

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE THEME OF REST AND THE SABBATH

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Introduction

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."¹ At first glance, it might appear that Jesus is offering retirement from mere physical toil. The language is certainly evocative of rest from earthly labor; yet, the context of the passage suggests that Jesus is doing more than simply offering a break from difficult work. Jesus' offer goes beyond the mere physical and offers rest for the soul of the one who assumes His burden. The implication of this text is that Jesus' audience is laden with a type of labor of which He alone can relieve them. Granted, it does not appear from the context that all those present in the audience were consciously aware of their burden, nonetheless, Jesus offers to give them rest for their souls. The question then is this: what is the nature and the context of the rest that Jesus offers to those who assume His burden? It is this question and others related to it that this essay seeks to answer.

In his article on "Rest" in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Jon Laansma writes, "In the OT the thematic treatment of the idea of rest consists of two main strands: the Sabbath rest (from routine labor) and the promise of rest (from wandering/journeying or enemy threat) in the land of Canaan."² Laansma continues saying, "These two strands are combined in two NT passage namely Matthew 11:28-30 and Hebrews 3-4."³ Whether or not one completely agrees with Laansma's conclusion regarding the "two main strands,"⁴ one can certainly agree that the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all scriptures references are from the English Standard Version

² Jon Laansma, "Rest," ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press; InterVarsity Press, 2000), 727.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Though "sabbath" is an important "strand" in biblical theology, it could exclude a careful investigation of the creation account if one does not accept Sabbath as a creation ordinance. A better proposal would consider the "work-rest" pattern as a strand since it exists prior to the Sabbath institution in Exodus 16.

idea of rest is pervasive in scripture and can serve as a helpful theme in biblical-theological study. In light of this fact, the goal of this paper will be to explore the theme of rest in relationship to the Sabbath⁵ throughout redemptive history.

Presuppositions

This paper will seek to fulfill its stated goal through a diachronic study of the scriptures in their protestant, canonical form. The epistemological presuppositions that are foundational to this essay are summarized in the Baptist Faith and Message (2000) and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978).

Perspectives

In the following section, different perspectives on the Sabbath will be described and documented before argument is made for the position of this paper. Admittedly, the perspectives that are dealt with in this section are general, broad, and do not always take into consideration every nuance of a certain position or proponent.

The Seventh-Day Sabbath

In *A Layman's Guide to the Sabbath Question*, Dr. Richard Belcher and Rev. Richard Belcher, Jr. describe this position as one that "holds that there is a direct connection between the Old Testament Sabbath command and *Christian* worship today."⁶ In other words, "the Sabbath command of the Old Testament is to be observed today in the New Testament period just as it was in the Old Testament times."⁷ There are several proponents of this view, but few have had the influence on the study of the Sabbath as Samuele Bacchiocchi. Speaking of Bacchiocchi, D.A. Carson writes, "Without doubt, the work that has stirred up most interest in the subject, at least in

⁵ Given the relationship between the Sabbath and the Promised Land, a discussion of the later will be necessary at points in this paper

⁶ Richard Belcher and Richard Belcher, Jr., *A Layman's Guide to the Sabbath Question* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1991), 7.

⁷ Ibid.

the English-speaking world, is that of Samuele Bacchioni.⁸ In brief, Bacchioni argues for the perpetual observance of the Sabbath command in the New Testament times on the basis of creation ordinance,⁹ inclusion in the Decalogue,¹⁰ the content of Christ's teaching,¹¹ the testimony of the New Testament,¹² and the history of the early church.¹³ Without going into too much detail in this section, it is important to point out that Bacchioni's argument assumes a lot about the text. For Bacchioni, as well as other Seventh-Day Adventists, the universally assumed application of things like "creation ordinances" and the perpetually binding character of the Decalogue outside of its covenant context are key elements to their understanding of and argument for seventh-day Sabbath. In the same vein as Bacchioni, a more recent attempt to argue for the seventh-day Sabbath position has been made by Skip MacCarty, who summarizes his argument as follows:¹⁴

- At creation God blessed and sanctified the seventh day for universal and permanent application for humankind.
- The Sabbath ordinance was assumed in the manna story prior to Sinai.
- God embedded the Sabbath in the heart of the Decalogue.
- Foreigners were included in the universal application and blessing of the Sabbath.
- It was the "custom" of Jesus and the apostles to observe the Sabbath in a manner that would be expected of those who believed in its universality and permanence.
- Jesus' ministry included the holistic Sabbath reform for which the prophets had appealed.

⁸ D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 15.

⁹ Belcher and Belcher, Jr., *A Layman's Guide to the Sabbath Question*, 8–9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15–20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 21–30.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 31–34.

¹⁴ Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: 4 Views* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 70–71.

- Referencing the Sabbath ordinance of creation, Hebrews affirms, "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God," and appeals for NT believers to "make every effort to enter that rest" as a holy people who believe and obey.
- John in Revelation describes God's people just prior to the Second Coming as those who "obey God's commandments [including the Decalogue] and remain faithful to Jesus."
- Paul's treatment of the old and new covenant was dominantly experiential, not historical, with the new covenant including both OT and NT believers.
- God made the new covenant with "the house of Israel," not with Gentiles. In the NT era "the house of Israel" is the church of God. Therefore, the Sabbath continues as His covenant sign between Himself and Israel.
- Daniel 7:25 prophesied that an ungodly power would "try to change the set times and the laws" of God, including the Sabbath.

Though each of the claims of Bacchiochi and MacCarty cannot be directly addressed in this paper, the "Position" section of this paper will address these claims in general and present an alternative view.

The Puritan Sabbath

This particular position is also known as the "Christian Sabbath" position. The title "Puritan Sabbath" has been chosen to describe this position, because the title "Christian Sabbath" can and is used in various applications in different Christian literature on the subject of Sabbath. Some argue that Jesus Christ is the "Christian Sabbath," while others, in particular those representing the current view under consideration, argue that the "Christian Sabbath" is the first day of the week due to Christ's resurrection from the dead, which they claim effectively transfers seventh-day, Old Covenant Sabbath observance to the first day of the week, New Covenant Sabbath observance. In essence, there is very little difference between the Seventh-Day Sabbath position and the Puritan Sabbath position. Like the Seventh-day Sabbath positions, proponents of

the Puritan Sabbath believe that that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance¹⁵ and perpetually binding as moral law expressed in the Decalogue.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Puritan Sabbath position understands that Sabbath to be consistent with Jesus and the Apostles' teaching regarding the Sabbath in the New Testament.¹⁷ Yet, there are a few key differences between the two positions that must be mentioned. First, whereas the Seventh-Day Sabbath positions understands the creation account to establish "the Sabbath," the Puritan position understands the creation account to establish "a Sabbath." This is a necessary difference considering the fact that the Puritan position insist on "first-day" Sabbath observance instead of the originally established ordinance of the seventh-day" Sabbath. For this reason alone, almost all Seventh-Day Sabbath advocates would be appalled at the notion that the Puritan position shares any sort of correspondence to their position. For the Seventh-Day position, the Day itself is hallowed and sanctified. For the Puritan position, the pattern from creation is that one-day-in-seven will be hallowed, sanctified, and specified by God throughout the course of redemptive. Under the Old Covenant, the Puritan position sees the Seventh Day as the Sabbath on the basis of the Decalogue. In the New Covenant, the Puritan position sees the first day of the week as being the Christ-authorized Sabbath by virtue of His status as Lord of the Sabbath and His resurrection. As Joseph Pipa puts it: "The day changed; the obligation unchanged."¹⁸ This change of day is commonly referred to as the "transfer theology" of Sabbatarianism.

The Continental Sabbath

¹⁵ Ibid., 119–123; John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008); G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 776–781.

¹⁶ Donato, *Perspectives on the Sabbath*, 123–134; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 385–404, 528–574.

¹⁷ See the material in the bibliography for a fuller explanation

¹⁸ See Chapter Seven in Joseph Pipa, *The Lord's Day* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1997).

Of the different positions on the Sabbath, this one is the most difficult to describe and most contested, especially among those that hold to the Puritan Sabbath position. The reason for the difficulty of description is due to the fact that it emerged during a time that was not as concerned about matters like the Sabbath. For the most part, this position originated from the time of the Reformation when issues of greater importance were at stake. As for the reason that this position is contested, it is probably due to the fact that many within the Puritan Sabbath tradition would like to see men like John Calvin articulate their particular view of the Sabbath. Unfortunately for them, Calvin, along with others from that time period, do not fit neatly into the later articulation of the Puritan Sabbath. John Frame¹⁹ is particularly helpful in pointing out the differences between the Puritan Sabbath position and the Continental Sabbath position. Frame writes

The particular day is not the point, for the church, within its rights, could summon us to worship on some other day, or at some other interval. The Heidelberg Catechism reflects Calvin's view of the Sabbath: Q. 103. What does God require in the fourth Commandment? A. In the first place, God wills that the ministry of the Gospel and schools be maintained, and that I, especially on the day of rest, diligently attend church to learn the Word of God, to use the holy sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord, and to give Christian alms. In the second place, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, allow the Lord to work in me by His spirit, and thus begin in this life the everlasting Sabbath. Like Calvin, the Catechism focuses on the Sabbath as a symbol of redemption. We keep the fourth commandment by resting from sinful works and receiving the grace of God's spirit. Calvin's second priority is the Catechism's first: God mandates public worship and instruction. But, like Calvin, it does not say that this worship must take place every seventh day or that the believers are under a divine obligation to cease all daily work and recreation in order to participate in the work of the church.²⁰

Some have argued that the main difference between the Puritan Sabbath position and the Continental Sabbath position is the matter of recreation on the Sabbath, but as can be clearly seen from Frame's comment, the main difference is how the two positions esteem days and

¹⁹ It is helpful to note that Frame would agree with some of the elements of the Continental Sabbath position regarding recreation, but he would primarily align himself with the Puritan Sabbath position.

²⁰ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 518.

understand their obedience to the fourth commandment. Ultimately, this difference stems from the Continental Position's "failure" to regard Sabbath as a creation ordinance. Commenting on this "failure," Richard Gaffin writes

A basic error is Calvin's failure to reckon adequately with the Sabbath institution as a creation ordinance. Other deficiencies in his views are due to this fundamental defect. He did recognize, as we have seen, that the Sabbath is mandated at creation and, correlatively, that the fourth commandment is perpetually and universally binding. But the creation Sabbath is not given sufficient attention; its meaning does not have the controlling place it must in determining a fully biblical notion of the Sabbath institution.²¹

Hence, in summary, the Continental Sabbath position interprets the perpetual nature of the Sabbath, as expressed in the fourth commandment, to be a spiritual rest for those under the New Covenant. Sabbath, therefore, is spiritualized and tied to no specific day in the seven-day week.

The Lutheran Sabbath

This position comes to many of the same conclusions that are expressed in the Continental Sabbath position, but it comes to that conclusion by means of a different understanding of law. Without going into too much detail, the Lutheran Sabbath position can be stated to "teach the need of a day of rest, without specifying which day in the week; the day is to be sanctified by the careful use of the Word of God."²² Initially, it appears that this is the same articulation of the Continental Sabbath, but in reality, Martin Luther and the other theologians of this tradition gave much more attention to the concept of natural law and its relationship to the Sabbath. Whereas the Continental Sabbath position had little to no regard for the significance of creation in formulating their position, this position sees a natural, universally binding, eternal law established at creation that finds many different expressions throughout the course of redemptive history. So for Luther and others, creation establishes a day of rest among the seven days of the week. This day of rest finds expression under the Old Covenant in the form of the Seventh-day

²¹ Richard Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Fearn: Mentor, 1998), 146.

²² Donato, *Perspectives on the Sabbath*, 277.

Sabbath. Under the New Covenant, the creational ordinance of a day of rest finds expression in whatever day the church chooses to worship, which was generally on the first day of the week in commemoration of Christ's resurrection.

The Fulfilled Sabbath

In many ways, the Fulfilled Sabbath position is the most commonly held position in evangelical scholarship. Essentially, this position states that the Sabbath belongs to the realm of things that Christ has fulfilled by virtue of His person and work. Due to Christ's work of fulfillment, the Sabbath is no longer a binding institution, but rather, it serves as a redemptive-historical type to highlight the nature of the blessings that have come through Christ. In response to the other positions that maintain the perpetuity or ethical significance of the Sabbath for those under the New Covenant, this position concurs with D.A. Carson's sentiments regarding the Sabbath, which says

First, we are not persuaded that the New Testament unambiguously develops a "transfer theology," according to which the Sabbath moves from the seventh day to the first day of the week. We are not persuaded that Sabbath keeping is presented in the Old Testament as the norm from the time of creation onward. Nor are we persuaded that New Testament develops patterns of continuity and discontinuity on the basis of moral/civil/ceremonial distinctions... We are also not persuaded that Sunday observance arose only in the second century A.D. We think, however, that although Sunday worship arose in New Testament times, it was not perceived as a Christian Sabbath.²³

Instead, the Fulfilled Sabbath position grants interpretive priority to the revelation of Jesus Christ under the terms of the New Covenant. From this point forward, this paper will argue for a nuanced version of the Fulfilled Sabbath position, which understands the Sabbath as a temporal, covenant-specific, provisional expression of the eschatological rest that is pre-figured in the Garden of Eden, fulfilled in Christ, and experientially and progressively appropriated under the New Covenant.

²³ Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 16.

Summary Chart of Sabbath Perspectives

Position	Creation Ordinance	Ten Commandments	Jesus' Teaching	Apostles' Teaching	Proponents
<i>Seventh-Day Sabbath</i>	"The" Sabbath is established universally and perpetually on the Seventh Day	Believes that the Decalogue is the expression of God's eternal moral law and is therefore binding on all people	Believes that Jesus' teaching and example affirm the seventh-day Sabbath	Believes that the Apostles' teaching regarding the abolishment of the Sabbath refers more to experience as opposed to historical	Seventh-Day Adventist Skip MacArthy Samuele Bacchiocchi
<i>Puritan Sabbath</i>	"A" Sabbath is established universally and perpetually to be observed one out of every seven days	Believes that the Decalogue is an expression of God's eternal moral law and are therefore binding on all people, nevertheless, this position believes that the Sabbath command undergoes change in the New Covenant	Believes that Jesus affirmed the moral and perpetual nature of the Sabbath on the basis of creation and the Decalogue	Believes that the Apostles' teaching regarding the abolishment of the Sabbath refers only to the "Jewish" or Seventh-day Sabbath	Westminster Confession of Faith Second London Baptist Confession of Faith
<i>Continental Sabbath</i>	The pattern of a day of rest is established universally and perpetually to be regularly observed, but it is not to be restricted or limited to the seventh-day or the first-day of the week	Relegates the chief requirements of the fourth commandment to ceremonial status ²⁴ while seeing a spiritual element that is perpetually binding on all mankind	Believes that Jesus' teaching and example affirm the spiritual nature of the Sabbath commandment under the New Covenant	Believes that the Apostles' teaching regarding the abolishment of the Sabbath refers to the Sabbath, which is fulfilled and Christ and obeyed by resting from "evils works" of sin	John Calvin Heidelberg Catechism
<i>Lutheran Sabbath</i>	Creation established "natural law" that is written on the hearts of all mankind; in regards to the Sabbath, it is conceptually grounded in creation but not literally at stated in the Decalogue	Views the second through the tenth commandment as an outworking of obedience to the first commandment which is rooted in God's redemption of Israel from bondage, Obedience, therefore, to the fourth commandment is relative to the context of redemption (ie. – Egypt [Physical] & Salvation [Spiritual])	Believes that Jesus' teaching and example point the establishment of a sabbatical pattern for the good of all mankind	Believes that the Apostles' teaching and example points to the fulfillment of the ceremonial aspects of the law, but preserves the pattern that was establish at creation according to natural law	Martin Luther Charles Arand Lutheranism
<i>Fulfilled Sabbath</i>	The Sabbath is not a creation ordinance, rather, God's rest, which takes place on the seventh-day in creation is to be viewed as having an eschatological significance that points to a future state of consummation that is inaugurated by the completion of the work of the "last Adam," Jesus Christ and yet to be fully realized in the New Heavens and the New Earth, where God dwells in his "Holy Temple"	The Sabbath is commanded to be observed by Israel in the context of the Old Covenant, it has no binding authority to those outside of this specific context, the Sabbath, along with the Old Covenant passes because of the work of Jesus Christ	Jesus understood and taught that the salvation that He would accomplish fulfilled the typological nature of the Sabbath by providing true and perpetual rest	The Apostles' understood and taught that the Sabbath was part of the Old Covenant that had passed away with the work of Christ, which inaugurated the New Covenant era	Craig Blomberg D.A. Carson A.T. Lincoln New Covenant Theology (Proper)

²⁴ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 519.

Position

The Hebrew verb for rest, *šābat*, occurs for the first time in Genesis 2:2, which reads, "And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done." In this passage, *šābat* is in the Qal with a vav consecutive, which designates God's "cessation of labor" after the completion of His creative work. Hence, God's action should be seen as a progressive move from one state of being to another contrasting state of being. In this case, God moved from the state of creating and ordering the cosmos to the state of ceasing to create and order the cosmos. Therefore, God's rest should not be viewed as one of absolute inactivity, but rather, as a cessation from a particular work that fulfills a particular purpose.

Many commentators interpret the work of creation in purely modernistic and scientific terms. There is no doubt that these interpreters have good intentions to defend the historicity of the creation account in light of modern challenges. Regrettable though, many interpreters engage in anachronistic arguments regarding the mechanism and duration of creation and miss the more theologically significant points of the author. As important as such topics are, the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 is not so much concerned with mechanism and duration²⁵ as it is with function and purpose. In the Ancient Near East (ANE), people were not focused on the material presence or structure of an object as much as they were on the function of the object. Regarding the question of ontology in the ANE as it relates to cosmogony, John Walton states that "something exists when it has a function, not when it takes up space or is a substance

²⁵ This is not to say that mechanism and duration are not addressed in the creation account, but rather, that they are not the focus.

characterized by material properties."²⁶ Therefore, when considering the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2, it is important to recognize that the ANE reader would have understood it in terms of a description of "the establishment of the functioning cosmos, not the origins of the material structure or substance of the cosmos."²⁷ Unfortunately, many conservative and evangelical scholars tend to dismiss this ANE background because it would appear to undercut some of their fundamental beliefs about creation. On this point, it is important to note that the most faithful reading of the text is the one that carefully takes into consideration the author's intention in light of his societal and literary context. As G.K. Beale writes, "The Bible was written in very specific historical circumstances and the better one understands these surrounding circumstances, the more rich one's understanding of the Bible may become."²⁸ Instead of dismissing the ANE background of the creation account for a modernistic and scientific understanding, scholars should seek to articulate a "whole-Bible" theology of creation that takes into consideration the consistent teaching about creation over the whole of the canon. This means that one must not necessarily abandon conservative theological convictions regarding creation, but rather, they should base those conclusions upon a synthesis of the whole Bible's testimony instead of an exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 that does not take into account the original reader's worldview.²⁹

Having argued for the need to consider the ANE background of the Old Testament, one can now begin to work through the creation account in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of God's work and rest. By assuming the function-based ontology worldview of the

²⁶ John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 167.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

²⁸ G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A biblical theology of the dwelling place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 31.

²⁹ This would fall more into the category of Systematic Theology than Biblical or Exegetical Theology.

original reader, one will begin to see the parallels between the ANE's concept of temple building and the Genesis account. Quoting Gordon Wenham, T. Desmond Alexander writes,

The Garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary.³⁰

Alexander goes on to comment on Wenham's observation saying that "it may be more accurate to designate it a temple-garden."³¹ John Walton notes the theocentric nature of the garden-temple by saying, "We must first recognize that the Garden of Eden was not, strictly speaking, a garden for humans but was the garden of God."³² In order to substantiate the claim that the Garden of Eden should be viewed functionally as a temple ordered for God's presence, Alexander enumerates a list of similarities that Wenham notes between the Garden of Eden and later Jewish temples:³³

- Eden and the later sanctuaries were entered from the east and guarded by cherubim
- The tabernacle menorah (or lamp stand) possibly symbolizes the tree of life. Arboreal decorations adorned the temple.
- The Hebrew verbs for "to serve, till" and "to keep, observe, guard," used in God's command to the man to "to work it (the garden) and take care of it (Genesis 2:15)," are found in combination elsewhere in the Pentateuch only in passages that describe the duties of the Levites in the sanctuary
- Gold and onyx, mentioned in Genesis 2:11-12, are used extensively to decorate the later sanctuaries and priestly garments. God, in particular, is one of the main materials used in the construction of the tabernacle and the temple.
- The Lord God walked in Eden as he later does in the tabernacle

³⁰ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 21.

³¹ Ibid.

³² John Walton, "Eden, Garden of," ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 204.

³³ Alexander, *From Eden to the new Jerusalem*, 21–23.

- The river flowing from Eden is reminiscent of the Ezekiel 47:1-12, which envisages a river flowing from a future Jerusalem temple and bring life to the Dead Sea. the fact that Eden must be an elevated location, possibly a mountain, also supports the idea that it is a sanctuary, for God's presence is frequently associated with mountains.

Based upon the ANE concept of functional ontology and the striking similarities between the Garden of Eden and later temples, it is clear that the creation account reveals God as creating and ordering all things for a divine purpose. God created a dwelling place among His creation for himself, placed mankind there to work and guard it, and entered into a state of reflective and purpose-fulfilled rest.³⁴ God's rest signified the completion of his work. In this sense, God's work and rest was prototypical of the work and rest that mankind would engage in within context of the Garden of Eden. The key at this point is to recognize that God's rest is prototypical and not identical to the rest that is offered to mankind in subsequent revelation. Man is not expected to build a temple for himself in which he may reflect on his own work nor is man expected to enter into a state of reflective, purpose-fulfilled rest prior to the completion of his labor. Rather, man functions in his God-given role of an image-bearer by engaging in the work of expanding the dwelling place of God³⁵ with the goal of fulfilling the labor that God has purposed for him and subsequently entering into the rest from such labor as God did when He fulfilled the purpose of His work. Therefore, God's work of creation and rest from creation provide a goal for mankind's work that ultimately culminates in a state of rest.

There is no suggestion at this point that man has entered into God's rest nor should there be since the pattern of Genesis 1 and 2 is not primarily cyclical, but eschatological. God engaged in creation for a purpose and in doing so He commissioned man with a divine purpose (Genesis

³⁴ The perpetual nature of this particular rest is grounded in the open-ended nature of the Seventh day, which has no end and is set apart from the other six days of creation.

³⁵ G.K. Beale writes, "As Adam and Eve were to begin to rule over and subdue the earth, it is plausible to suggest that they were to extend the geographical boundaries of the Garden until Eden extended throughout and covered the whole earth." Alexander, *From Eden to the new Jerusalem*, 25.

2:15). Just as God did not enter into His rest until He completed his work, so mankind would not enter into rest until his work was complete. Hence, rest is the goal of God's creative work wherein He delights, sanctifies, and blesses his creation. Mankind's rest awaits them when they complete the work that they have been given; yet man would not fulfill the work for which God created him. Shortly after God's commission to mankind, man rebelled against God and was expelled from the Garden of Eden. On multiple counts, man was no longer able to fulfill the work that God had given him. Man was now a sinner unable to enter into the presence of God and work and guard the Garden. Yet, the promise of future blessing remained in the "seed of the woman" who would ultimately eliminate the evil one and redeem what mankind had lost (Genesis 3:8-24).

The chapters that follow man's expulsion from the Garden are rather grim. Contained in them, one finds murderous violence among family members (Genesis 4:1-16), grotesque expressions of pride (Genesis 4:23-24), and the eventual worldwide flood that destroys all but a choice few people and animals (Genesis 6-8). If God is going to fulfill his promise to Adam and Eve, He is going to do it in a way that confounds the wisdom of man. In Genesis 12, God begins to reveal how he is going to fulfill his promise by calling a man named Abram. Upon calling Abram, God promises to give him land and make him a great nation. Eventually Abram's name is changed to Abraham to confirm God's promise of making him a great nation (Genesis 17), and he and his wife eventually and miraculously have a son in their old age. The son's name is Isaac. In Genesis 26, God confirms the promise that He gave Abraham regarding the land and becoming a great nation to Isaac, which is eventually confirmed to His son Jacob, who would eventually be called Israel. In the providence of God, the descendants of Israel would fulfill

God's promises by constituting the chosen nation of Israel that would be preserved through famine but would eventually end up enslaved in Egypt.

Lacking both land and rest, God called Moses to liberate His people from their captivity in Egypt. After a series of plagues, Pharaoh agreed to release the captives only to later regret his decision and pursue them to his own death and destruction. After escaping the Egyptians, the Israelites found themselves worshipping but also in need. In Exodus 15:22-27, Moses recounts how God provided water for the Israelite at Marah. At this point, it is important to mention that there is no institution of rest for the people.³⁶ The next chapter, Exodus 16, is an important chapter, because it is the first expression of an institution that provides rest for the people.

Exodus 16:22-30 says

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.'" So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." So the people rested on the seventh day.

Though there is much that can be observed from this text, the most important elements are related to the provision of rest in the form of a Sabbath. First, the Sabbath is instituted as a day of "solemn rest" on which the work of gathering is to cease. In this case, the Sabbath is observed on the Seventh day. Second, the Sabbath is "given" to the people of Israel. The giving of the

³⁶ Some may argue that the seven-day cycle that is present in text like Genesis 8:10,12 teaches that Noah enjoyed "rest" from labor based upon a one-in-seven principles that is claimed to have been established at creation. This suggestion misses the eschatological significance of the creation week, which ultimately reveals God's intention for man to complete his work then enter into rest. The principle of one-in-seven is reserved for the Sabbath institution that is expressive of the creation pattern but not synonymous with it.

Sabbath to the people of Israel is significant, because it points to the provision that God has made for his people through his appointed servant, Moses. It is interesting to note that the author does not speak of a universal institution of Sabbath, but rather to a specific Sabbath given to a specific people.

According to Laansma, the Sabbath "is a day free of work, a day on which even the slave can rest, just as God himself had been refreshed on the seventh day of creation."³⁷ P.A. Barker goes further suggesting "the two primary ideas (of the Sabbath) are that no work is to be done on this day and that it is to be observed regularly on the seventh day of the week."³⁸ As a legal institution of the Mosaic covenant, the Sabbath is most fully articulated in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Exodus 20:8-11 reads

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Based on this passage, many have argued that the Sabbath is an ordinance of creation because of the allusion to Genesis 2:1-3. Genesis 2:1-3 reads

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

According to some commentators, the allusion to Genesis 2 bases the fourth commandment on the God's intended pattern for man's work and rest. Barker quotes Hasel who says, "that because humankind is made in the image of God and God rested on the seventh day, there is an implicit

³⁷ Laansma, "Rest," 729.

³⁸ P.A. Barker, "Sabbath," ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 695.

command for humanity also to rest on the seventh day."³⁹ This type of argument is crucial and in many ways is the "lynchpin" for every position that seeks to establish the perpetually binding nature of the Sabbath. Again, Barker quotes another Old Testament scholar, Gordon Wenham, who "sees in the striking language of blessing and sanctifying used with reference to a day and the threefold emphasis on God's resting from his work 'the clearest of hints of how man created in the divine image should conduct himself on the seventh day.'"⁴⁰ Clearly, many well-respected Old Testament scholars view Sabbath as having some key relationship to creation. However, as attractive as this conclusion may be, the interpreter must proceed with care. Although many commentators see an undeniable and correct relationship between the seventh-day of creation and the fourth commandment, one must first recognize the genre and seek to identify the author's intent in the respective passages. If scripture is to be understood as the authoritative story of God's work of redemption and restoration, it would serve interpreters well to keep in mind the rest of the canon when drawing conclusions regarding ethics. For instance, if one holds to a conservative view of the authorship of the Pentateuch, it seems rather odd that Moses failed to identify God's "Seventh Day" rest as the "Sabbath Rest" which Israel enters into. If Moses intended for the Seventh Day of creation to be viewed as a Sabbath to be kept by all man, it is rather strange that he would not mention it until Exodus 16. Now, the lack of the term Sabbath in the Genesis account does not necessarily mean that it is not a creation ordinance, but given the fact that these documents were written with the purpose of instructing the covenantally constituted nation of Israel, it is quite a hermeneutical stretch to extrapolate a universal norm for mankind from a mixture of narrative and legal text that were written to a specific people in a specific redemptive-historical context. Second, the work-fulfillment pattern of creation (as

³⁹ Barker, "Sabbath," 697.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

opposed to the work-rest cycle that is argued for by many advocates of a perpetual and universal Sabbath day observance) makes more sense of the unique nature of the seventh-day of creation, which has no stated ending. As was mentioned earlier, God's rest at creation is primarily a matter of eschatology, not ethic. God's work in creation established a meta-pattern for mankind as His image-bearers that demonstrates His desire for man. Just as God created the universe with a divine purpose that culminates in divine rest, so man is to work and fulfill his purpose as the image-bearer of God until his work is complete and he is able to enter into God's rest. This does not preclude mankind's entrance into God's rest, but it also does not equate Israel's commitment to Sabbath observation as the fulfillment of God's intention from creation. Instead, mankind's fallen state must be taken into account when accessing the ethical norms of the creation account. After the Fall, man is expelled from the Garden wherein he was commissioned with the divine work of "keeping and tending" God's creation. Whether or not God intended man to observe a day of rest every seven days while working in the Garden is simply not revealed in the text. So instead of establishing a pattern of how man should live, the narrative highlights man's failure to live according to what is, in fact, actually revealed in the text.

What, then, is the relationship between God's rest at creation and Sabbath observance? The keeping of the Sabbath day in the sequence of a seven-day week reveals that God gave the Sabbath (Exodus 16, Nehemiah 9, Ezekiel 12) to Israel for the purpose of reminding them of both their obligation as a chosen nation to fulfill their divine purpose and their temporal enjoyment of the completion of His labor (the enjoyment of Edenic blessings in the promised land because of their redemption from Egypt). Therefore, the Sabbath was a reminder of God's work unto completion in creation and a promise of God's work to fully bring about their rest in the Promised Land. Sabbath, then, functioned as a microcosm of the rest that God promised for

his people, but it should not be equated with the fulfillment of the eschatological and perpetually significant rest of God.

As redemptive history marched forward, the rest that God provided for Israel in the form of the Sabbath commandment began to take on more significance as they neared the Promise Land, which is often spoken of in Edenic terms. Just as the Sabbath was a picture and temporal expression in a seven-day cycle of the God's rest at creation, so the Promised Land advances the concept of God's provision of rest by moving from a time set aside for rest (the Sabbath) to a place for rest (Canaan). Regarding how Edenic realities are related to the promise of rest, Laansma writes

The Edenic arrangement is paradigmatic for redemption. When Israel enters Canaan, the land is described in terms reminiscent of Eden, not least in its depiction as a banquet and lodging place, for which the people did not need to work, but which that they are free to enjoy (Deut. 6:10-12), although of course the Israelites will work this fruitful land to their profit, and this too is a gift (Deut.8:6-18).⁴¹

Just as God revealed the Sabbath to Israel when He provided manna for them in the Marah, so God brought Israel into the Promised Land and provided lodging. On these points, it is not hard to see how the provision of food and lodging in the Garden of Eden are being restored to the people of God in the form of a double-portion of manna prior to the Sabbath and the lodgings of the Promised Land in Canaan. The theologically significant point is that God is restoring the blessings of Eden to mankind without mankind's help in the matter. The Sabbath and the Promised Land, therefore, served as a reminder and temporal expressions of God's initiative in creating, constituting, providing, and protecting His people as a fulfillment of His promise to reverse the effects of the curse. However, to equate the consummative and holy rest of God at creation with the Sabbath that is observed by a fallen people and to equate the ideal Garden of

⁴¹ Laansma, "Rest," 728.

Eden with the provisional and volatile Promised Land is not scripturally warranted or suggested since both the Sabbath and the Promised Land are covenantally-specific expressions of the outworking of God's promise to redeem mankind as a result of the Fall. Some may argue that Sabbath and Promised Land should not be taken together, but given the fact that the Sabbath was revealed to a people on the way to the Promised Land and both explicitly tied to the rest of the people, Sabbath and Promised Land can be no more separated than the rest of God on the seventh day and the Garden of Eden. In the plan of God, the Sabbath and the Promised Land were a response to man's fallen state that typologically pointed to the consummative work of salvation that ultimately comes "through the seed of the woman." They were expressions of God's grace to His people, but they were neither eternal nor ultimate, rather, they were temporal and typological.

Once the Israelites had inhabited the Promised Land, they longed for a king to rule over them. In response to Israel's desire, God gave them kings who, for better or for worse, served as representative of the nations of Israel before God. When a king was righteous, the blessings of God were on the people. When a king was wicked, the judgments of God were on the people. Interestingly enough, the pictures of the blessing of God were more clearly seen and associated with times of peace and rest in the land. Also closely associated with the role of the kings in the life of the nation of Israel was the Temple. The Temple, which David desired to build and was eventually built by Solomon, "designated Yahweh's resting place"⁴² among the people. As was mentioned earlier at the beginning of this section, the concept of temple and the divine presence among mankind is present at creation. As such, Israel's observance of the Sabbath in the Promised Land with the Temple of God typifies the Edenic state from which man originally fell.

⁴² Ibid., 730.

The Sabbath afforded an opportunity for Israel to enjoy God's provision of food (manna) that is typological to the state of existence afforded to Adam and Eve in the Garden to enjoy God's provision of food. In a similar way, the Promised Land afforded Israel a place of security and rest from their enemies in which they could fulfill God's purposes for them among the nations and enjoy the benefits of God's conquering work on their behalf⁴³ that is typological of the place of protection and abundance afforded to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to fulfill God's purposes for them. Finally, the Temple afforded Israel the blessings and the opportunity to have fellowship with their God just as the Garden of Eden was created as a dwelling place for God among man. Therefore, the establishment of the Temple in the Promised Land with the observation of the Sabbath typifies the building and expansion of the Garden of Eden for and by mankind for the purpose of completing their work and entering into the rest of God. Yet, like Adam before them, Israel would forfeit and lose these blessings due to sin and unfaithfulness. How could the promises of God to redeem ever be fulfilled if the one to whom He entrusts His work continues to fail? How or who would fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah regarding the "eschatological hope"⁴⁴ of rest?⁴⁵

The answer to these questions brings this paper to an investigation of the New Testament. Given the primarily Old Testament focus of this paper, the following material will only directly address the two key passages that were mentioned in introduction, namely, Matthew 11:28-30 and Hebrews 3-4.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus does two things. First, he calls men to himself. Second, he promises that He will give rest to those who come to Him. The gravity of these claims can be

⁴³ See God's active work in Israel's conquest for the Promised Land in the book of Joshua

⁴⁴ "The Sabbath is interpreted as an eschatological hope more than any other OT institution." Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos, The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 37.

⁴⁵ Laansma, "Rest," 730.

easily missed if the Old Testament context is not considered. In speaking of the Old Testament context of Matthew 11:28-30, Jon Laansma writes

Matthew associates Jesus' promise of rest in Matthew 11:28-30 most directly with his Son of David Christology, under the influence of the OT rest tradition (for close parallels to the phrasing of Matt. 11:28-30 see Exod. 33:14, Jer. 6:16 [Heb.]; Ezek. 34:15 [LXX]; 2 Sam. 7:11[LXX]; Deut. 5:33 [LXX]; Jer. 31:25 [Heb.]). The narrative of 1 Samuel 21:1-22:23 contains more than one parallel to Matthew 11-12 (1 Samuel 21:1-6 and Matthew 12:3-4; 1 Samuel 22:2 and Matthew 11:28-30). The temple saying of Matthew 12:6 may be explained in terms of the OT complex of rest, Davidic dynasty and temple. Moreover, Matthew's placing of the rest saying just after an allusion to Isaiah 61 (Matthew 11:4-6; Is. 61 is phrased in terms of the sabbatical year of jubilee) and immediately before two Sabbath controversies (Matthew 12:1-14) suggests that the idea of the Sabbath rest was in his mind as well. Thus he blends the two primary OT traditions relating to rest (cf. Heb. 3-4), and connects them to the present and ultimately future work of the Messiah.⁴⁶

Essentially, Jesus' claim to bring about rest for those who come to him is a messianic claim in the context of Sabbath controversy. Laansma continues saying, "As the ultimate Son of David, Jesus announces the awaited rest, thereby claiming to bring to fulfillment Yahweh's OT promise."⁴⁷

Such a claim should not surprise the student of the Gospel narratives. On more than one occasion, Jesus claimed his superiority to OT figures and institutions, not the least of which were the temple and Solomon. Furthermore, Gospel writers, such as John, contrast Jesus to figures like Moses. The point of these claims and contrasts is to drive home both the superiority and fulfilling nature of Christ's person and work. In terms of a canonical testimony, Jesus is shown to be the "last Adam" who fulfills the purpose of the Father and the "temple" wherein God dwells among his people and the people meet with their God. In terms of Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus is shown to be the one who gives rest to His people as the fulfillment of the Sabbath, which was a type and shadow of the substance that is found in Christ (Colossians 2:16-19). Instead of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 731.

pointing people to a specific day⁴⁸ or the Sabbath to find rest, Jesus called men to himself because He understood that He, in both his person and work, was the only place wherein mankind could find the eternal and perpetual rest to which the Sabbath and the Promised Land dimly and temporarily pointed.

In Hebrews 3:7-4:13, the author calls upon the Old Testament narrative of those from the "exodus generation" that forfeited the land and rest.⁴⁹ According to David Allen, "The concept of promise is prominent in Hebrews. The author speaks about promises made to Abraham (6:12-17; 11:9-17). Believers are heirs to God's promises which are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus (8:6; 10:23,36; 11:39-40)."⁵⁰ In this case, the promises of land and rest that were forfeited by those of the "exodus generation"⁵¹ are still available to the author's audience, yet these promises have an eschatological significance that transcends the occupation of a piece of land. This eschatological advancement of the Old Testament promises is seen as the author "perceives the offer to the generation of Numbers 14, and in the implied offer of Psalm 95, *as* one promise, of entrance into God's own resting place at the time of Jesus' parousia."⁵² According to this passage, there is neither a Sabbath day set aside for observation or a Promised Land sought after for rest, but rather, a "today" to receive the "good news" of the offer to enter God's celebratory "rest" (sabbatismos) of salvation. And which rest is this that man is to enter into by faith now and consummately in the future? It is the eschatological rest of God that was typologically expressed in the Sabbath day of the Decalogue and the Promised Land of Canaan, which has been fulfilled

⁴⁸ The observation of specific days in relationship to the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ and no longer necessary for the Christian. The New Testament Lord's Day is a day observed independent of the Sabbath. Whereas the Sabbath was primarily as day of rest on which worship was permitted, the Lord's Day is Christian institution that is primarily a day of worship without the Mosaic trappings of the Sabbath command.

⁴⁹ David Allen, *Hebrews* (The New American Commentary 35; Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012), 274.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See Numbers 14 and Psalm 95

⁵² Laansma, "Rest," 731.

through the work of Christ as "a great high priest who has passed through the heavens" in order that those who believe may draw near to the "throne of grace" that is occupied by the King who has given rest to His people and dwells in their presence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, how does Christ bring rest? Rest is found in Christ first and foremost through faith in Him which makes one united with Him and therefore subject to the blessings and benefits of the New Creation into which Christ has already entered. This is a present reality in which all believers currently exist. This understanding of rest is decidedly Christ-centered, because it recognizes that the blessing of rest is mediated by virtue of union with Christ. Secondly, rest is found in Christ by virtue of the fact that His completed work has accomplished the reconciliation and redemption that was necessary for restoration not only of his people, but also of His creation. As the last Adam and the great Son of David, Jesus fulfills the work given to Him by His Father and thus provides the ultimate and eternal resting place for his people, who for now by faith⁵³ have entered into the experience of His rest.

⁵³ "Only united to Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, can we fulfill all our Sabbath duties, finding rest in God's presence and entering into an eternal rest that satisfies all the hope of the original Sabbath day of Rest." Edmund Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 59.

Chart on Rest and its Various Biblical and Historical Expressions

<u>Subject of Rest</u>	<u>Time of Rest</u>	<u>Place of Rest</u>	<u>Nature of Rest</u>	<u>Provider of Rest</u>
God	Upon completion of Creation	Garden of Eden Heaven	Cessation of Creative Work	Himself
Adam	Upon Completion of his work	Garden of Eden	Cessation of Work	God
Israel	Sabbath – Seventh Day	Promised Land	Day of Solemn and Set Apart Rest in the Promised Place of Provision and Protection	Moses Joshua
Christian	Now	Spiritually In Christ	Present	Jesus Christ
	Not Yet	Consummatively in the New Creation	Future	

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