

REDISCOVERING

— THE —

GLORY

— OF THE —

SABBATH

JO ANN DAVIDSON

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## Introduction

### First Things First

**T**he Sabbath has always been a central issue for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, so much so that it is part of our denominational name. We are “seventh-day” Adventists, separating us from others who also believe in the second coming of Jesus but do not link it to the biblical Sabbath.

A book looking into the biblical Sabbath will interest some but will arouse no interest at all for others. Some may have their curiosity tweaked, but for many Christians today, the study of any biblical doctrine is unappealing. They find pursuing those studies boring and pedantic. They think, *It may have been necessary to study doctrines in the past, but not now.* They seek relational models of Christian identity, models that emphasize the love of Jesus or make a person more “spiritual.” Still others find the church and its doctrines unnecessary. They feel that they enjoy greater blessings and benefits in nature. Moreover, church leaders can’t seem to agree on many doctrinal issues anyway.

Studying anything, however, involves making choices, whether it is religion, politics, philosophy, or learning a skill. Ideas and beliefs matter, and every person must decide what is true. Not choosing is itself making a choice. There is no neutral ground. Even pluralism, which urges tolerance, is a commitment to certain assumptions. And the tolerance urged there ends when someone does not accept the pluralistic platform.

Christian faith has never been about merely gathering the best combination of texts—though sometimes it may seem so. It is about

encountering, loving, and wanting to serve the living God. To know Him, a person must find where and how He has revealed Himself. Which, of course, involves studying Scripture, the primary source for that revelation. Such study involves accepting Scripture's claims about itself: that though there were many writers, God was the Author. Furthermore, all the biblical writers illuminate each other. There is no instance in which one writer contradicts or proves another wrong. Scripture can be trusted. Ellen White is passionate about this: "The Bible is its own interpreter. With beautiful simplicity, one portion connects itself with the truth of another portion, until the whole Bible is blended in one harmonious whole. Light flashes forth from one text to illuminate some portion of the Word that has seemed more obscure."<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this book is not to defend the inspired nature of Scripture, but it is rightly assumed. With this assumption comes the all-important reminder that studying biblical doctrine is not merely lining up all the right texts. Nevertheless, the entire biblical canon must be studied—for it is a complete system of truth.

In the following pages, it will be seen that the Sabbath is a major biblical topic—and it is intertwined with other such biblical doctrines as the doctrine of God, the doctrine of humanity, the covenant, the doctrine of salvation, the great controversy between Christ and Satan, and more. As with all doctrinal studies, each link is crucial, intersecting and holding together a golden "chain of truth." Ellen White explains more than once the importance of Scripture's "chain of truth": "The grand truths of sacred history possess amazing strength and beauty, and are as far-reaching as eternity. What more important knowledge can be gained than that which outlines the fall of man and the consequences of that sin, which opened the floodgates of woe upon the world, which tells of Christ's first advent? The incarnation of Christ, His divinity, His atonement, His wonderful life in heaven as our advocate, the office of the Holy Spirit—all these vital themes of Christianity are revealed from Genesis to Revelation. Each is a golden link in the perfect chain of truth."<sup>2</sup>

Connected questions concerning the Sabbath are, Is the Sabbath related to salvation? Is keeping it a requirement for being saved? Or is it more important to become more "spiritual"?

Even the quest for answers to these questions can be dangerous if not grounded biblically. As the apostle Paul instructs: "Do not quench the

Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. *Test all things*; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:19–22; emphasis added). To “test” something, there must be a standard. And that standard is the Bible. With the divine Author authenticating His Word, we know it can be trusted. And all sixty-six books are necessary. Each one teaches, informs, and corresponds with the others.

Christian faith is not based on a set of mystical, ill-defined, or unclear ideas about the world and its inhabitants. Nor is it a casual collection of Bible writers recording their intuitive emotions about spiritual matters. From Genesis to Revelation, the teachings of Scripture cluster around and focus on Jesus. The sixty-six books begin with Him as the masterful Lord of Creation week (Genesis 1; 2; Colossians 1:3, 4, 16–18) and climax with the book entitled “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

At the heart of Christian faith is a Person, not a dry doctrine. And when people want to study and share what they know about Jesus, they are dealing with doctrine. Recall Jesus’ own testimony about the Old Testament—on Resurrection Sunday, no less. Traveling on the road to Emmaus, He met up with two disciples who were grieving about Jesus having died that weekend. As He joined their conversation, He did not triumphantly announce His presence—which would have been the easiest way to bring exceeding joy to the grieving disciples. He first turned their minds to the Old Testament Scriptures: “Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And *beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (Luke 24:25–27; emphasis added).

Responding to that discussion later in their home, as they recalled what Jesus had explained to them, the disciples marveled: “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (verse 32). In fact, it wrought such a profound change in their thinking that they had to dash back to Jerusalem and encourage the other despondent disciples with what they had learned.

Jesus then graciously reappeared among them all—and reiterated the same biblical principle that had caused the “burning heart” experience in Emmaus. “Then He said to them, ‘These are the *words which I spoke* to

you while I was still with you, that *all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.*' And *He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures*" (verses 44, 45; emphasis added).

Jesus' opening "their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" emphasizes that Scripture is a system of truth. And since Jesus is none other than God Incarnate, His teaching has authority and weight. This makes it clear that when we study the Bible, we can be blessed with the knowledge of the true God.

Christians do not believe that Jesus has authority because of the excellence and truth of His teaching. Human thinking and evaluation are not needed to establish His authority. He has absolute authority because He is God Incarnate. Our thinking and teaching continually need to be judged by Him.

This book will explore the truth about God through the study of the Sabbath in Scripture. It will, of course, include whether there is a right day and a right time. But more important, behind all the discussion, it portrays the "Lord of the Sabbath."

Seventh-day Adventists have, using both the Old and New Testaments, rightly focused on which day is the correct biblical Sabbath. However, there is much more to discovering the true Sabbath than just knowing the right day. Its glorious nature needs to be restored!

The following chapters will explore and review just how extensively the Sabbath is highlighted and embedded in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation—sometimes explicitly, often implicitly. They will make it obvious that the doctrine of the Sabbath is not a peripheral or minor issue, nor have we been following "cunningly devised fables." After that, a brief survey of the Sabbath in history will recount how the Sabbath was never lost, and a few supposed "problem Sabbath texts" will be investigated. The concluding chapter once more highlights the Sabbath by celebrating its glorious nature and includes some practical ideas to enhance its observance.

Our study begins as Genesis opens and follows through the next sixty-five canonical books until the canon closes. The historical books contribute as does the book of Psalms—the "official hymnal" for Old Testament sanctuary worship. Even the "penitential psalms," especially linked to Yom Kippur in the seventh month of Israel's ritual calendar, are important because the Day of Atonement was called the "high Sabbath"

or the “greater Sabbath.” And thus, those psalms are a vital part of any Sabbath theology.

Some of the Old Testament prophets mentioned the Sabbath by name as they sought its restoration to Sabbath keepers who were keeping the right day the wrong way. The prophet Isaiah, quoting the Lord, provides major proof that the Sabbath is not just for the Jews but is for all people. “All peoples” are described with two characteristics: honoring the covenant and keeping the Sabbath:

For thus says the LORD:

“To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths,  
And choose what pleases Me,  
And hold fast My covenant,  
Even to them I will give in My house  
And within My walls a place and a name  
Better than that of sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
That shall not be cut off.

“Also the sons of the foreigner  
Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him,  
And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—  
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,  
And holds fast My covenant—  
Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,  
And make them joyful in My house of prayer” (Isaiah 56:4–7).

The Old Testament Israelites were given divine instructions on what was ethically normative for God’s people: the Sabbath was identified as a vital posture of fellowship with Him.

In chapter 58, Isaiah also spoke of Sabbath restoration, quoting the divine promise that this would bring “delight”!

“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,  
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,  
And call the *Sabbath a delight*,  
The holy day of the LORD honorable,



And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,  
Nor finding your own pleasure,  
Nor speaking your own words,  
*Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD;*  
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,  
And feed you with *the heritage of Jacob your father.*  
The mouth of the LORD has spoken” (verses 13, 14; emphasis added).

This passage reminds us that the Sabbath was never meant to be a burden or a restriction. Instead, it is a cause for delight!

Later, when taken into captivity, the prophet Ezekiel admonished the Israelites that their apostasy had been caused by their desecration of the Sabbath (Ezekiel 20). Following their return from Babylonian captivity, the importance of Sabbath to the divine Creator was urged by the prophet Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13). And Nehemiah, like Ezekiel, reminded them that violation of the Sabbath was what led to their captivity in Babylon (verses 17–19).

A pattern can be detected in Old Testament history: The Sabbath was taught, perverted, and restored more than once. However, the Sabbath is never called “Jewish” anywhere in Scripture. It was instituted thousands of years before there were any Jews. Jesus also insisted that “the Sabbath was made for *man*”—not for just a certain ethnic group (Mark 2:27, 28). There were drastic results for humans and all creation because of sin’s entrance—but the Sabbath was given before sin, and it was not changed after sin.

The New Testament depicts Jesus keeping the Sabbath, “as His custom was” (Luke 4:16). In the book of Acts, the apostles are shown keeping the Sabbath. Paul also kept the Sabbath, and several times in his letters to the Gentile churches he had established, he refers to the Decalogue, even quoting from the fourth commandment in one of his prayers.

As the canon closes in the book of Revelation, a glorious future is promised. At last, the curse and results of sin will be removed—and “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1) will be created. And it will be such a glorious time that God can’t help but refer to it in the Old Testament through Isaiah, where He promised that the blessing of the Sabbath would continue:

“For as the new heavens and the new earth  
Which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD,  
“So shall your descendants and your name remain.  
And it shall come to pass  
That from one New Moon to another,  
And from one Sabbath to another,  
All flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the LORD (Isaiah  
66:22, 23).

The biblical promises of heaven never suggest a disembodied, ethereal, timeless existence. Instead, the very real created world described in Genesis 1 and 2 is promised to be restored—and the biblical Sabbath will continue! The Creator’s dreams for this planet will finally be realized—and the blessing of the Sabbath will be part of it.

The study of the biblical Sabbath need not be restricted to the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:8–11). It is linked to

- the Creation of this world,
- redemption,
- its needed restoration,
- the covenant, and
- eschatology, the study of “last things,” including final judgment.

A survey of the biblical Sabbath lies ahead—a journey full of joy and fellowship with the Lord of the Sabbath.

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1. Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1961), 207.

2. Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1943), 427.

## Chapter One

### **Back to the Beginning**

**T**he Old Testament—and the Bible itself—opens with the dramatic narration of the day-by-day creation of this world. The literary pattern of the Genesis 1:1–2:3 Creation account serves to highlight the extraordinary event Creation week was. In the first three days, there is (1) the bestowing of light, (2) a separation of firmament and water, and (3) emergence of dry land. The next three days, each of these three “habitats” is filled: (4) sun, moon, and stars filled the light sources; (5) the birds and sea creatures are created and blessed—filling the air and waters; (6) humans and land animals are created and given the same blessing of the birds and sea creatures as they fill their habitat on the newly created soil.

The Creator, well-pleased, declared all of it “very good”—fully delighting in the material world He crafted. “God looked out onto the freshly made creation and saw reflected back in sensual form the full display of his own love, joy, creativity, playfulness, and curiosity. Nothing in creation had to be. . . . But all of it remains precious, the expression of divine poetry, and the exhibition of a passionate Word. . . . For creation to cease to exist, God would have to desist from loving, because it is only God’s joyful, creative speech and warm, sustaining breath (see Psalm 104) that daily enlivens and maintains each and every creature.”<sup>1</sup>

Ellen White writes similarly: “Our Father in heaven is constantly engaged in upholding the things which He has created. Every leaf grows, every flower blooms, every fruit develops, by the power of God. In Him

‘we live, and move, and have our being.’ Each heart-beat, each breath, is the inspiration of Him who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life,—the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM. The great and infinite God lives not unto Himself, but for the benefit and blessing of every being and every object of His creation.”<sup>2</sup>

The climactic seventh day follows next. That very first singular week culminated in the creation of twenty-four hours of blessed, holy time. More verbs are linked with the creation of this day than for any of the preceding six—for the Creator “finished,” “rested,” “blessed,” and “sanctified” this final day of the first week. And on the seventh day, unlike the other six, the Creator *both* formed and filled it. The verbs describing His actions indicate He was fully present on the seventh day as He blessed and sanctified it. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, when God sanctifies something—setting it apart, such as the later constructed sanctuary—it is signaled by His glorious presence. “And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kings 8:10, 11).

Marriage was also created that first week. He had already blessed all the creatures He had made.

Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.” So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. *And God blessed them*, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” So the evening and the morning were the fifth day (Genesis 1:20–23; emphasis added).

Then, on the sixth day, marriage was given to Adam and Eve, and it was also blessed by the Creator.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the

birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. *Then God blessed them*, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:26–28; emphasis added).

Then God blessed the Sabbath. The Sabbath was instituted before the Fall, just as was marriage. Hence the Sabbath is no more Jewish than is marriage—both are gifts from Eden. Ellen White reminds us, “There were two institutions founded in Eden that were not lost in the fall, the Sabbath and the marriage relation. These were carried by man beyond the gates of paradise. He who loves and observes the Sabbath, and maintains the purity of the marriage institution, thereby proves himself the friend of man and the friend of God.”<sup>3</sup> She also writes, “Marriage was from the creation, constituted by God, a divine ordinance. The marriage institution was made in Eden. The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was instituted in Eden, when the foundations of the world were laid, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Then let this, God’s institution of marriage, stand before you as firm as the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.”<sup>4</sup>

The Sabbath day could not be endowed with more glory. Ellen White points out that it even has a protective nature:

God gave the Sabbath as a memorial of his creative power and works, “for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” He made its observance obligatory upon man, in order that he might contemplate the works of God, dwell upon his goodness, his mercy, and love, and through nature look up to nature’s God. *If man had always observed the Sabbath, there would never have been an unbeliever, an infidel, or an atheist in the world.*<sup>5</sup>

Some have argued that the verses describing the creation of the seventh day do not include the “numbering formula” of the previous six days: “the evening and the morning were the [x] day.” Because of this, it

is suggested that the seventh day is of a different character, such as denoting unending time. However, each of the first six days has *two* numbering formulas. And the wording of Genesis 2:1–3, describing the creation of the first Sabbath, does contain the second of the two “numbering formulas,” which was attached to the other six days. The numbering of all seven days was introduced with the definite article —“*the* first day” (Genesis 1:5),” “*the* second day” (Genesis 1:7), “*the* third day” (Genesis 1:13), and so forth. This second “numbering formula” is connected to all seven days. And when it comes to the seventh day in Genesis 2:1–3, the phrase is repeated three times!

“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on *the seventh day* God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on *the seventh day* from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed *the seventh day* and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:1–3; emphasis added).

Moreover, each mention of “the seventh day” occurs approximately in the middle of three consecutive sentences in the original language. And each of these three sentences has seven words. Through this impressive narrative writing, “the seventh day” is linked with the previous six days—yet it is done so in such a way as to make clear that the seventh day *is* different: not in length but in nature. As Genesis opens, Deity is presented as creating all life and matter. Furthermore, He sets a weekly cycle as He enters and participates in time. Thus, the Sabbath is granted paramount importance: “God is the focus and center of the whole creation account. His activities are stressed. He speaks, acts, and is in control. He is a Sovereign Creator. Eleven times God directly speaks in the first creation story: ten times with the specific formula, ‘and God said.’ . . . God is explicitly mentioned thirty-five times in thirty-four verses of the first creation story. There is no doubt that God is presented as the Center and the sole Creator.”<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, a careful study can hardly miss the extensive use of the number seven in Genesis [chapter one](#).<sup>7</sup> For example, Ivan Panin carefully examined the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1 and discovered an incredible phenomenon of multiples of seven that could not be explained by chance. For example, Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”) is composed of seven Hebrew words containing a total of 28 ( $7 \times 4$ ) letters. Panin then added up thirty separate codes

involving the number seven in the first verse of the Bible. A partial listing includes:

- Genesis 1:1 contains seven Hebrew words.
- The number of letters equals twenty-eight ( $7 \times 4 = 28$ ).
- The first three Hebrew words (translated “in the beginning God created”) have fourteen letters ( $7 \times 2 = 14$ ).
- The last four Hebrew words (“the heavens and the earth”) have fourteen letters ( $7 \times 2 = 14$ ).
- The fourth and fifth words have seven letters.
- The sixth and seventh words have seven letters.
- The three key words: “God,” “heaven,” and “earth” have fourteen letters ( $7 \times 2 = 14$ ).
- The number of letters in the four remaining words is also fourteen ( $7 \times 2 = 14$ ).
- The shortest word in the verse is the middle word with seven letters.

The mathematical faculty at Harvard University were presented with this biblical phenomenon. They then attempted to disprove its significance as a proof of divine authorship. Using the English language, they artificially assigned numeric values to the English alphabet—giving them a potential vocabulary of over four hundred thousand available English words to choose from to construct a sentence about any topic they chose. But even after valiant efforts, the professors were unable to duplicate this incredible mathematical phenomenon. Despite their skilled mathematical abilities and computer access, they were unable to come close to incorporating numerous multiples of seven, as found in the Hebrew words of Genesis 1:1.

Beyond the seven days of Creation in Genesis—after God rests, blesses, and sanctifies the seventh day—throughout the rest of the Bible, the numeral seven also reappears many times:

- It appears 287 times in the Old Testament ( $7 \times 41 = 287$ ).
- The word *seventh* occurs ninety-eight times ( $7 \times 14 = 98$ ).
- The word *sevenfold* appears seven times.
- The word *seventy* is used fifty-six times ( $7 \times 8 = 56$ ).

Notice also

- the seven churches,
- seven seals,
- seven trumpets, and
- the seven thunders—all in the book of Revelation. (See Revelation 10:1–4.)

There is also a pattern of sevens in Matthew 1:18–25, the inspired history of Christ's birth (does not include the genealogy of verses 1–17):

- The number of words in the seven-word passage is 161 ( $7 \times 23 = 161$ ).
- The number of vocabulary words is 77 ( $7 \times 11 = 77$ ).
- Six Greek words occur only in this passage and never again in Matthew. These 6 Greek words contain precisely 56 letters ( $7 \times 8 = 56$ ).
- There are seven distinct proper names in the passage.
- The number of Greek letters in these seven proper names is forty-two ( $7 \times 6 = 42$ ).
- The number of words spoken by the angel to Joseph is twenty-eight ( $7 \times 4 = 28$ ).

The number seven subtly permeates all of Scripture as the number of God's divine perfection and perfect order. Before his death in 1942, Ivan Panin discovered literally thousands of such mathematical patterns underlying all of the books of the Old Testament, which can be found in his book *The Inspiration of the Scriptures Scientifically Demonstrated*, where he discusses the phenomena extensively. Panin and several others examined other Hebrew literature, attempting to find such mathematical patterns, but they are not found anywhere outside the Bible. He accumulated more than forty thousand pages of detailed calculations covering most of the texts of the Bible before his death. This impressive discovery by Panin has been examined by numerous authorities, and the figures have been verified.\*

Panin described his own view of Scripture after his lifelong study of it by comparing it to the limits of secular philosophy: “ ‘Not so, however,



with The Book. For it tells of One who spake as men never spake, who was the true bread of life, that which cometh down from the heavens, of which if a man eat he shall never hunger.’ He concluded with the challenge: ‘My friend of the world, whose you are: Either Jesus Christ is mistaken, or you are. The answer that neither might be is only evading the issue, not settling it. But the ages have decided that Jesus Christ was not mistaken. It is for you to decide whether you shall continue to be.’ ”<sup>8</sup>

When considering the impressive details of his mathematical record, notice that a change of a single letter or word in the original languages of Hebrew or Greek would destroy the phenomenon. Then recall that Jesus insisted that the smallest letter and grammatical mark of Scripture were preserved by God: “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18, KJV).

One more aspect of that first week needs to be emphasized. On each of the first five days of the first week, God saw that everything was “good.” On the sixth day, everything was declared “very good.” But on the seventh day, something different happened. In the first six days, God created matter and all life. On the seventh day, He fashioned holy time. The Hebrew word *kodesh* (hallow, sanctify) first appears in the Genesis account of God creating the Sabbath. The first thing God made *holy* was not a mountain, nor a structure, nor a cave, nor a city, but time. By sanctifying Sabbath, God spectacularly demonstrated His sovereignty over both space and time—over all reality—ending His creating process with this grand gesture.

With this final act, He shaped the first seven days into the first week—a unique time measurement. The weekly cycle, which God embedded in Scripture and is subsequently found around the world, is not linked to any celestial movements or cycles, as is the month to the moon’s cycle, and the calendar year to our planet circling the sun. Accordingly, the seven-day weekly cycle distinguishes the Creator as sovereign over all life and *time*.

The first day of the first week found the Creator “at work” creating. But on their first full day, the newly created humans didn’t work. Though given their tasks on day six (Genesis 2:15), on the seventh day, their first full day, they rested the whole day before doing any work. They rested in God’s finished work. What a lesson of grace!

The German Protestant theologian Karl Barth saw this: “It is only by participation in God’s celebrating that he [man] can and may and shall also celebrate on this seventh day, which is his first day. But this is just what he is commanded to do. Hence his history under the command of God really begins with the Gospel and not with the Law.”<sup>9</sup>

And following the example of the Creator and of Adam and Eve, we can also rest each Sabbath. This blessed rest is unparalleled in any other ancient nation. The concept was revolutionary, and its implications inspired Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “In the Bible, ‘rest’ really means more than ‘having a rest.’ It means the rest after the work is accomplished, it means completion, it means the perfection and peace of God in which the world rests, it means transfiguration, it means turning our eyes absolutely upon God’s being God and towards worshipping him.”<sup>10</sup>

In the New Testament, Jesus Himself insists that the blessings of this day were intended for everyone, not just for the Jewish people, declaring that “the Sabbath was made for *man*” (Mark 2:27; emphasis added). A Jewish writer, noting the royal nature of the Sabbath day, called the Sabbath “a palace in time.”<sup>11</sup>

Before continuing our journey through the Pentateuch, a vital interpretive point needs to be reviewed. The narratives in Genesis often proceed without mentioning how much time has elapsed between different events. In some cases, God does give major time-grounded prophecies and genealogies, yet the historical narratives are often linked together without mentioning precise periods. This is noticeable in the fifty chapters of the book of Genesis, which covers approximately 2,500 years. Contrast this with the four books Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which together cover about 120 years.

It becomes obvious that there are a multitude of details and descriptions that a reader might wish for that are not recorded in the vast time of Genesis’s fifty chapters. That, of course, suggests that the details that are included are all the more important! In fact, the narrator sometimes intentionally employs this method, under the inspiration of the Author of Scripture, to subtly present critical theological issues.

For example, the reader is not told how much time Adam and Eve lived in Eden before they sinned. Their sin is abruptly introduced in Genesis 3—immediately following the first two chapters describing the perfect world God created. This stark contrast serves to expose the deadly nature of sin and its results in [chapter 3](#).

Next, Genesis 4 contains a hint of the divinely created weekly cycle when describing Cain and Abel bringing their offerings to the Lord: “Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And *in the process of time* it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat” (Genesis 4:2–4; emphasis added).

The opening phrase of verse 3, often translated “in the process of time,” would more accurately be translated “at the end of days”—as some marginal readings rightly indicate. Of course, the phrase does indicate a passage of time. However, a careful reading of the first Genesis narratives would signal that the only “end of days” mentioned so far is the end of the first seven days with the Sabbath. Thus, the two brothers’ actions “at the end of days” suggest that they were bringing their offerings on the Sabbath.

Old Testament history continues with dreadful descriptions of the impact of evil on the human race, which led to divine judgment: “Then the LORD saw that the *wickedness of man was great* in the earth, and that *every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5; emphasis added). The previous genealogies (Genesis 5) have given a general sense of time passing, leading into Genesis 6:5, which registers the vast extent and deepening of sin’s grip on humanity with superlative graphic language allowing no exceptions: “*every intent . . . only evil continually.*”

Genesis 6–9 describes the call of Noah, the building of the ark, the viciousness of the Flood storm, the waters then subsiding—and finally, the release from the ark of Noah, his family, and the animals. Though the Sabbath is not specifically mentioned, the weekly cycle has been indicated:

- *Genesis 7:4*. “For after *seven more days* I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made.” God announced that judgment against vile human wickedness would commence on the seventh day.
- *Verse 10*. “And it came to pass after *seven days* that the waters of the flood were on the earth.”
- *Genesis 8:10*. “And he [Noah] waited yet *another seven days*, and again he sent the dove out from the ark.”

- *Verse 12.* “So he waited yet *another seven days* and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him anymore.”

The weekly cycle is obviously functioning.

What is called the “patriarchal period” fills the rest of the book of Genesis. Some commentators suggest that there is no mention of the patriarchs keeping the Sabbath. There is, however, divine mention of obedience to God’s law long before Sinai. For example, when God renewed the covenant with Isaac, Abraham’s son:

Then the LORD appeared to him and said: “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because *Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws*” (Genesis 26:2–5; emphasis added).

When God blesses Isaac, covenant language is obvious, copying the wording of the covenant (cf. Genesis 22:16–18; Genesis 12:1–3) given to Abraham: “I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (verses 3, 4).

God then informs Isaac He will do this “because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (verse 5). God could have merely stated that Abraham was obedient because obedience does imply an ethical standard. However, God was very precise and declared what Abraham was obedient to: “My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (verse 5). This is definitive language, particularly considering that the Decalogue has not been proclaimed from Mount Sinai—and will not be for a long time yet. It is not stretching the meaning of the text to suggest that God’s declaration hints that Abraham kept the Sabbath—which is found within the “commandments” to which God said Abraham was obedient.

The weekly cycle is again referred to in the narratives of Jacob when unwittingly he married Leah after working for Rachel for seven years. Jacob complains about this to his new father-in-law, and Laban responded:

“Fulfill her *week*, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years.”

Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her *week*. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also (Genesis 29:27, 28; emphasis added).

This incidental mention of the week is another cue that the weekly cycle is fully operational during the patriarchal period.

### **The book of Exodus**

Continuing our journey through the Pentateuch, we will become increasingly aware that the narratives express theology and are not merely telling a story. For example, we see the Sabbath in the book of Exodus before Sinai. In forty chapters, the book refers to it fourteen times. It is, of course, especially highlighted in the heart of the Decalogue. The fourth commandment, about the Sabbath, contains approximately one-third of all the words in the Decalogue. The commandment, however, is not the first time Sabbath is brought up.

Ellen White mentions in *Patriarchs and Prophets* that when God “commissioned” Moses to return to Egypt after forty years of shepherding, one of the first things Moses did was to restore the Sabbath. She writes, “In their bondage the Israelites had to some extent lost the knowledge of God’s law, and they had departed from its precepts. The Sabbath had been generally disregarded, and the exactions of their taskmasters made its observance apparently impossible. But Moses had shown his people that obedience to God was the first condition of deliverance; and the efforts made to restore the observance of the Sabbath had come to the notice of their oppressors.”<sup>12</sup> Exodus chapter five hints at this through the reaction of Pharaoh to the request of Moses and Aaron: “Moses and Aaron, why do you *take the people from their work*? Get back to your labor” (verse 4; emphasis added).

The Pharaoh of the Exodus was used to enforcing slave labor seven days a week. After Moses restored the Sabbath upon his arrival in Egypt,

the Egyptian ruler had apparently gotten wind that his Israelite slaves were not cooperating one day a week. He clarified his frustration even further with his second statement: “And Pharaoh said, ‘Look, the people of the land are many now, and *you make them rest from their labor!*’ ” (verse 5; emphasis added). The word for “rest” that the Egyptian ruler used reveals he was even aware of the name of the Israelite’s “day off.” It is built on the root of the Hebrew word *shabbat*.

After the Israelites escaped Egypt, the Sabbath is again in the spotlight. Before the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, where the Decalogue was spoken to them by God, He spoke about the Sabbath and His law! As the freed slaves journeyed to the Promised Land, one of the many miracles bestowed on them by Yahweh was the gift of manna for their meals. “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may *test them*, whether they will walk in *My law* or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily’ ” (Exodus 16:4, 5; emphasis added).

The people were given instructions concerning the collecting of manna for six days—and told how they could rest on the seventh day by gathering a double portion of it on Friday. Moses explained God’s command regarding the Sabbath: “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Tomorrow is a *Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD*’ ” (verse 23; emphasis added). Apparently, some did not have enough faith or deliberately chose to ignore the directives for “it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none” (verse 27). The divine response is striking. “ ‘How long do you refuse to keep *My commandments and My laws?* See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day” (verses 28–30; emphasis added).

The Israelites hadn’t even experienced the dramatic divine presentation of the Decalogue on Mount Sinai—yet God asks how long they are going to refuse to keep His commandments and laws! Keeping the Sabbath was a test of believing God even before Sinai—a test found more than once in the Bible, as we will see.

For the next forty years of wilderness wanderings, God miraculously continued to mark off each week and each Sabbath with manna meals. Note the multiple miracles involved:

- On the first five days of the week, everyone could gather what they needed, but any left over would spoil.
- On the sixth day, a double amount could be gathered for each person, and when it was saved for the next day, it didn't spoil.
- There was no manna to gather on the seventh day, the Sabbath, and the people could rest.
- This weekly cycle was divinely marked for forty years.

The psalmist later described these miracle manna meals as heavenly food!

He had commanded the clouds above,  
And opened the doors of heaven,  
Had rained down manna on them to eat,  
And given them of *the bread of heaven*.  
Men ate *angels' food*;  
He sent them food to the full (Psalm 78:23–25; emphasis added).

The Israelites finally arrived at Mount Sinai—and what happened there truly was an utterly unique occasion in all human history. God called Moses up the mountain and described His desire for His people: “ ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel” (Exodus 19:4–6).

This is a remarkable introduction to the presentation of the law. The Great Lawgiver doesn't come across as a tyrant, demanding obedience or else. Rather, He wanted the Israelites to think of Him like a mother eagle carrying her children on her wings, wanting to teach her eaglets how to fly. God used this warm analogy to describe bringing the released slaves,

not to a court setting, but to Himself: “I bore you on eagles’ wings and *brought you to Myself.*”

In His instructions to the former slaves—and subsequently to us—God includes the gift of resting for one-seventh of our lives! No other god ever offered such a gift. The ancient Near Eastern origin accounts speak of the gods creating humans so that they could work for them. Yes, God commanded work for six days—yet He intended even that work to be a blessing just as His own work of creating had been for Him.

He also described His dream of the Israelites being His special treasure—all of them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are not the words of a potentate trying to force obedience through a massive load of restrictions. These are the commands of God, the Liberator, who wants His redeemed people to stay free! The Exodus first and *then* the giving of the law—this sequence is significant! The psalmists clearly grasped this and composed hymns in praise of the law: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97).

However, when the freed slaves arrived at Mount Sinai, no one could casually enter the presence of the holy God. Three days of preparation were needed.

Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice (Exodus 19:16–19).

Moses would often remind the freed slaves of the nature of their divine deliverance. He recalled the extraordinary nature of the awesome Sinai event in his farewell message to Israel:

“For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And



what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’

“Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. . . .

“. . . But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day” (Deuteronomy 4:7–13, 20).

The Decalogue—the “Ten Words,” as the Hebrew Bible consistently refers to them—is the towering ethical document in Scripture. It is quoted by almost every biblical writer following the Exodus, whether psalmists, prophets, or historians. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself refers to the Decalogue, affirming its eternal nature. The apostle Paul likewise speaks of the far-reaching claims of God’s law, often directly quoting it in his various letters and epistles. The great apostle’s cross-cultural ministry to the Gentiles finds him instructing new Christians on how the law’s boundaries extend to the deeply hidden secrets of the human heart, searching thoughts and motives—because the curse of sin is such deep contamination. The canon closes with the book of Revelation and its significant reference to “those who keep the commandments” (Revelation 14:12).<sup>13</sup>

Because the giving of the law at Sinai was so overwhelming, some have thought that the divine law was a new ethical system given especially to the Jewish people. However, Decalogue precepts weren’t

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