

When a Sabbath? Building Blocks Week 4

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.

- Genesis 2:1-3

There is a seven-day creation. Whether you believe it is literal or figurative has little relevancy here. There are seven days in a week.

- Sunday, Yom Rishon, or the first day, was the creation of light.
- Monday, Yom Shani, or the second day, was the creation of the atmosphere.
- Tuesday, Yom Shlishi, or the third day, was the creation of plants and the grounds.
- Wednesday, Yom Revei, or the fourth day, was the creation of the sun, moon, stars.
- Thursday, Yom Khamshi, or the fifth day, was the creation of birds and sea creatures.
- Friday, Yom Shishi, or the sixth day, was the creation of animals and humans.
- Saturday, Yom ha Shabbat, or the seventh day, was a day of rest.

On the sixth day, God created man and placed them in the garden, and then they rested. The motive of the Sabbath before the fall of man was to work from a place of rest, not just rest from a place of work.

We see with the fall of man that the work became hard and tiresome, and thus clinging to resting in God was even more important in order to not get caught in the trappings of the world but to remember that in God, all things were created.

From Genesis on, our weekly cycle continues. Friday evening to Saturday evening, we find it as Yom ha Shabbat. A day of rest.

The Sabbath and rest are a reoccurring theme throughout the entire Bible.

While Shabbat is the common Hebrew term, there is also another Hebrew word used for rest in the Scriptures – “nuakh.” This word means to dwell or settle. This term isn’t just ceasing from labor, it is the type of rest you get

when cuddled up with your spouse with nothing else to do. Shabbat is a place to sit and rest – “shevet.”

We also see that God rested immediately after creating order from chaos in Genesis. To have a Sabbath not only means to cease, but to settle. (Genesis chapter 2:1-15)

The Sabbath in Exodus

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.”

- Exodus 16:4-5

Shortly after God delivers the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, we see Him start to lead and teach the people about His rest and provision. Six days you gather, and on the day of man, you will gather twice as much, which will allow you to rest from the worry of surviving. God will provide.

This is once again foreshadowing trusting the Lord to be our provision for all things.

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.

- Exodus 16:22-30

We see even as the Lord is attempting to reintroduce them to rest and get them to settle into His provision instead of their slavery mindset, people still struggle to trust Him. Due to their lack of trust, they are instructed to stay in their place and not go out on the Sabbath. The Lord is attempting to get them to see HE is their provision, HE is their rest, and in HIM alone will you survive.

“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.

- Exodus 20:8-11

At Sinai, God formalizes the reminder that we are to remember the work of the Lord, His provision, and to dwell with Him in rest. This commandment helps us remember God and shows how we can practice loving Him. It isn't about the regulation of “thou shall not” – it is a positive instruction to pursue God, love God, and know that in God, we find rest and can be settled.

And the LORD said to Moses, “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’ ”

- Exodus 31:12-17

God continues to lead and show that the Sabbath is not merely words but has a central role in the Mosaic covenant. Remember what God has done for

you. Remember that apart from God, you will always struggle to provide and find rest from the struggles of this world.

We see the principle of the Sabbath in regard to slavery and freedom in Exodus as well.

When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.

- Exodus 21:2

Slavery to freedom. The labor of this world to the liberation of freedom in Jesus. Exodus continually reminds us of the Sabbath through the lens of creation.

The Sabbath in Deuteronomy

“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

- Deuteronomy 5:12-15

We see a shift in the instruction here. No longer is the creation referenced but rather the remembrance of when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and that it was God who saved, God who led, and God who liberated from slavery.

“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD’s release has been proclaimed.

- Deuteronomy 15:1-2

We see the concept and narrative of the Sabbath expanded to the land, the poor, and the new creation motif. I encourage you to read all of Deuteronomy chapters 15 and 16 to see how the Lord sets up and teaches the Israelites even more about His economy. Truly everything is God's, and His goodness is not scarce. Lands and people will all be set free once again in God's master plan for rest and settling into Him, not just in the past but also the present and the future! We extend to others a release from the burdens rather than put that yoke on them. Don't be a pharisee and turn a blessing into a burden.

The Sabbath in Leviticus

In the book of Leviticus chapters 23 and 25, we see the concept of Sabbath grow into key rhythms and times throughout the year. Scattered people are to gather corporately to dwell with the Lord, settle into His presence, and rejoice in the rest only God can provide. This foreshadows the future redemption of all creation back into an eternal rest with God.

The Sabbath in the Prophets

In Joshua chapter 6, we see the story of the battle of Jericho as a Shabbat motif. For six days, Joshua's men marched around the city with seven priests and seven trumpets (invokes the Jubilee concept), then on the seventh day, they marched seven times, and the walls fell, giving way to God's plan.

Of course, we can't skip over Daniel's timeline (chapter 9) and seventy weeks as a Sabbath motif. The Sabbath – and more importantly, the return of creation to dwell with and rest in God – is interwoven in the past, present, and future of all of God's covenants.

Jesus and the Sabbath

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 12, we see Jesus confronted by the religious leadership regarding His practices on the Sabbath.

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

A Man with a Withered Hand

He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”— so that they might accuse him. He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

- Matthew 12:1-14

All laws are given for life. The Sabbath is given to bring life. Yet Jesus is showing that apart from God, there is no life. We see this by reading Matthew 11.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

- Matthew 11:28-29

Before the confrontation on the Sabbath, Matthew clarifies using Jesus’ words. People are worn down, tired, burdened – afraid to transgress laws, fall short, or not keep up with the Joneses. It’s in Jesus that we find that rest and the true intent of the Sabbath – to dwell in peace, rest, and settle into God.

This series of statements and interactions in Matthew elevates the Sabbath to more than a mere remembrance and points to creation's need to dwell with God and be restored to His rhythms and cycles. Jesus is here to usher us into this covenant.

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

- John 14:1-7

Jesus tells us in the Father's house, there are many dwelling places, and He goes to prepare a place for us to rest, settle, dwell. And He will come again and take us to this final resting place. This is an elevation of the paradigms of the Sabbath – eternal rest and dwelling with God in and through Jesus.

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

- Mark 2:23-28

Man was not made to rest; we were made to work. From the garden, we were given tasks to work. The fall made that work harder and more tiresome and burdensome. The Sabbath, the rest in Jesus, the working from a place of rest not resting from work alone is why rest was made for man. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, because it is He who is our rest. Just ceasing from labor doesn't provide settling, dwelling, or rest. We have to shift our paradigm – Sabbath is more than just Saturday or ceasing.

We see this also in Hebrews chapter 4. There is a Sabbath rest for the people of God – a future time where we will not toil in our labors or strive to find righteousness apart from God in our own doings but can fully dwell in the completion of the creation as it was intended to be. Not just a checklist of dos and don'ts, not just a regulation of what to and not to do, but a full redemption and restoration to dwell with God as his apprentices in rest and peace.

The Sabbath is a gift for life! A life no longer tied to what we can or cannot accomplish according to the systems of slavery around us. A gift of freedom from the bondage of our sins and slavery to our sinful nature. A gift not only to remind us of what was, but what is, and what is to come. The complete restoration of who God created us to be.

The goal of the Sabbath is not to say, "I keep the Sabbath." It is to allow Jesus to utterly destroy the culture's grasp on who you are, what you are, and how you are to be. It is to find peace, rest, and transformation to become apprentices who look, talk, and walk like Jesus. In that goal, you will find a rest like no other and an order to push back against the chaos of this world.

We aren't just attempting to fulfill the Saturday paradigm of the Sabbath, we are seeking to fully align with and experience every facet of the Sabbath that God created.