to do those things that strengthen us for the Lord's work;" (2) to only do work that is "necessary so God's people could

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<sup>38</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 41.

<sup>39</sup> Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Gospels," 67.

<sup>40</sup> Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Gospels," 68.

<sup>41</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 326.

<sup>42</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 311.

<sup>43</sup> The following list is taken from Joseph A. Pipa, "The Christian Sabbath," in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, ed. Christopher John Donato (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 135–38.

worship:” (3) “one may do those things necessary to promote the purposes of the day;” (4) “the Sabbath is to be a day for the exercise of mercy.” The end result is a set of principles that leaves the Christian with the same question that faced the Pharisees: How do you define activities that violate these principles in order to remain guiltless? Blomberg rightly concludes that doing so results in a “bewildering string of casuistic and self-contradictory attempts” to maintain a command that Jesus brought to completion through his person and work.<sup>44</sup>

The problem is that Pipa has misunderstood the fuller meaning of the Sabbath as presented in the Old Testament and fails to grasp how Christ fulfills it. The Sabbath functions as a command *and* prophetically as a type that points forward to the restoration of covenant rest lost in the fall. To reduce the Sabbath merely to a set of moral principles neglects the prophetic nature and function of the covenant sign, giving pride of place to rest and worship as though they were the primary functions of the command. Moreover, to adopt such an interpretation of the Sabbath results in having to define the permissible activities that strengthen for the Lord’s work, are merciful, and promote the purpose of the day. To do so has the potential of resulting in the same sort of tedious regulating found in the halakah.

Matthew 11:28–12:14 anticipate changes that are coming with the inauguration of the new covenant. The Sabbath was a distinguishing mark of Israel among the nations. It is not surprising that Matthew arranges these scenes to introduce the possibility that the Sabbath will be transformed under the new covenant mediated by the promised Davidic king. Matthew’s narrative is ultimately moving toward one of Jesus’s most significant statements regarding his authority: The Great Commission. Not only is the gospel for every people, Jesus demands obedience to everything *he* commanded—a statement

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<sup>44</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, “Responses to Joseph A. Pipa,” in Donato, *Perspectives on the Sabbath*, 194.



demonstrating that his “law,” or better *he* is that to which the Old Testament pointed. As such *he* fulfills and brings to an end the Mosaic law. “What starts out in Matthew as an argument over the interpretation of the Sabbath commandment ends up on another level involving the dramatic newness of Christology and mission.”<sup>45</sup>

The fulfillment of the Sabbath has been inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. True rest is found in him alone not the cessation of various activities one day in seven. Carson’s conclusion is worth quoting in full:

Indeed, if the Old Testament principle were really “one day in seven for worship and rest” instead of “the seventh day for worship and rest,” we might have expected Old Testament legislation to prescribe some other day off for the priests. The lack of such confirms the importance in Old Testament thought of the *seventh day*, as opposed to the mere one-in-seven principle so greatly relied upon by those who wish to see in Sunday the precise New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Sabbath.<sup>46</sup>

The absence of what might be construed as a principle of rest associated with Sabbath observance in the Old Testament indicates that rest and refreshment (Exod 23:12) were not the primary aims of the command. Those arguing for a Christian Sabbath rightly see moral principles in the legislation of the Sabbath. However, whatever benefits are afforded to God’s people as a result of the Mosaic law cannot be unhitched from its seventh-day foundation because of its eschatological significance. The age to which the seventh day of creation pointed—and which was disrupted in the fall—has been inaugurated by the inbreaking of the kingdom, a key theme in Mark’s gospel.

### **Mark 2:27–28**

Mark’s account of the grain field episode occurs early on in his presentation of Jesus. France describes Jesus in the opening of Mark as “one who causes astonishment,

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<sup>45</sup> Hagner, “Jesus and the Synoptic Sabbath Controversies,” 237.

<sup>46</sup> Carson, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels,” 66–67 (emphasis original).

as a figure of unprecedented authority.<sup>47</sup> Mark opens his Gospel with the words, “The beginning” indicating that a new beginning has dawned reflective of Genesis 1.<sup>48</sup> Mark’s Gospel moves quickly from one scene to the next revealing Jesus’s authority over disease, demons, and the unclean. He even has the authority of God himself to forgive sin (2:5).

The grain field Sabbath scene is placed immediately after Jesus’s pronouncement that the bridegroom has come and with him the inauguration of a new redemptive era in which the old must give way to the new. “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment . . . and no one puts new wine into old wineskins” or else the new will ruin the old (2:21–22). The Sabbath scene—and everything that follows in Mark’s Gospel—must be interpreted within the context of this newness. It anticipates that Jesus’s authority will impact even the most sacred of old covenant practices: the sign of the covenant itself, namely the Sabbath. The episode is not much different than Matthew’s presentation, so the focus here will be on the distinctive statement of 2:27 paired with the lordship proclamation that both accounts share.

Jesus confronts the Pharisees’ accusation by focusing the argument on his unique authority as the Son of Man.<sup>49</sup> Wessel and Strauss connect this encounter with Jesus’s challenge in 12:35–40.<sup>50</sup> There he questions their understanding of Psalm 110:1–2

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<sup>47</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 25.

<sup>48</sup> David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel: Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 101.

<sup>49</sup> Some have disputed the Messianic significance of the title’s use here, noting that Jesus does not speak of himself in these terms until after Peter’s confession in Mark 8:29. The argument, then, is that it should not be taken as a Messianic title but a general reference to humanity, complementing Jesus’s statement in v. 27. While not heavily relied upon, this argument supports those who argue that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance made for man. Space will not allow for interaction with this debate. The position of this project is that the title is Messianic and that it is Jesus alone who is Lord of the Sabbath. See Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew–Mark*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 735. For a brief and helpful survey on the title’s use in the Synoptics, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 218–26.

<sup>50</sup> Wessel and Strauss, *Mark*, 735.

and David's own reference to his son as Lord. Mark's emphasis upon Jesus's position and authority underly his ability to overrule the Sabbath. A survey of the "Son of Man" sayings in Mark alone reveals that Jesus "is clearly identified with God and takes on divine prerogatives as the one who forgives sins, is Lord of the Sabbath, and is the judge of all on the last day."<sup>51</sup>

The cultural context in which Jesus engages the subject of Sabbath-keeping is one where a lengthy and complex set of regulations had been established in order to answer the question: What constitutes work on the Sabbath?<sup>52</sup> In bringing the Sabbath back to the simplicity of its benefit for God's people, Jesus is clearing away what ultimately had become a heavy yoke to God's people. He is authorized to do so because he is the Lord of the Sabbath. Yet Mark's presentation of Jesus's claims intimates that something new is on the horizon. All that Jesus says and does is to be understood as the "new wine" of the eschatological age he is inaugurating. This point should not be pressed too hard from the present pericope, but neither should it be overlooked.

Mark 2:27 is often used to argue that the Sabbath was instituted for all humanity for our good. However, Jesus is not mounting an argument to serve as case law for a right understanding and application of the Sabbath proper. To make such an assertion from verse 27 reaches beyond what the text says and reads into it something that is not in view. Advocates of the Sabbath as a "creation ordinance" argue that the word "man" here carries the generic meaning of all humanity. They conclude that God created the Sabbath for mankind's good and therefore it should be observed across all covenant eras.<sup>53</sup> Yet Jesus is combating the notion that Sabbath observance is a point of legal necessity and must be adhered to—even at the expense of doing good (3:4). He is

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<sup>51</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 222.

<sup>52</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 143.

<sup>53</sup> So Skip MacCarty, "The Seventh-Day Sabbath," in Donato, *Perspectives on the Sabbath*, 21. Advocates of Sunday Sabbath follow the same line of reasoning as MacCarty on this point.

not making a theological point regarding who the Sabbath applies to. Humanity was not created subservient to Sabbath regulations. As Garland says, “God did not create the Sabbath as a command simply to be obeyed.”<sup>54</sup> France rightly sees the argument as one of priority.<sup>55</sup> The fourth commandment was as much a blessing for Israel as it was prospective of God’s redemptive work to restore rest lost at the fall.<sup>56</sup> The overt concern to regulate Sabbath conduct had obscured its actual purpose in Jesus’s day. His declaration is a corrective to this misguided understanding. Who the Sabbath was made for—whether Jew or all of humanity—is not the question at hand and should not be read into Jesus’s assertion.<sup>57</sup>

The eschatological overtones of Mark’s Gospel provide the broader context within which to understand Jesus’s statements regarding the Sabbath. The first recorded words of Christ in Mark’s account provide a lens through which to read his account: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (1:15). Christ inaugurates the new age of the kingdom and each act of healing, exorcism, and forgiveness is a glimpse of the new creation. Carson notes that “the Sabbath itself is associated with the theme of restoration and the messianic age.”<sup>58</sup>

The arrangement of the Sabbath controversies immediately following Jesus’s statements about new wine confirms such an eschatological reading. Hagner concurs:

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<sup>54</sup> Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel*, 309.

<sup>55</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 147.

<sup>56</sup> As Nicolas Ansell concludes, “Thus for all the newness that Jesus’s claim brings into history, he is also telling us that the ancient call to ‘remember’ and ‘observe’ the Sabbath and ‘keep it holy,’ as found in Exod 20:8 and Deut 5:12, is less a command than an ongoing *blessing* that cannot be heard within the demanding hermeneutic of the Pharisees.” Nicolas Ansell, “On (Not) Obeying the Sabbath: Reading Jesus Reading Scripture,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 33, no. 2 (2011): 101 (emphasis original).

<sup>57</sup> Carson, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the Gospels,” 65.

<sup>58</sup> Carson, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the Gospels,” 66. Schreiner notes, “Healing on the Sabbath is intriguing, for it points back to the seventh day of creation (Gen 2:1–3) and forward to the new creation where the world is free of death and disease. Jesus’s healings on the Sabbath signal the inauguration of the kingdom, anticipating a world where there is no disease and death.” Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 173.

“Since the Sabbath was an anticipation of the eschaton, Jesus regarded it as the perfect day for bringing wholeness to those in need. These Sabbath deeds are an indispensable part of the kingdom he brings, and thus they point to his messianic mission, his authority, and his identity.”<sup>59</sup> To distill these Sabbath scenes down to a set of principles misses the overarching point being made: the Sabbath was made for man—in part—to point to Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath. The prominence of healings as the source of controversy on the Sabbath points to the restoration that Jesus’s work will secure. True Sabbath rest will be inaugurated by the new covenant. To enter God’s rest is nothing less than coming to Jesus and taking his yoke (Matt 11:27–28; Heb 3:14). As Blomberg rightly concludes, “It is not just some general concept of rest that is fulfilled when a person trusts in Jesus; it is the very Sabbath command itself that is so fulfilled.”<sup>60</sup>

### **John 5:1–17**

The healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda takes place in Jerusalem during an unspecified “feast of the Jews” (5:1). Jesus orders the man to pick up his bed and walk as a demonstration of the healing’s reality. Only after the man takes up his mat does John report that this occurred on the Sabbath (9)—a clear indication of Jesus’s intention. This is the catalyst for the religious leaders to accuse the man of doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath. The man quickly shifts the blame to Jesus, prompting their attack in verse 16. As in previous episodes, Jesus is not interested in justifying his behavior in light of the Torah. His order to pick up the mat and go only contravened regulations outlined in the halakah. However, Jesus moves the debate into the realm of his authority and his identity as the Christ. Schreiner stresses the theological significance of John 5: “Sabbath and Christology are closely wedded, indicating that that Sabbath must be interpreted in light

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<sup>59</sup> Hagner, “Jesus and the Synoptic Sabbath Controversies,” 215.

<sup>60</sup> Blomberg, “Responses to Skip McCarty,” 85.

of the coming of the Son and suggesting a new era has arrived with his coming.”<sup>61</sup> His claim to work like God is rightly perceived by his opponents to be “calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (5:18). He further justifies his healing work by claiming to only do what he sees the Father doing. The work that God has been doing until now is the very redemptive work now flowing through his life and ministry.<sup>62</sup>

Jesus’s statement in verse 17 must be understood in light of the rest theme associated with the covenants beginning with Genesis 2:2–3. Why else would Jesus mention the Father’s ongoing work in the midst of a Sabbath controversy with the religious leaders? God’s rest at creation denoted the cessation of his creative work not a resting from all activity. He continued his work of upholding the universe with omnipotent care. God’s rest helps us to distinguish his activity in creation and his activity in providence and salvation. However, the fall ruined the covenant rest enjoyed by God and humanity. The work of restoration was immediately promised (Gen 3:15) and so began the work of Father and Son to accomplish redemption and restore the enjoyment of covenant rest. Jesus’s work is the achievement of salvation. John later describes the Father’s work: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29).

A. T. Lincoln links the work Jesus came to “finish” in John (4:34, 5:17, 17:4) and his pronouncement that “It is finished” on the cross (19:30).<sup>63</sup> The redemptive work he and his Father were busy doing has been brought to an end in terms of Christ’s incarnate work. “John 5:17 then presupposes an eschatological interpretation of Genesis 2:2–3, similar to that found in Hebrews 4. As to the work of creation, God’s rest was

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<sup>61</sup> Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 173.

<sup>62</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 248.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 204.

final. . . When it was disturbed by sin, God worked in history to accomplish his original purpose.”<sup>64</sup> Jesus’s remarkable claim is that his and the Father’s redemptive work is permissible on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath not only recalled the rest that was lost (Gen 2:2–3) but looked forward to a day when rest would be restored (Ps 95). Jesus’s healing on the Sabbath is situated within this framework and indicates that the kingdom has broken into history. Referencing John 5 Schreiner rightly concludes, “He works with sovereign freedom on the Sabbath to heal and to cure because the Sabbath is the day on which healings should occur. By releasing human beings from their burdens and diseases, Jesus grants the rest that the Sabbath signified.”<sup>65</sup> Jesus later points to the law as justification for his healing activity (7:22–23). However, John 5:17 indicates that Jesus, like God the Father, is not subservient to the Sabbath but is Lord over it.<sup>66</sup>

John goes on to articulate the work that he and the Father are doing in verses 19–30. This extended discourse further develops John’s Christological understanding of Jesus. Verses 19–23 are structured around four “because” statements that present the dynamic of the Father/Son relationship and the work they do.<sup>67</sup> Like the Father (19–20), Jesus gives life (21) and judges (22). Two activities ascribed to God alone in the Old Testament are now said to be a shared work between the Father and the Son. John presents Jesus as equal with the Father, “for the only one who could conceivably do *whatever the Father does* must be as great as the Father, as divine as the Father.”<sup>68</sup> In

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<sup>64</sup> Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” 204.

<sup>65</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 641.

<sup>66</sup> France notes a stream of thought within Judaism that went as far as saying that God observed the Sabbath in heaven (Jub. 2.18, 30). France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 143. This view was rejected in Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism. Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” 203. Jesus, of course, rejects any such notion and confirms that God has been actively working throughout history to accomplish his redemptive purposes.

<sup>67</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 251.

<sup>68</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 251 (emphasis original).

fact, the Father “has given all judgement to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father” (5:23). Shared divine glory places Jesus on equal footing with the Father. In John 5, Jesus shifts the discussion to the nature of his person and work and places the Sabbath within the larger sphere of salvation history. The Sabbath command did not operate within a vacuum of legal regulation and practice but served as a shadow and type of the rest found in the person of Christ himself (Matt 11:28–30). “His ministry brings them to full measure (*cf. pleroo* in 23:32), by supplying the final revelation of the will of God.”<sup>69</sup>

### Conclusion

Together, the Gospels envisage a portrait of Jesus’s greatness that surpasses every shadow and type in his fulfillment of them. He is a greater lawgiver than Moses; greater than the temple; greater than David; greater than the Sabbath; and as great as God the Father. Jesus has the divine prerogative to not only declare how the Sabbath is to be understood but to pronounce its culmination in himself. The Gospels give the impression that a right understanding of the Sabbath is vital to understanding the person and work of Jesus. It cannot be understood apart from him. A closer look at these passages provides some helpful insights.

First, the hope of the Sabbath is Jesus Christ, not rest and refreshment. In contrast to the religious leaders of his day, Jesus’s primary orientation for the Sabbath was to restore the intimacy of new covenant presence with his people—a nearness seen in part throughout the Old Testament but not known since Eden. We were created for such intimacy with God that we might work as priestly kings out of a state of perpetual covenant rest. Only the presence of God in Jesus Christ can give rest to our souls—inaugurated now and consummated fully at his return. An overt concern to regulate an old

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<sup>69</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 114.



covenant practice misses the point. Christians could certainly benefit from slowing down and prioritizing a day in which their primary (only) focus is the Lord and his kingdom. However, the Gospels emphasize that the greatest rest our souls can experience is to be brought into new covenant relationship with the triune God in and through Christ Jesus. It is his yoke that is easy and his burden that is light (Matt 11:30). No measure of dutiful practice to ensure observance of one day in seven can compete with what he alone provides. All of the covenant promises of rest find their “yes” in Christ (2 Cor 1:20).

Second, the constellation of Sabbath passages in the Gospels present a covenantal shift in redemptive history that moves away from the old covenant and its sign. Costa makes an interesting observation in this regard. As noted above, the fourth commandment required “remembrance” and “observance.” Jesus takes these covenant terms and applies them to the new covenant indicating that he and his law are what the Sabbath pointed to. “Jesus commanded that we keep the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper in ‘remembrance’ of him (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:24–25), and that we are to disciple and teach the nations who receive baptism in the name of the triune God to ‘observe all that I have commanded you’” (Matt 28:20).<sup>70</sup> No such ordinance to keep the Sabbath is found in the New Testament. In fact, as I’ll observe in the next chapter, Paul understands the Sabbath as a shadow that gives way to the substance of Christ, freeing members of the new covenant from obligation to observe one day above another. Rather, the regular practice of the ordinances by the church serves as an ongoing reminder that through Christ we have entered God’s rest. Furthermore, we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26) to look forward with anticipation to the day on which he will consummate the fullness of the rest he has secured.

The reality and fulfillment of the Sabbath has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The inauguration of the new covenant has arrived through his death and

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<sup>70</sup> Costa, “The Sabbath and Its Relation to Christ,” 132.

resurrection and ushered in a new era of redemptive history that completes all other covenant realities and brings them to their designed end—including the Sabbath. The Law and the Prophets must be interpreted and applied through the lens of Christ and his inauguration of the new covenant. The Sabbath is no longer binding under the new covenant. True rest and refreshment are found by partaking of Christ and striving to remain in him (Heb 4:11).

## CHAPTER 6

### SABBATH REST IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES

God's rest is an eschatological state established archetypically at creation, reestablished in the inauguration of the new covenant, and awaiting its ultimate fulfillment in the return of Christ at the new creation. Hebrews 3:7–4:13 understands Sabbath rest as looking back at creation and what was lost in the fall and as a type that points forward to the greater rest won in Christ. Christ's life, death, and resurrection inaugurated the new covenant age in which those who come to him by faith have entered that rest (Matt 11:28–30; Heb 4:3, 10). Failure to listen to him would be catastrophic for he is the Davidic king through whom God restored his presence among his people through the new covenant.

The previous chapter demonstrated that the reality and fulfillment of the Sabbath has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The inauguration of the new covenant has arrived and ushered in a new era of redemptive history that brings to completion all other covenant realities and carries them to their designed end—including the Sabbath. The Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ. The New Testament church struggled through the implications of this new reality as Jew and gentile Christians struggled to love one another and resist attempts to add to Christ's finished work by requiring adherence to the Mosaic law. This chapter will trace the implications of the fulfillment of the Sabbath for the church in the Pauline Epistles.

#### **The Wall Comes Down**

D. A. Carson says that any investigation of the Sabbath serves as a “test case” for how we put our Bible together. It “touches on the relationship between the

Testaments” in such a way that the conclusions of one’s study results in a “paradigm for broader theological and ethical reflection.”<sup>1</sup> Carson’s point is that the way one understands how the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament (i.e., promise-fulfillment and/or the new covenant displacing the old and so forth) will determine how one understands how Christians relate to the Mosaic law. Does the fulfillment of Christ bring the law-covenant to its designed end? Or do the moral aspects of the law, often viewed as the Decalogue, continue as normative for the church today? If so, in what ways? If not, how do new covenant believers relate to the ethical teaching of the Old Testament? Paul wrestles through these questions—perhaps more than any other New Testament author—as the apostle to the gentiles and a former Pharisee.<sup>2</sup> Whether he was addressing Jew and gentile relationships in the church at Rome, or gentile Christians facing Judaizing opponents in Galatia, Paul often unpacked the realities of the new covenant’s fulfillment of the old and its implications for the church. Paul’s conclusions about the law-covenant provide an interpretive key for understanding his statements regarding the Sabbath in his Epistles.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Schreiner points out that the old covenant established Israel as “both a religious and political entity.”<sup>4</sup> The distinction between Israel and other nations was held intact by the Mosaic law. However, the inauguration of the new covenant meant that “the distinctions between Jews and gentiles, including the laws enshrining those distinctions, are no longer observed literally.”<sup>5</sup> Paul does not create an extensive catalogue of laws

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, ed., introduction to *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1982), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 241.

<sup>3</sup> The scope of this project precludes fully interacting with this much debated subject. Scores of books have been written to address the question of Paul’s relationship to the law. For this project’s purposes, a broad overview will be helpful in order to determine how Paul’s teaching on the Sabbath fits together with Heb 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 165.

<sup>5</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 171.

differentiating between what is in effect and what is not.<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 9 confirms that the sacrificial system operative under the Mosaic law is no longer necessary because of the once and for all atoning death of Christ. Paul seems to nullify laws concerning the feasts, circumcision, Sabbath, as well as food and purity laws (Rom 14; 1 Cor 5:7, 8:1–13; Col 2:16–21). Paul reduces the whole of the law to the Great Commandment: loving God and neighbor (Rom 13:10; Gal 5:14). Schreiner concludes that “those who live by love do good to their neighbor in every situation (Rom. 13:10), and no law can exhaust the possible opportunities.”<sup>7</sup>

To conclude that believers are free from any moral requirements would misunderstand Paul’s point. He condemns many of the sins prohibited by the Mosaic law (Rom 1:29–31; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21) and repeats many of its commands (1 Cor 10:7; Col 3:6; Eph 6:1–3). However, Craig Blomberg is correct in saying that Paul does not do so merely because a given law appears in the Torah. “He filters each piece of legislation through its fulfillment in the law of love—the teaching and ministry of Jesus—to see how it applies in the Christian era.”<sup>8</sup> The division of the law into ceremonial, civil, and moral in order to extract ethical principles fails on this point because it neither accounts for the covenantal context in which the commands were given nor applies it through the lens of Christ’s fulfillment.<sup>9</sup>

The fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ means that his teaching, person, and work are the end to which all the Law and the Prophets point (Rom 10:4). The laws, commands, and institutions culminate in him. Each has significance in their own

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<sup>6</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 170.

<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 146.

<sup>8</sup> Craig L. Blomberg “The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ,” in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, ed. Christopher John Donato (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 326.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum are helpful in making this distinction and showing how it works itself out in exegeting the text and applying it today. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 784–98.

redemptive-historical context, but whatever significance they had prior to Christ's coming cannot be separated from him now that he has come. This is one reason why advocates of a continuing Sabbath get it wrong. They may not completely sever its meaning from him—after all, they argue that ultimate rest will be consummated as a result of his redeeming work. However, to maintain the ongoing observance of a Sabbath day now that Christ has come—even if it transfers to Sunday—has no basis in the new covenant. In Christ, the Sabbath was brought to completion—or fulfillment—in his person and work (Matt 11:28–30). Paul argued that the substance has replaced the shadow (Col 2:17).

The above overview only scratches the surface of this important topic. However, it provides the basic framework for interpreting Paul's exhortations regarding the Sabbath as part of a larger shift in redemptive history whereby the old covenant is fulfilled and replaced by the new and is no longer binding on God's people. The "dividing wall of hostility" that had separated Jews and gentiles for centuries was removed by the death and resurrection of Christ which established the church as "one new man" (Eph 2:14–16). Jews and gentiles alike received the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ—the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant has dawned (Gal 3:7–9). The wall that separated Jews and gentiles was the Mosaic law and its various stipulations that set Israel apart from the nations around them.<sup>10</sup> Schreiner points out that what is expressed in Ephesians 2 is not limited to particular aspects of the law: "Paul does not limit himself to the ceremonial law here but refers to the whole law. The law that separated Jews and Gentiles is no longer in force. Jews and Gentiles form one new people of God under the charter of the new covenant."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 296.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, ed. Stephen P. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 176.

The intertestamental period amplified the Jew/gentile distinction further. Jewish leaders saw the compromise on matters of circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath as threats to their identity as God's covenant people.<sup>12</sup> James Dunn notes this influence was prevalent among diaspora Jews during the period of the early Church which gave rise to the conflicts Paul addressed in his letters as Jew and Gentile Christians came together in the local church.<sup>13</sup> However, Paul's chief concern does not center on the Jews' nationalistic identity as argued by Dunn. Paul condemns the Judaizer's for imposing law-covenant practices of Sabbath, food laws, and circumcision on gentile believers as a means of being made righteous.<sup>14</sup> Paul's point of contention is that the believer's source of righteousness is through faith in Christ alone, not only demonstrating the law-covenant's impotence, but establishing its obsolescence now that the new covenant has been inaugurated.

Paul's Epistles unpack the many practical implications of the new covenant for the church. Christ's fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:17) means that the old covenant is no longer in force for Christians. Circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath are each addressed and prove to be the primary "blocks" in the wall that caused hostility and was removed by Jesus.

Paul's concern about the Sabbath ranges from disunity of the body rooted in judgmentalism and contempt (Rom 14:1–6; Col 2:16–17) to false teaching that threatens the integrity of the gospel (Gal 4:10–11). Paul's exhortations throw light on the need for spiritual growth and maturity as believers more fully grasp the glories of Christ's

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<sup>12</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38B (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 805. Dunn observes that for "the Maccabees 'eating unclean food and violating the sabbath' ranked together as the two chief hallmarks of disloyalty." See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 708.

<sup>13</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 805.

<sup>14</sup> For a helpful interaction with and counter to Dunn's view, see Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 43-61.

fulfillment of the Sabbath (Rom 14:19; Gal 4:12, 19; Col 1:28)—specifically Jewish Christians whose consciences do not yet allow them to set aside the observance of days by faith (Rom 14:23). Their scruples regarding the observance of the various holy days articulated by the law-covenant led them to cast judgment on fellow believers. Paul would not tolerate such unloving behavior in the church.

It is rather surprising to discover how little the Sabbath is addressed in Paul’s letters given the frequency of Sabbath controversies in the Gospels.<sup>15</sup> Paul would have certainly been devoted to the strictest observance of the Sabbath during his days as a Pharisee. However, much more space is devoted to food law controversies and circumcision than to the conflict over the observance of the Sabbath.<sup>16</sup> Narratives in the book of Acts that mention the Sabbath do so descriptively to orient the reader to Paul’s strategy in advancing the gospel among his kinsmen (Acts 13:14; 16:13; 17:2). On the three occasions in which the Sabbath is addressed, Paul’s exhortation is consistent with a typological understanding of the Sabbath day—as given in the fourth commandment—as fulfilled in Christ and no longer binding in the new covenant.

### **Romans 14:5–6**

Paul’s letter to the churches in Rome covers a wide range of purposes.<sup>17</sup> Romans is a thorough expression of Paul’s gospel, partly to “resolve the conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Rome” because he “wanted the church to be unified so that they would praise God harmoniously together . . . under his gospel.”<sup>18</sup> Unlike Corinth where

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<sup>15</sup> Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 174. Even more revealing is the fact that the word appears only once—in Col 2—in the rest of the New Testament after the book of Acts.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps that is indicative of the fact that the early church understood Jesus’s pronouncement in Matt 11:28–30 to fulfill the Sabbath.

<sup>17</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 403–7.

<sup>18</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 19, 22–23.



the “weak” are gentile believers who battle their conscience over food offered to idols (1 Cor 8:7), the “weak in faith” (14:1) are Jewish Christians struggling with their conscience given their past adherence to the Mosaic law. Running parallel to the issue of food and conscience is the dispute of esteeming “one day as better than another” (14:5). According to Paul whether one abstains from eating or observes a day is a matter of faith (14:23). Paul appears to boil the debate down to a matter of conscience: “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (14:5).

Paul refers to two groups in chapters 14–15: the “weak” and the “strong.” Some have suggested that the “weak” are former gentile idolaters, while others propose they are Jewish or gentile ascetics or Jewish legalists. However, what is most probable in this case is that they are Jewish Christians whose conscience continues to be bound to the Mosaic law but are nonetheless true believers.<sup>19</sup> Douglas Moo concludes, “Both weak and strong serve the same Lord; both weak and strong are members of the same kingdom.”<sup>20</sup> Paul’s concern is that members of both groups are judging those in the other camp to the detriment of their gospel witness and the faith of fellow believers. Ultimately, the responsibility to judge lies with the Lord and no one else (14:10–12). Paul neither commends nor condemns those who observe “days.”

The absence of the word “Sabbath” in Romans 14 has led to a number of suggestions regarding Paul’s reference to “days” in verse 5. Some have argued that the ambiguity allows for a range of meaning to account for both Jewish “days” and the syncretism of pagan “lucky” or “unlucky” days with the Jewish cult.<sup>21</sup> Most

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<sup>19</sup> See John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 355–57. See also Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 844–45. Schreiner (*Romans*, 709) is convincing: “Paul’s tolerance of such practices suggest a Jewish source. It is hard to imagine Paul being so sympathetic with practices hailed from paganism.” Dunn fails to convince in his argument that the “weak” group is comprised of both Jews and God-fearing gentiles. However, his encouragement to remember that the church does not neatly divide into only these two groups is instructive. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 802.

<sup>20</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 851.

<sup>21</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 858. Moo concludes that the Sabbath fits the context best given the proximity

commentators agree that the Sabbath is at least partly in view given the plain reading of the text and Jew/gentile composition of the church in the first century.<sup>22</sup> As noted above, the Sabbath was one of the well-known “days” associated with Jewish culture in the Roman empire and marked them off socially. The “weak” in faith were primarily Jewish Christians in the church, making the Sabbath the most natural reading of verses 5–6 as a point of conflict in the body. Furthermore, Paul’s conclusion that “each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (14:5) about the “days” in question could hardly refer to pagan holidays. Schreiner rightly notes that “Paul would not have been sympathetic with pagan superstition.”<sup>23</sup> Paul would make no provision for such practices in the church.

Paul exhorts the entire body to “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (14:19). The encouragement of chapter 14 flows out of chapter 13 and his claim that love for neighbor fulfills the law. Paul is addressing specific matters over which the church is failing to fulfill the law of love toward one another in the life of the body (13:8). “Properly relating to brothers and sisters who have a different understanding on the above questions fulfills the law of love (Rom 13:8–10) and is part of what it means to live a life wholly given over to God (12:1–2).”<sup>24</sup> Differing opinions regarding food and the Sabbath were threatening the church’s unity in the gospel (14:1). Rather than “love each other,” believers were judging and despising one another based on whether one practiced certain dietary restrictions or esteemed certain days (14:3–5).

Paul instructs the church to “welcome” those who are “weak” with all sincerity (14:1). The term for “welcome” here implies the kind of hospitable warmth fitting for the

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and parallel nature of both the food and “days” in the passage.

<sup>22</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 859.

<sup>23</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 715.

<sup>24</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 703.

family of God. Moo emphasizes that the strong are “not only to tolerate the weak but that they were to treat them as brothers and sisters in the intimate fellowship typical of the people of God.”<sup>25</sup> The kind of love and acceptance Paul commends is unto the Lord (14:8) and in service of Christ (14:18). How could their attitude toward the “weaker” brother or sister be at odds with God’s who has welcomed and accepted the “weak” just as he has the “strong” (14:3)?

Paul introduces the second point of division in the church in verse 5: the “judging” or “esteeming” of days (14:5). The same two groups are involved, indicated by the parallel manner in which the subject is introduced. The “strong” believer makes no distinction between days any more than he does food.<sup>26</sup> Paul quickly shifts back to food in verse 6 indicating that “the advice he gives on foods was advice to the two groups sufficient to cover both issues.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, Paul’s exhortation regarding food applies to the conflict over the esteeming of days. The Christian is to determine their behavior on these matters based on settled convictions or faith (14:5, 23). Schreiner asserts, “Weakness of faith and inadequate understanding go together. The failure to understand salvation history rightly inevitably involves weakness in faith.”<sup>28</sup> Christ’s fulfillment of the law-covenant has implications for the Sabbath, and it is more than doing away with the ceremonial aspects of its observance as Sabbatarians contend.

Paul makes it clear that the division in the church on matters of food and Sabbath is a matter of faith.<sup>29</sup> Schreiner observes that Paul restricts his use of “faith” in

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<sup>25</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 852.

<sup>26</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 361. Stott is careful to point out that Paul is not encouraging mindless behavior nor an unwillingness to examine past practices to discern their place in the new covenant Christ has inaugurated. Both groups are pressed to grow in faith: the strong in love toward their weaker brothers and sisters, and the weak in educating their conscience.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 805.

<sup>28</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 714.

<sup>29</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 713. Schreiner concludes, “The standpoint of the ‘weak’ on foods and days signals a certain deficiency in their faith. It is not the case, though, that the ‘weak’ believed that

verse 2 to the activity of the strong. “The ‘strong’ are exercising faith in eating everything.”<sup>30</sup> He does not condemn the weak for their abstention, but the implication is that their lack of faith underscores their inability to eat certain foods. They are on safer ground to abstain than to eat with doubt (14:23). The context of the passage makes clear that the sin Paul is concerned with is the church’s failure to love one another and so “fulfill the law” (13:8). There is no indication of guilt regarding the practice of abstaining from food or observance of days by the “weak.” Neither are the strong reprimanded for their failure to follow suit. As noted above, the strong are commended for the faith they exercise in eating (14:2) and the parallel nature of the topics at hand means that this is equally true of their esteeming “all days alike” (14:5).

The barrier to “peace” and “mutual upbuilding” (14:19) is the prideful posture the “weak” and “strong” have toward one another. Paul orders the “strong” to avoid the temptation to “despise” their weaker brothers and sisters (14:3, 10). To “despise” means to devalue the worth of someone or to have a disdainful attitude toward them.<sup>31</sup> In this case the “strong” were looking down on the “weak” with an attitude of contempt at their inability to come out from under old covenant practices and enjoy the freedom of Christian liberty. Conversely the “weak” were standing in judgment over the “strong,” finding fault with the exercise of their freedom in Christ to the point of condemning them for their behavior.<sup>32</sup> These sinful attitudes are Paul’s primary focus. However, in the process of addressing these matters of disunity he unpacks the implications of Christ’s fulfillment of the law. Dietary and Sabbath laws are no longer binding on the Christian.

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abstaining from meat and wine and observing certain days were necessary for salvation.”

<sup>30</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 714.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 352.

<sup>32</sup> Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 567.

The believer who depends upon Christ alone for justification (Rom 3:24–25) must exercise that same faith whether they eat or abstain, or esteem one day or not.

Romans 14 leaves readers with the impression that the Sabbath is no longer a binding command for God’s people but a matter of preference. More than that, Paul categorizes Sabbath observance as non-essential.<sup>33</sup> A fuller understanding of Christ’s redemptive work will inform the conscience and free believers to “walk in the footsteps of the faith” (4:12) and depend on grace alone not adherence to the law (4:14–16). Paul is careful to buttress his instruction by making room for the observance of the Sabbath that flows from a sincere desire to please the Lord (14:6). The greater priority in the life of the church is “walking in love” for the spiritual well-being of one another (13:8; 14:15).

#### **Galatians 4:10**

Paul’s epistle to the churches in Galatia is intense and fiery. He is stunned that they have been so easily swayed by Judaizers to take on a yoke of slavery to the Mosaic law (1:6; 4:8–10; 5:1) in order to complete their salvation (2:16).<sup>34</sup> If Christ came to “redeem those who were under the law” (4:5), how can they “turn back to the weak and worthless element[s]” that cannot save (4:9)? “No letter makes clearer than this one the importance of living out all of the implications of salvation through the cross.”<sup>35</sup> Christ’s fulfillment of the law-covenant (Matt 5:17) means that it is no longer binding for the Jew or gentile who knows God (Gal 4:9). This certainly informs Paul’s reaction to their undertaking to observe “days and months and seasons and years” (4:10). The strength of Paul’s response to their observance of days indicates that their view of these laws was binding and salvific. Unlike Romans 14, this is not a matter of conscience. The opponents

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<sup>33</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 358. Stott is quick to point out that Paul doesn’t dismiss the issue out of hand. The kingdom is not to be boiled down to one’s practice of diet and observance of days (14:17), no more than it is fundamentally about one’s freedom (14:20).

<sup>34</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 457.

<sup>35</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 475.

may have claimed to be Christians but their distortion of the gospel places them outside the boundaries of the faith.

Paul's view of the Sabbath within this context is markedly different than Romans 14. Here it is a matter of gospel fidelity. For anyone to suggest that a Christian must adhere to Old Testament practices like Sabbath observance to secure a right standing with God is "anathema" to Paul (Gal 1:8–9). There is some disagreement as to whether 4:10 is a reference to the Jewish calendar. Paul's reference to their former life (4:8) and a return to "elementary principles of the world" (4:9) seem to point toward pagan holidays. Schreiner acknowledges links to paganism may be lingering in the background. However, given the identity of the false teachers and the "desire to be under the law" (4:21) it seems likely that verse 10 is a reference to the Jewish calendar.<sup>36</sup>

The vague manner in which Paul references the days may have a two-fold function. First, several commentators observe the similarity between Paul's sequence and Genesis 1:14, where the heavenly bodies separate day and night and are signs of the "seasons, and for days and years."<sup>37</sup> These seasons and days formed the basis for the Jewish calendar under the old covenant. Second, Paul's imprecise terminology would allow for an association between the Old Testament law and the pagan idolatry linked to their former life worshipping these same heavenly elements. Perhaps Paul recognizes a blending together of the law with their former paganism. If true, the combination of pagan and Jewish references implies that Paul is equating their attraction to Judaism with the paganism they left behind.<sup>38</sup> A derisive appraisal of the Judaizers dependence upon

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 46. Paul does not accuse them "of literally reverting to the worship of astral deities."

<sup>37</sup> So Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 278. See also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 279; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 205.

<sup>38</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 278–79.

the law as essential for salvation.

Thus far in the two references to the Sabbath in Paul's Epistles we see its association with food laws—two of the primary blocks in the dividing wall as noted above. Paul insists that the law-covenant has ended with Christ (Rom 10:4) and therefore the church is no longer obligated to observe such Old Testament ordinances. The Sabbath has fulfilled its purpose and no longer functions within the new covenant community. Paul's association with the strong in Romans 14–15 indicates that he himself “esteems all days alike” (Rom 14:5). The implication is that maturity in Christ informs the conscience in such a way that one is free to live in the reality of the new covenant where the Sabbath is no longer binding because it has been fulfilled completely in Christ. Only the “weak” in faith have consciences bound tempting them to judge their brothers and sisters for failing to set apart the Sabbath. The threat Paul perceived in Galatians was the temptation to adhere to the fourth commandment as a means of completing salvation. Paul would not tolerate such a distortion of the gospel. Colossians 2—the third and final passage in Paul's Epistles that addresses the Sabbath—demonstrates that Paul is convinced that the Sabbath was only a “shadow” that pointed to Christ who fulfills true rest for God's people.

### **Colossians 2:16–17**

The final passage where Paul addresses the Sabbath is the only one of the three where he explicitly uses the word “Sabbath.” The combination of dietary laws and observance of the Sabbath portend a Jewish background in Colossians. The exhortation to “let no one pass judgment” parallels Romans 14 and further confirms that both passages are addressing similar situations. The distinction in Colossians is that judgment and “disqualify[ing]” are coming from opponents outside the church rather than from within. Attention will be given to the unique contribution Colossians 2:16–17 makes to the present study.

Commentators highlight the Platonic language Paul employs to express his understanding of the Old Testament's relationship to the New.<sup>39</sup> However, it seems better to understand his use of “shadow” and “substance” within the biblical vocabulary of typology. James Dunn rightly sees the phrase “things to come” as an eschatological connector between the “shadow” and “substance.”<sup>40</sup> Christ is the fulfillment of the dietary and Sabbath practices of the Old Testament. The same wording is used in Hebrews 10:1: “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities.” Paul's objective is to demonstrate the type/antitype relationship between these old covenant rituals and Christ's fulfillment of them.

Paul Deterding sums up Paul's approach well: “the apostle understood the OT to point to Christ in ways beyond individual Messianic predictions, such as he cites in his other letters, for they set forth a typological approach to those portions of the Hebrew Scriptures under consideration here.”<sup>41</sup> Paul's interpretation of the Sabbath is entirely consistent with Hebrews 3–4 and acknowledges the covenantal shift that has occurred through Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament. The irony of Paul's argument—given the context of the opponents “disqualifying” believers who do not adhere to their teaching (Col 2:18)—is that embracing these Old Testament shadows as normative in the church today would be disqualifying because they have achieved “their full meaning only in relationship to Jesus Christ.”<sup>42</sup>

The word rendered “substance” is the term *sōma* which is translated “body”

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<sup>39</sup> So James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 176. See also N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 119; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 222.

<sup>40</sup> Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 176.

<sup>41</sup> Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 118.

<sup>42</sup> Deterding, *Colossians*, 118.



elsewhere (Col 1:18, 22, 24; 2:19; 3:15).<sup>43</sup> Commentators acknowledge the possibility of a double meaning for the reference but most conclude that Christ is the focus of Paul's contrast.<sup>44</sup> One interesting suggestion is that the reality of the incarnation is the means of fulfillment which casts a shadow back to the Old Testament types.<sup>45</sup> Whether or not there is significance to the use of the word "body" here, Paul's point is clear: now that Christ has come the Colossians are under no obligation to observe dietary or Sabbath laws for they have reached their intended end in him. Like his exhortation in Romans 14, they should not let anyone "pass judgment" or "disqualify" them for failing to adhere to these Old Testament practices.

### **The Sabbath as Fulfilled in the Pauline Epistles**

This investigation into Paul's view of the Sabbath further supports the thesis of this project. In summary, Paul is not against the Sabbath but concludes that it is a matter of one's conscience (Rom 14:5). While he does not prohibit its observance, he makes it clear that those whose faith is informed by the implications of Christ's fulfillment of the Sabbath no longer see the need for esteeming one day above another. "If Paul believed the Sabbath command was binding, he would not say people could make up their own mind."<sup>46</sup> There is room for disagreement within the church on this subject. Paul's chief concern is that on whichever side of the divide one falls, no one is to "judge" or "despise" a brother or sister in Christ.

Paul asserts that the Sabbath is a shadow that pointed to Christ (Col 2:17).

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<sup>43</sup> Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 223.

<sup>44</sup> Bruce asserts, "The use of this word in the context to denote the body of Christ may have influenced the choice . . . It is as members of the body of Christ that his people now possess the substance, so that they may cheerfully let the shadow go." Bruce, *Colossians*, 117. Douglas Moo and G. K. Beale, on the other hand, conclude that it is a reference to Christ as the fulfillment. Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 224; G. K. Beale, *Colossians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 222.

<sup>45</sup> So Beale, *Colossians*, 117; Deterding, *Colossians*, 118.

<sup>46</sup> Schreiner, "Good-bye and Hello," 178.

Now that the “substance” has come, there is no longer a need for the practices and institutions that prophetically pointed to Christ. Since the entire law was “a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities” (Heb 10:1), there is no warrant for arguing that the Sabbath is of a different nature than the law which contained its ordinance. Colossians 2 demonstrates Paul’s understanding that the fourth commandment looked back at creation as the archetype of rest (Exod 20:11) and forward to promised rest in Christ (Deut 5:15). The type has served its purpose and now gives way to the reality to which it pointed.

### **Various Objections to the Non-Sabbath View**

Those who are convinced that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance take a more nuanced interpretive approach to Paul. G. K. Beale asserts that Paul only has in mind the Sabbatical system “particularly observed in Israel.”<sup>47</sup> He contends that only Israel’s cultic institutions that typologically pointed to Christ have now ceased. The Sabbath ordinance instituted at creation (Gen 2:2–3) remains binding as it points to the eschatological goal of the new creation.<sup>48</sup> Beale’s position makes eschatological rest the substance of the shadow rather than Christ (Col 2:17). To argue that the foundation of Paul’s argument is related only to the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law divides it in a way that is foreign to the New Testament. Schreiner rightly asserts that “The Sabbath is not a creation ordinance that applies to every generation; for otherwise NT writers would not identify it as a shadow, nor would they say it does not matter if people observe it.”<sup>49</sup>

As argued in chapter 3 of this project, no such mandate exists within the creation account. God’s rest in Genesis 2:2–3 is best understood as entrance into covenant

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<sup>47</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 792.

<sup>48</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 793.

<sup>49</sup> Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 180.

enjoyment with his creation. The seventh day represents much more than one day in seven. It is the goal and purpose toward which all of creation is moving with God's blessing enabling it to ultimately achieve this end. The narrative is not intended to convey a man-oriented invitation or mandate to imitate God as Sabbatarians argue. There is no scriptural warrant for concluding that the seventh day conveys a timeless principle to govern the weekly habits of God's people. Paul indicates that such practices have passed away now that Christ has come.

This project has demonstrated that the New Testament's witness points to the end and fulfillment of the Sabbath in the person of Jesus Christ. He restores the covenant rest that was lost in the fall through his life, death, and resurrection. Christ is the antitype of God's rest at creation. His finished work will also fulfill the promised rest of the land in the new creation. The Sabbath command has been brought to completion in him. Romans 14 indicates that as long as one has saving faith in Jesus, one may or may not esteem one day as better than another—but he clearly views doing so as unnecessary because its prophetic function has ended.

Advocates of a Christian Sabbath argue that after the resurrection the church began to recognize Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. For example, Beale asserts that the Sunday worship gathering “commemorates Christ's inauguration of rest and points to the eschatological rest of the saints.”<sup>50</sup> Yet there is no biblical basis for such a conclusion. The earliest indicator of the church gathering on Sunday is found in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2. In Acts 20, Luke notes in passing that the church had assembled on the first day of the week to break bread. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul assumes that the church would gather on the first day of the week. These passages simply indicate that it was normative for the church to meet on Sunday. The New Testament never establishes Sunday as the Sabbath for the church under the new covenant nor does it point to the

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<sup>50</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 796.

Sabbath as the reason the church set the day apart to gather for worship.<sup>51</sup> Most agree that the reason Sunday became the normative day for Christian worship is the resurrection. However, there is no indication in the New Testament or in early church history that Sunday replaced the Sabbath or became known as the Lord's Day (Rev 1:10) *as a result* of the old covenant institution or cultic ritual.<sup>52</sup> The New Testament does not directly commend or command that Sunday be the normative day that the church is to gather.

Sabbatarians like Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley conclude *a priori* that since Jesus's post resurrection appearances all occurred on the first day of the week "the apostles directed the churches of all lands to set apart the first day of the week as the day for sacred assemblies."<sup>53</sup> Such an assumption cannot be demonstrated from the text of Scripture. The New Testament does not commend emulating the divine example under the new covenant as a means of looking ahead to the full and final rest secured in Christ.<sup>54</sup> Willy Rordorf captures this reality well: "The promise of the sabbath was now no longer associated with a day, but with Jesus himself."<sup>55</sup>

### **The Lord's Day**

If what has been argued thus far is true, how is the church to understand the Lord's Day and its function under the new covenant? The term "Lord's Day" only occurs once in the New Testament (Rev 1:10). However, as Bauckham suggests, "it is nevertheless basic to a consideration of the origins and significance of the Christian

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<sup>51</sup> R. J. Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 240.

<sup>52</sup> For a helpful overview of the history of the early church on the topic of Sabbath, see Richard Bauckham's three chapters in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 221–310.

<sup>53</sup> Joel R. Beeke, and Paul M. Smalley, "Delighting in God: A Guide to Sabbath-Keeping," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 11, no. 1 (2019): 9.

<sup>54</sup> Contra Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 158.

<sup>55</sup> Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 298.

weekly day of worship.”<sup>56</sup> John’s reference to it in his letter to the seven churches suggests that they knew what he was referring to. The origin of this phrase and its connection to Christian worship cannot be undertaken here.<sup>57</sup> However, a few observations are appropriate.

The book of Acts describes the apostles continuing to go up to the temple to pray (3:1), the church gathering at the temple complex (5:12), and Paul attending synagogue services to evangelize (9:20; 13:14, 44; 19:8). Not until you get to Acts 20:7 is there any mention of a specific day on which the church gathered. The description of these activities gives the impression that both the Sabbath and the church gathering on the first day of the week ran in parallel in this early stage of church history, each having their own distinct purpose. We are not suggesting that the church remained obligated to observe the Sabbath—only that both the Sabbath and Sunday were distinct and separate days. There is no hint of transference.

The New Testament refers to the “first day of the week” only twice (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2) in reference to the church gathering to break bread and presumably to devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching, worship, and prayer as noted by Luke in Acts 2:42. Paul’s reference to it in 1 Corinthians 16:2 is related to taking up a collection for the saints. The emphasis in the Gospels upon Jesus’s resurrection using the same phrase “the first day of the week” suggests that this is the primary reason they did so (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), but there is no explicit link in the text.<sup>58</sup>

The New Testament is not prescriptive with regard to *when* the church gathers. It only commands that it does so and “all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:25). There is evidence that the church met more frequently than once per week

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<sup>56</sup> Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” 222.

<sup>57</sup> See Rordorf, *Sunday*, 294–307.

<sup>58</sup> Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” 238. See also Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello,” 186–87.

(Acts 2:46) and that more regular involvement in one another's lives was encouraged to produce perseverance in the faith (Heb 3:13). Weekly gatherings appear normative in the New Testament but nothing more can be asserted from the evidence of the biblical text.<sup>59</sup> Paul's assertion in Romans 14:5 suggests that local churches may be free to gather on whatever day best suits the context in which it finds itself.

There is no indication that the New Testament church viewed Sunday as a Christian Sabbath nor that the principles of the Sabbath were to be adopted on another day under the new covenant. As argued in chapter 3, the importance of the seventh day in Genesis 2:2 as the culmination of the creation week resulting in God's covenant rest was foundational to the purpose and function of the Sabbath in the Old Testament. To associate the first day of the week with the Sabbath is not warranted by the evidence in the New Testament.

### **Conclusion**

Paul's Epistles confirm that the Sabbath was a type and shadow of the greater rest secured for God's people by Jesus Christ. Romans 14 demonstrates that our acceptance of one another's differing opinions on this issue is not to result in quarreling (14:1). Paul made room for believers to grow in their understanding of Christ's fulfillment of the law and its implications for the Christian life and life in the church. While one is free to observe the Sabbath, they must not demand others do so.

Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia makes it clear that any view that requires Sabbath observance to maintain right standing with God is to be rejected. No work of the law is to supplement the finished work of Christ. The Sabbath had fulfilled its purpose of pointing back to the covenant rest that was lost in the fall and forward to a

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<sup>59</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi would agree with this statement. However, his conclusions rely more on extra-biblical sources than Scripture. More importantly, his approach to Scripture is colored by his commitment to Seventh Day Adventism. Bacchiocchi's historical research is thorough and engaging. See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).

better rest ultimately secured by Christ for his church. No such prophetic function is associated with the Lord's Day in the New Testament. Paul makes clear that what the Sabbath pointed toward has already come. Tony Costa's concluding words are fitting: "The ultimate question is not whether we keep the Sabbath, but whether the Sabbath keeps us."<sup>60</sup> Amen, and amen!

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<sup>60</sup> Tony Costa, "The Sabbath and Its Relation to Christ and the Church in the New Covenant," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 20, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 143.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The Sabbath has been an important part of redemptive history since it was first introduced in the Old Testament. I have argued that God's rest is an eschatological state established archetypically at creation and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is eschatological in the sense that the goal of God's creative work is entrance into covenant rest with humanity. I have sought to establish that the rest theme introduced in Genesis 2:2–3 lays the foundation for the fourth commandment—but not in the sense that it establishes the Sabbath as an eternal moral norm for humanity. By resting, God entered into the joy of covenant relationship with humanity in the garden-temple of Eden.

Hebrews 3–4 presents a theological synthesis of the rest theme from creation to the post-exilic era to demonstrate that one of the key functions of the Sabbath was prophetic—pointing to the ultimate rest won for the believer by Jesus Christ. The author does this by making a redemptive-historical argument, showing how God's covenant rest manifested itself across the canon in conjunction with the land primarily yet also tethered to the temple, priesthood, and throne of Israel. The fourth commandment fits within this schematic looking both backward at rest that was lost in the fall and forward to an ultimate restoration of humanity's rest resulting from the reconciliation purchased by Jesus Christ in the new covenant.

The results of this investigation provide the church with a starting point in understanding the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic law—more specifically the Ten Commandments. Further study is needed to unpack the implications of no longer adopting a hermeneutic that divides the law into civil, ceremonial, and moral as well as the approach that treats the decalogue as distinct from the rest of the commands legislated



under God's covenant with Israel. Both approaches have been popularized because faithful Christians with a sincere desire to please the Lord in all things have been eager to understand and apply the Old Testament to the church. However, these approaches fall short because they fail to filter the Old Testament through the reality of the completed and final revelation of Christ. Jesus's fulfillment of the Old Testament transforms the church's relationship to everything that came before in new and better ways.

Biblical theology is concerned with maintaining a whole Bible perspective in order to keep its overall message central to the exegetical task. It tethers biblical interpretation to the Bible's own categories and structure to demonstrate its unity according to its own presentation of itself. Students of the Bible must begin at the historical-grammatical level without overlooking the Bible's covenant structure. The covenants hold together the Bible's progressive nature, promise-fulfillment motifs, and typology that anticipate and culminate in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Scripture comes to us today as a completed text and must be read as such. The New Testament presents the arrival of Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant as the culmination of everything that came before. Therefore, his person and work illumine our understanding of the role and function of the entire Old Testament including its laws, institutions, events, persons, and covenants.

The Sabbath is subsumed within these larger structures and like them has found fulfillment and completion in Jesus. Therefore, the Sabbath is no longer binding under the new covenant. This project has sought to demonstrate that it has fulfilled its purpose of pointing to him according to the development of the rest theme through the Pentateuch, the Psalter, the Gospels, Paul's Epistles, and Hebrews. The New Testament is the final revelation of the Sabbath's purpose and function and therefore is the binding authority for the church until Christ returns to consummate the kingdom inaugurated in his first coming.

Hebrews 3–4's emphasis on "today" points to the present reality of God's rest

for the new covenant believer. The “today” that the psalmist looked forward to has arrived in the person of Christ. There is nothing more for the believer to “work” toward (4:10) because we already “share in Christ” (3:14). The only fear (4:1) a new covenant believer is to have is of the unbelief (3:19) that comes from sin’s deceitful ability to harden one’s heart (3:13) and lead him to depart from the *only* source of rest, namely Jesus Christ.

Hebrews emphasizes the ongoing role and function of the local church in striving to remain in our Sabbath rest—Christ himself—and persevere until the consummation of full and final rest. The author takes the “today” and applies it to the ongoing, everyday need for members of the church to exhort one another, that the effects of sin might not deceive and harden hearts toward Christ (3:13). He is most concerned with their present reality of resting in Christ (3:14). In one sense, this is an everyday concern not one day in seven. The ever-present danger for the church is falling away from the living God (3:12), failing to recognize that Christ has brought us into the true and better rest than the land or Sabbath could ever achieve. I submit that the promise that stands (4:1) is Christ’s promise in Matthew 11:28–30. Obedience to the yoke of Christ is the same obedience called for in Hebrews 4:11. This is a corporate call to the church to follow the true and better Joshua who has brought us to a better country (Heb 11:16).

Much more needs to be said with regard to the implications of this study in the life of the church today. We will conclude with one practical application for the church drawn from Hebrews. Hebrews 10:23–25 complements the author’s exhortation in 3:13. Regular participation in the corporate gathering of the church is essential for holding fast to our Sabbath rest. Tony Costa links the covenant terms “observe” and “remember” in the fourth commandment to the new covenant ordinances established by Christ, namely baptism and the Lord’s Supper.<sup>1</sup> Neither is explicitly linked with Sabbath rest in the New

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Costa, “The Sabbath and Its Relation to Christ and the Church in the New

Testament. However, perhaps the connection lies at the level of them being covenant signs for their respective covenant eras. Regular observance of the Sabbath has given way to the regular observance of the Lord's Supper in the life of the church. The corporate call to rest in Christ is maintained by the corporate administration of the Lord's Supper as the church gathers regularly. Paul connects the ongoing observance of the Lord's Supper with the return of Christ: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (1 Cor 11:26; emphasis added). In the same way, Hebrews 10:25 exhorts the regular gathering of the church to occur "all the more as you *see the Day drawing near*" (emphasis added). Just as the observance of the Sabbath under the old covenant pointed forward to the restoration of covenant rest in the future, the observance of the Lord's Supper in the new covenant celebrates the fulfillment of our rest in Christ and looks ahead to the consummation of our final rest with him. This suggests thoughtful reflection upon the already-not yet reality of Sabbath rest as local churches consider the frequency of observing the Lord's Supper.

Disagreement over the relevance of the Sabbath for the church today will persist. Paul's exhortation to resist the tendency to "judge" and "despise" one another in Romans 14 is instructive as we live together in the new covenant community. Faithful brothers and sisters have benefited greatly from resting on the Lord's Day. Their thoughtful effort to submit their lives to the authority of God's Word should cause any who disagree to thoughtfully reflect on the Sabbath to be fully convinced in their mind that they are treating all days alike out of faith (14:5, 23). The sobering reality is that we will all give an account to God (14:12). By God's grace, may we walk in love with one another in pursuit of Christ alone not his many benefits (14:18–19).

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## ABSTRACT

### REST IN CHRIST: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH IN SANDY SPRINGS, GEORGIA

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God's rest is an eschatological state established archetypically at creation and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The rest theme introduced in Genesis 2:2–3 lays the foundation for the fourth commandment—but not in the sense that it establishes the Sabbath as an eternal moral norm for humanity. By resting, God entered into the joy of covenant relationship with humanity in the garden-temple of Eden. Hebrews 3–4 presents a historical-redemptive argument presenting the rest theme from creation to the post-exilic era to demonstrate that one of the key functions of the Sabbath was prophetic—pointing to the ultimate rest won for the believer by Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath is no longer binding under the new covenant. This project seeks to demonstrate that it has fulfilled its purpose of pointing to Christ according to the development of the rest theme throughout the Pentateuch, the Psalter, the Gospels, Paul's Epistles, and Hebrews. The New Testament is the final revelation on the Sabbath's purpose and function and, therefore, is the binding authority for the church until Christ returns to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated in his first coming.

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### EDUCATION

BA, Cedarville University, 2002

MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Associate Pastor, Cumming Baptist Church, Cumming, Georgia, 2008–2016

Director of Operations, Reaching and Teaching International Ministries,  
Louisville, Kentucky, 2016–