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The
Sabbath:
A day of **rest**
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Life-changing preaching

I have received your magazine for years. Several years ago I was pleased that your editors published a couple of articles on addiction recovery. I have been engaged in trauma-related ministry for over 30 years.

Thanks for the July 2014 lead article, “Life-Changing Preaching: An Interview With Haddon W. Robinson.” I appreciate the articles by and about

non-Seventh-day Adventists; and references to professionals of other faiths have been refreshing for me.

Thank you also for the editorial: “Mentor: An Experienced and Trusted Advisor” (September 2014). In the Christian community we need more mentors for everyone but especially those engaged in ministry and Christian-related care-giving professionals.

—Tom Jackson, Fletcher, North Carolina, United States

Blessing the congregation

The lead article in the November 2014 issue, “Blessing (2 Cor. 13:11–13),” written by Marguerite Shuster, serves to remind preachers that a benediction, by definition, is a blessing upon the assembled congregation and not an opportunity to rehash or give a synopsis of the sermon.

—Lawrence Downing, email ✉

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We thank all of the students worldwide who submitted a manuscript for this contest and wish them much success in their pursuit of working in the Lord's vineyard.



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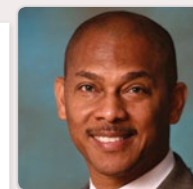
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Confessions of a struggling Sabbath keeper

It began during my childhood; sometimes manifesting itself late Friday afternoons, and at other times on Saturday afternoons. On Fridays my question was “What time does the sun set?” The Sabbath hours interfered with my TV plans. On Saturday, I asked the same question, but for a different reason. I counted down the hours, then the minutes, before the sun set. It was as if I were waiting for the doors of a prison to be opened so my incarceration would end. This wasn’t so bad during the winter months, because at least I didn’t have to wait so long after church ended before I could turn on the TV and be entertained.

My reasoning changed while matriculating during my university years. Saturday night provided quality hours for uninterrupted study. I was on a mission, and I needed every waking hour to invest in fulfilling the dream God gave me and the goals I set for myself. The sooner the sun dropped below the horizon, the sooner I could do what I needed to do in order to succeed.

Finally, the day arrived when all that hard work paid off. I was a pastor. I found joy in the Sabbath day that I knew God wanted me to experience. I was leading out in the worship experience, and we all basked in the light of dwelling in His presence. On a regular basis I witnessed the fruits of my labors, as church members and others came to a greater understanding of God, drawing closer to Him.

I don’t preach on Sabbaths as often as I once did. My weekdays are now filled with editorial responsibilities. Yet even on the Sabbath day, I find the specter of deadlines still looms,

tempting me to ponder what needs to be done soon after the sun sets. Given that my entire adult life has been driven by an ability to perform, where is my Sabbath? How do I claim the true rest that God designed for me from that first Sabbath day in Eden?

Have I been listening to myself?

Through the years, I have preached countless sermons and given scores of lectures affirming the biblical and practical validity of the holiness of the seventh day of the week. Those who have listened have expressed their appreciation for what I’ve said as well as for the God who has given us such a marvelous gift in time. But while I’ve been so busy sharing these truths, have I taken the time to listen to myself while I speak? Have I allowed the beauty of Sabbath holiness to benefit me?

I must remind myself that *the Sabbath is not about me. It’s about God.* I find it easy to fall into the trap of believing that my sermon constitutes the main activity during the worship experience. The truth, however, remains that my highest and greatest offering during the holy hours of the Sabbath centers on communion with God.

I must also remind myself that the Sabbath day was not designed merely for physical rest; that is, an afternoon nap or simple relaxation. The Hebrew verb translated *Sabbath* signifies a cessation from labor, an interruption of the normal flow of activities. *The Sabbath, then, speaks to my need to rest in God’s performance, not my own.* In giving my best in my labor the previous six days,

The Sabbath is not about me. It’s about God.

I can take joy in knowing that God has smiled upon my labors—because He is the One who was working through me.

I must also remind myself that *the Sabbath hours provide quality time for me to reconnect with loved ones and others.* During the week I focus on office duties, committee assignments, household matters, and a host of other concerns. The same applies to my wife and children; so as such, we can feel like four ships passing in the night. The Sabbath day allows us to unplug from the ordinary and reconnect with one another.

My vows for 2015

The new year brings with it new resolve; and with this fresh start I promise myself and God—ever remembering that the seventh-day Sabbath stands as a model of salvation based on His works and not my own—that I will focus more on the things of Christ and less on the things that so often can appear to be about me. I will not yield to the tyranny of emails and deadlines that encroach upon God’s sacred hours. Rather, I will embrace the beauty of the Sabbath, taking time to celebrate—with my family—our Creator and Savior. 🙌

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The Sabbath:

A day of rest and gladness

When I was four years old, my father worked the night shift at Bostitch Company. Each morning Dad met his counterpart on the day shift and handed over the work, providing continuity on the assigned projects. Interestingly enough, the day shift worker sensed an honest heart in the guy handing him the orders each morning. It was not long before Al Lein asked my dad a simple question: “Would you be interested in taking Bible studies?” Dad did not hesitate. He had a deep desire to know more.

Line upon line

More than half a century later, I can still see Dad rushing to the mailbox, pulling out the white envelope each week, settling on the front porch of our simple clapboard house in Norwich, Connecticut, and opening his Bible. Having been raised in difficult circumstances in Harlem, he had little basis for understanding religious matters. But his sharp intellect, piercing questions, and dogged determination kept him studying for two years. Line upon line, precept upon precept, he compared verses as I played with my dolls and swapped Barbies with my sister, Dale.

And then one day he found it.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it

thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: 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” (Exodus 20:8–11).

The more Dad studied those verses, the more he realized that they called for action. One Friday evening as the sun began to set, he pulled over to the side of the road on the way to Bostitch Company, bowed his head, offered a simple prayer, and determined that this would be the last Sabbath he would ever work.

He never went back on his word.

My Sabbath keeping dad

Dad’s decision was not an easy one. With three children and one more on the way, he was deeply aware of his need to provide for his family. As a devout Catholic, my mother did not fully understand his new commitment but was dedicated to their relationship and respected his right to make individual decisions.

Initially, Dad found a job operating automatic screw machines for a company owned by two Jewish men, knowing that this would keep his Sabbaths protected. When work became sparse, they offered him the opportunity to start his own business

in the basement. I will never forget the lean years, sharing a hat with my sister on cold mornings, tearing open our Christmas gifts wrapped in newspaper, relying on my grandpa to drive us to the store.

Yet in the midst of all this, a profound sense of joy is associated with my memories surrounding the seventh-day Sabbath. While my mom, brother, sisters, and I would remain Catholic for many years, I anticipated Dad’s return home from church each Saturday, running to meet him as he walked down the sidewalk. There were the trips to the zoo, walks in the park, big fruit salads, and the sense of calm and peace. Friday evenings as we settled in front of the television, Dad would pad through the room, smiling at us as he quietly entered the den, closed the door, and opened his Bible. The soft glow of light from the other room told me that all was right in my world.

Dad kept his Sabbaths with unflinching integrity. Whatever the outcome, I am sure Dad would not have altered his course. But God rewarded his faith. Within five years, the fledgling business had grown to include a dozen workers, and our family moved to a house with an acre of land in the country. By the time I was a teenager, 30 employees clocked in at Finley Screw Machine Products each day, and the business was financially stable enough to pay our family’s ever-increasing college bills.

The Sabbath has now been at the heart of my faith for many decades. While Dad continued to drive my sisters and me to catechism each week following his new revelation, the day came when we, too, began to ask questions. Ten years after my father's decision to keep the Sabbath, he was finally

and courage, and colors my life with richness.

A number of years ago, I was fortunate enough to come across one of the finest books I have ever read, *Sabbath* by Dan Allender. Not generally one to read a book more than once, I have savored Allender's work three times, slowly

heartache and loss, and provide the child with an assurance that all will be well.

"Similarly, God gazes in rapture at his creation and says, 'She is so beautiful.' We do not know what else God did or didn't do on the seventh day, but we can assume that his gaze did not vary or

The Sabbath. *A 24-hour period that anchors me, fills me with grace, reminds me of my heritage, offers fresh insight and courage, and colors my life with richness.*



surrounded by a family united in their dedication and belief that the fourth commandment is still binding.

The power of an idea

What is it about the seventh-day Sabbath that is so arresting, so compelling, that it beds down in your heart with a power and conviction that cannot be shaken? During my teen years, there was a period of time when I turned my back on some of the new beliefs I had embraced, but there was never a question in my mind about the Sabbath. I remember being invited to parties but telling my friends, "When that big red fireball goes down in the sky, I cannot remain here." Hurrying home, I would be greeted by our Sabbath candles burning on the mantel, my mother playing the piano, my father studying his Sabbath School lesson, my sisters with freshly washed hair. The peace in the air was palpable.

The Sabbath. A 24-hour period that anchors me, fills me with grace, reminds me of my heritage, offers fresh insight

digesting his phrases as a fine meal, stopping to let the juices flow slowly.

A day of delight

Allender asserts that the Sabbath is not so much a break *from* life as a rich, joyous entering *into* life.

"God didn't rest in the sense of taking a nap or chilling out; instead, God celebrated and delighted in his creation. God entered the joy in his creation and set it free to be connected but separate from the artist.

"In many ways, God's rest on the seventh day of creation is paralleled by the birthing process and the period after birth, when the labor is finished yet the bonding begins. The mother and father gaze endlessly at their child, who is distinct from the parents because she is no longer merely in the mind and the womb of the mother, but external and separate. She is no longer solely in the imagination or deep in the womb; she is finally released to be held in the arms of the parent. This attachment brings mother and child into a bond that, if secure, will last through thick and thin,

his delight wane as the day progressed. Instead, his infinite delight grew in wonder and joy as he surveyed all he created and declared that it was good."¹

Allender proposes that what prevents us from immersing ourselves in all that the Sabbath has to offer is not merely our rushed lifestyle but, on a deeper level, our fear of truly embracing joy. When surveying his college class, he discovered that his students were much more comfortable with work. "I don't know what to do with a day that is meant to be full of delight," one student responded.²

Allender's book outlines the many levels of Sabbath joy that await those who are brave enough to embrace it. Reading his words, I am reminded again of the deep blessing the day unabashedly offers. The choice is mine. Am I to trivialize the gift of the Sabbath, relaxing on the couch while scanning Facebook, checking email, and playing a banal word game, or am I brave enough to face the seventh day with arms outstretched, willing to run headlong into all its beauty?

The elementals

Allender provides four elements of the Sabbath that he feels are at the heart of the seventh-day blessing. I offer them here, with my own commentary:

1. *Sensual glory and beauty.* “We are to bask in beauty, to surround our senses with color, texture, taste, fragrance, fire, sound, sweetness, and delight. And if we are to do so, each and every day, with joy, then how much more are we to do so on the Sabbath, when God stood back and marveled at his own creation?”³

It would have been easy to stay inside on that Sabbath afternoon in northern Massachusetts. The temperature hovered around zero, the frost coated the window in a thick glaze. But my aunt had given me a warm hat for Christmas, and a friend called with the offer of a walk. I bundled up with the anticipation of a child, pulled a woolen scarf over my mouth, and opened the door into all of Sabbath’s rich glory. We walked for about an hour, filling our lungs with the cold air, taking in the hushed reverence of a forest graced with snow. Decades later, that Sabbath memory still brings forth delight.

2. *Ritual.* “Sabbath rituals and symbols are the way we act out the drama of a holy, redeemed day.”⁴

In reading Allender’s comments on ritual, I cannot help but be reminded of one of my favorite chapters in another of my favorite books. Oliver Sacks, in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, includes a compelling essay about Jimmie, a man with extreme memory loss, or Korsakov’s syndrome. While Jimmie has become frozen in a 30-year time warp and cannot remember what happened even five minutes ago, he becomes amazingly alive in the context of ritual: “Fully, intensely, quietly, in the quietude of absolute concentration and attention, he entered and partook of the Holy Communion. He was wholly held, absorbed by a feeling. There was no forgetting, no Korsakov’s then, nor did it seem possible or imaginable that there should be; for he was no longer at the mercy of a faulty and

fallible mechanism—that of meaningless sequences and memory traces—but was absorbed in an act, an act of his whole being, which carried feeling and meaning in an organic continuity and unity, a continuity and unity so seamless it could not permit any break.”⁵

Every time I read this passage I am freshly amazed. Ritual is important. Sabbath is important. There is a part of us that becomes anchored and grounded and whole in the context of symbols and of the actions that we perform each week.

3. *Communal feasting.* “The delight of the Sabbath is not merely a gathering with good food and friends—there are many nights for such gatherings; but there is no one night that is so gloriously set aside for a taste of wonder that ushers us into the eternal party of God.”⁶

As a pastor’s wife, I have experienced countless Sabbath meals with friends, old and new. Andriy showed up at our church in Orlando by bicycle one Sabbath. “Is this the Kress Memorial Church,” he asked in a beautifully deep, thick accent. When we confirmed that he was, indeed, at the right place, he shouted, “Good! I found you on the Internet in the Ukraine. I arrived by plane yesterday, rented this bike, and have been riding for the past two hours asking everyone I meet on the street how to find you!” We feasted together that Sabbath with delight, bonded to this stranger with the joint knowledge that we worshiped the same God.

4. *Playfulness.* “The Sabbath is our play day—not as a break from the routine of work, but as a feast that celebrates the superabundance of God’s creative love to give glory for no other reason other than Love himself loves to create and give away glory.”⁷ One of my favorite memories of Sabbath as a “play day” centers on a glorious day in a sunlit New England cove with an unlikely friend. My husband met Maggie in the psychiatric ward of a hospital. Riddled by chronic depression, she had asked to see a pastor. Her face bore the scars of years of suffering. Over the months,

as she grew to trust us, her story came out. She was divorced from an abusive husband who had a violent temper. But that was not the worst of Maggie’s story:

Raised by a rigid clergyman, Maggie had learned to associate religion with hypocrisy, abuse, and cruelty. The fact that she responded to the offer of friendship from the two of us—pastor and wife—was nothing short of a miracle. Even more surprising was her desire to attend church.

One sunny Sabbath in June, we decided to take a ride to the Maine coast following the church service. Passing through the vestibule, we found Maggie waiting for her ride. On a whim, we asked her to join us.

Amazed at the offer, she consented. An hour later we pulled up beside a small bluff overlooking a protected cove. Marveling at the sunlit water below, I knew what I had to do. Clad in shorts and a top, I ran down to the shore and submerged myself in the salty cove. Hesitant at first, Maggie followed.

“I never dreamed I would be swimming with a pastor’s wife on the Sabbath!” she announced, finally dipping her scarred body into the blue circle of ocean.

We must have floated there for more than an hour, the salty water making us buoyant and light. I can still feel the peace of that day, the two of us bobbing in the cool water, the sun’s rays lighting up our faces, the burdens of a lifetime finally rolling off Maggie’s back like the rocks we had sent careening down the bluff.

The Sabbath. O day of rest and gladness. Yes, gladness. Don’t forget the gladness. The joy, delight, and abundance awaiting those brave enough to receive this joy, delight, and abundance! 🍷

1 Dan Allender, *Sabbath* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 2009), 28.

2 Ibid., 24, 25.

3 Ibid., 44.

4 Ibid., 156.

5 Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 36.

6 Allender, *Sabbath*, 78.

7 Ibid., 82.

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The Sabbath:

A sanctuary in time

In the Psalms we encounter Israel at worship, a worship that often took place on the Sabbath, “a sanctuary in time.”¹ This concept, of sanctuary in *time* rather than in a *place*, represents a radical restructuring of pagan cosmology. Pagan gods revealed themselves in places and through elements of nature. But the God of Israel is holy, *qadosh*, which means “separated.” He is separate, independent of all created reality. And the locus of His encounter with humans is in *time*, on the Sabbath, and through history. As Abraham Heschel acutely pointed out, “when history began, there was only one holiness in the world, holiness of time.”²

Indeed, the primacy of *time* over *space* as the locus of worship can be inferred also from the fact that the building of the tabernacle (sacred space) was prefaced with a reminder to keep the Sabbath holy (Exod. 35:2). The Sabbath also prefates the command to reverence the sanctuary (Lev. 19:30; 26:2). This privileging of *time* devalues or desacralizes space. Elements in nature become matter, mere objects, the creation of God. They cease to be gods or mediums of the divine. Desacralized, they are now able, “in their own special way, in a language that is neither perceptible to the ear nor understandable to human beings,”³ to declare the glory of God and proclaim themselves as

the work of God’s hands (see Ps. 19:1). Indeed, when we read in Psalm 19 that “the heavens declare the glory of God,” we hear a voice “that mocks the beliefs of Egyptians and Babylonians,”⁴ especially their deification of the sun, moon, and stars. Not only so, but in verses 7–11 the psalm consciously shifts to the torah the judicial-moral powers that the Egyptians and Babylonians ascribed to the sun.

It is fascinating, too, that in the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, these basic principles resurface amid the final conflict in earth’s history.

The moral order

Although nature declares the glory of God in majestic ways, nature—whether in heaven or earth—cannot provide moral values or spiritual direction to humans. The amorality of nature is the reason why Psalm 19:7–11 turns to the torah for moral direction. All the judicial-moral powers and even the descriptive terminology employed in the praise of the torah echo the liturgy of the solar cults, but the “appropriated vocabulary has been emptied of its pagan content and has taken on a new life. It is not YHWH, God of Israel, versus the sun god, but His Torah that is the focus of the contrast.”⁵

In other words, the polemic against paganism is really over God’s law and its sovereignty over the individual. And

in verse 11, the psalmist, by calling himself God’s servant, personally submits to the sovereignty of the torah.

To grasp what this submission entailed, we must recall that the giving of the law at Sinai was preceded by “a *double* exodus—the patriarchs’ exodus from Mesopotamia and the great exodus from Egypt.” In both cases it constituted “a vehement repudiation of both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian versions of cosmic order.”⁶ Accordingly, at Sinai, we see God creating a social order for the nation of Israel that mirrored the structural modalities inscribed in creation. In Genesis 1, God created through a process of separation and distinction. He separated light from darkness, heaven from earth, land from water, and filled them with distinct species of plants and animals; created Adam, and then Eve from a rib separated from Adam. Capping it all, He separated the seventh day from other days and made the Sabbath holy.

The Creation story ends with the Sabbath; the Decalogue explicitly refers to the Creation in the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:11). The Sabbath therefore is the *historical* link between Creation and the Decalogue or the Sinai covenant, pointing to God as the origin of both. Indeed, the phrase “Remember the Sabbath day” assumes the Sabbath to have been an established practice before Sinai. Then again, the explicit

mention that “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (v. 11, NIV) directly alludes to and underscores the separations and distinctions that God inscribed in creation and that He reenacted at Sinai.

Separation between the holy and the profane

The divine intent here was a new moral order, one established and suffused with holiness. That is why in Leviticus, whose key theme is holiness, the separations extend to mundane activities. “ ‘Do not mate different kinds of animals.’ ” “ ‘Do not plant your field with two different kinds of seed.’ ” “ ‘Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material’ ” (Lev. 19:19, NIV). The crux here, as Lucien Scubla rightly noted, is “men should not unify the things God separated in creating them. For there is a close relationship between the creation of the world in Genesis and the prohibitions in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. . . . Divine creation is the process of going from disorder to order. Therefore, prohibitions prohibit the return of disorder out of order, mixing together the things that God himself divided from each other.”⁷

Indeed, paganism’s gross immoralities and grotesque monstrosities stem from its mixing of the sacred and the profane, the human and the divine, the human and the animal, the natural and the supernatural. In short, it was reversing the order of creation. By mixing what God separated, it recreates the primeval chaos. And this chaos is evinced in the moral sphere. Without distinctions between the sacred and the profane, everything is pronounced sacred and moral. Iniquity is presented as piety. Obliterating distinctions between the sacred and the profane leads to unbridled wickedness. “ ‘Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there

is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. Her officials within are like wolves tearing their prey; they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain. Her prophets whitewash these deeds . . . by divinations. . . . The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor . . . and mistreat the alien, denying them justice’ ” (Ezek. 22:26–29, NIV).

Thus, to ignore the Sabbath is, in fact, to refuse to worship God, to reject Him as the ground of origin and being. To be sure, “God’s claim to reverence and worship, above the gods of the heathen, is based upon the fact that He is the Creator, and that to Him all other beings owe their existence.”⁸ And “the fourth commandment is the only one of all the ten in which are found both the name and the title of the lawgiver.”⁹ The Sabbath shows God’s ownership of the earth; thus, to abolish it is to usurp divine prerogatives.

The all-inclusiveness and egalitarianism of the Sabbath is demonstrated by Isaiah 56. Aliens and eunuchs who hold fast to His covenant and keep the Sabbath holy will become, says God, full members in the congregation of Israel, enjoying its full spiritual blessings: “ ‘for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’ ” (v. 7, NIV). If this recalls the Abrahamic promise of universal blessing (Gen. 12:3), this blessing finds its fulfillment in Revelation 14:6, 7, in the eternal gospel proclaimed to every nation, tribe, language, and people. And in worship, the many become one. Just as the Abrahamic promise was an implicit negation of Babel’s totalitarian bid to achieve a primeval unity against God, the first angel’s message negates a similar bid by Babylon the Great (v. 8).

Three angels’ messages

Significantly, the Sabbath is the crux of this negation. The “direct

verbal parallel between Revelation 14:7 (‘made heaven and earth, and sea’) and Exodus 20:11 (‘made heaven and earth, the sea’) . . . along with thematic and structural parallels, shows that the later portion of the first angel constitutes a clear, direct allusion to the fourth commandment of Exodus 20:11.”¹⁰ And the fourth commandment, in turn, directly alludes to creation; to divinely ordained distinctions that polemicize against the all-embracing pagan cosmos, and its confusion of the human and the divine, the material and the spiritual, the religious and the political.

The intimate link between the Sabbath and holiness is what makes the Sabbath the testing truth in the final battle between good and evil, Christ and the antichrist. Indeed, since “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19, NIV), to enter into the Sabbath is to move from one moral universe to its opposite. And to refuse to move, to enter the Sabbath, is to refuse to worship the Creator God. That is why the three angels’ messages are set in the context of judgment and accompanied by dire warning of the impending outpouring of God’s wrath. And the warning is one of mercy—that we may escape “ ‘the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ ” (Matt. 25:41, NIV). ❧

1 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 29.

2 Ibid., 9.

3 Nahum M. Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1993), 80.

4 Henri Frankfort et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought of the Ancient Near East* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 363.

5 Ibid., 92.

6 Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 115.

7 Lucien Scubla, “The Bible, ‘Creation,’ and Mimetic Theory,” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 12–13 (2006): 16.

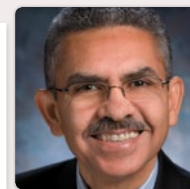
8 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1958), 336.

9 Ibid., 307.

10 John T. Baldwin, “Revelation 14:7: An Angel’s Worldview,” in *Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary*, ed. John Templeton Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 19.

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No “rest” for the “Sabbath” of Colossians 2:16:

A structural-syntactical-semantic study

Writing to the believers in Colossae, Paul cautioned, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Col. 2:16, 17).¹

Many have concluded that the “sabbath” in this passage refers to the seventh day and that this day is no longer binding upon Christians.² More recently, those promoting the Levitical festivals have similarly claimed that Colossians 2:16 deals with the weekly Sabbath, but that it *should* be observed together with the feasts and new moons. Seventh-day Adventists, however, have generally maintained that the context shows that this refers to the ceremonial sabbaths. In the landmark *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Professor Kenneth Strand hinted at a structural approach to the “feast, new moon, sabbath” trilogy: “It is also possible that Paul was using the common literary device of inverted parallelism [i.e., a chiasm], thus moving from annual to monthly and then back again to annual festivals”³—thus

affirming the ceremonial sabbath view of Adventism. Where does the weight of biblical evidence lie?

Apparently, while Paul was in prison in Rome,⁴ Epaphras visited him (Philem. 23), informing him of the spiritual growth of the Colossian church (Col. 1:3–8; 2:5) as well as of the heretical teachings making inroads there (Col. 2:1–23).

This heresy is nowhere identified, so dozens of theories regarding it have been proposed.⁵ However, since at least 1966, scholars have concluded that “it is no longer fitting to discuss a possible influence of ‘Gnosticism’ upon the Colossian Religion or its refutation.”⁶ In recent decades, serious Bible scholars, focusing on the scriptural text, have concluded that the challenge in Colossae had to do with “thought patterns with which Paul was very much at home—that is, some form of Jewish spirituality rather than Gnostic speculation or mystery cult initiation.”⁷

The major theological thrust of this epistle is a correct view of Christ—“the visible manifestation of the invisible God”⁸ (Col. 1:15)—a Christology cogently related to salvation (Col. 1:13,

14; cf. 2:11–15), with profound implications for ethical living (Col. 3:4–4:6). The single great message of Colossians may thus be summed up in the declaration, “Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us” (Col. 3:11, NLT).⁹ Astutely, Charles Talbert noted that “it is against the background of this salvific narrative that the arguments of the Colossian letter unfold.”¹⁰

Analyzing the structure of Colossians 2

Colossians 2:16 begins with “therefore” (KJV, RSV), indicating that the caution being sounded arises from what has been outlined earlier;¹¹ and that, as commentators acknowledge, “verses 12 and 13 are central to the appeal of the letter.”¹²

Ian Thomson has demonstrated that these two verses are the peak of a chiasm that extends throughout most of Colossians 2 (see figure 1 on page 12).

By recognizing “that chiasmus pervades Colossians”¹⁶ and “by appreciating the divisions and development of these thoughts within this significant letter, one may follow Paul’s thought with added clarity.”¹⁷

Figure 1: Colossians 2 Chiasm

Introduction: 2:6 “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”

A 2:7 “Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith”

B 2:8 “Beware lest anyone cheat you . . . not according to *Christ*”

C 2:9 “In Him dwells . . . the Godhead *bodily*,” 10a “You are complete in Him”

D 2:10b “Who is the head of all *principality* and *power*”

E 2:11 “Circumcised with the circumcision made without *hands*”

F 2:12 “Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were *raised*”

F¹ 2:13 “Dead in your transgressions . . . He made you *alive* together with Him”¹³

E¹ 2:14 “Wiped out the *handwriting* of requirements that was against us”

D¹ 2:15 “Having disarmed *principalities* and *powers*”

C¹ 2:16 “Let no one pass judgment,” 17 “But the *body* is Christ’s”¹⁴

B¹ 2:18 “Let no one cheat you,” 19a “Not holding fast to the **Head**”

A¹ 2:19b “Nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows”¹⁵

(Col. 2:14, HCSB). In Ellen White’s words, “The ceremonial system was made up of symbols pointing to Christ. . . . It is this law that Christ ‘took . . . out of the way, nailing it to His cross.’ Colossians 2:14.”³² These “regulations” that “stood opposed to us” allude to Old Testament laws that were “‘a witness against you’” (Deut. 31:26, NKJV),³³ which Peter called a “‘yoke,’” “‘which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear’” (Acts 15:10, NKJV).³⁴

Interpreting the *cheirophon tois dogmasin*

The above chiastic structure reveals that “the *handwriting* of requirements” (of v. 14, NKJV) corresponds linguistically to “the circumcision made without *hands*” (of v. 11).¹⁸ Thus, it is preferable to formally translate *cheirophon* as a literal “handwriting” or its equivalent;¹⁹ and that structurally and contextually, this “written code, with its regulations” (NIV) echoes the ceremonial regulation of circumcision.

This unique term *cheirophon* is immediately qualified by *tois dogmasin*. Since written by the same author, covering similar issues, and sent to recipients of the same region, some have concluded that the “*dogmasin*” in Ephesians 2:15 sheds light on Colossians 2:14,²⁰ thus making “reference to the Mosaic Law.”²¹ Contemporaneously, Josephus and Philo likewise used *dogma* for Mosaic Law.²² Several scholars concur,²³ noting that this is supported by most of the Greek church fathers and “is grammatically without problems.”²⁴

Though he frequently employed *nomos* for Old Testament law, Paul apparently did not use it here, so as (a) to avoid the impression that the entire Mosaic Law had been abrogated;

and (b) to focus attention directly on the ceremonial law²⁵—elements of which are listed in 2:16.²⁶ As David Pao concludes in his 2012 exegetical commentary, “Even though a strict identification with the Mosaic Torah cannot be made,” the *cheirophon* “should be understood in relation to the Mosaic law.”²⁷

Colossians 2:14 has been recently recognized as “one of the most vivid descriptions in the New Testament of what happened when Jesus died.”²⁸ “He [i.e., Christ] forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:13b, 14, NIV). John Heil observed that “the metaphor is convoluted, but presumably reflects again the idea of Christ’s death as a sin offering.”²⁹ In brief, by formulating this daring metaphor,³⁰ Paul directly connected forgiveness through Christ (v. 13b) to the “written code, with its regulations” (v. 14), which had required sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, as well as to the death of Christ, by which these ritual requirements were “canceled” (Greek: *exaleipsas*, i.e., “abolishing a law”³¹). By His death, Christ consummated the ritual system—He “has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the cross”

Fittingly employing a Christological hermeneutic, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* . . . summarizes, “At the death of Christ the jurisdiction of ceremonial law came to an end. His atoning sacrifice provided forgiveness for all sins. This act ‘wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross’ (Col. 2:14; cf. Deut. 31:26).”³⁵ Verse 15 then reveals, as Dermot McDonald notes, “Christ the crucified is Lord; and all the hostile powers of the universe have become subjected to him. In Christ’s cross the demonic hosts of evil have met their Conqueror.”³⁶ With this background, we can now proceed to verse 16, which begins, “So let no one judge you in food or in drink” (NKJV).

Reflecting upon “judge,” “food and drink”

Colossians 1:21, 22, 27, and 2:13 give the distinct impression that the Colossian church was predominantly Gentile, though Jews were certainly present³⁷ and apparently formed “a significant Jewish element within the church,”³⁸ for history records that “Colossae had a significant Jewish population.”³⁹ Based on similarities with Galatians,⁴⁰ several interpreters

have concluded that the Colossian “heretics” were Jews or Judaizers,⁴¹ though chapter 2:21 suggests that the restrictions proposed went far beyond the Jewish law.⁴² David Garland states, “Newly formed Gentile Christians in Colossae are being badgered about their faith by contentious Jews”⁴³ and were “being called upon to observe times and seasons as somehow necessary for their salvation.”⁴⁴

Paul’s counsel is strong: “Let no one, then, judge you” (YLT). The word *judge* (*krinetō*) contextually means to “pass unfavorable judgment upon.”⁴⁵ As the New Living Translation has paraphrased it: “So don’t let anyone condemn you for . . . not celebrating certain holy days.”⁴⁶

Before considering the terms *feast*, *new moon*, *sabbath*, a comment needs to be made regarding the “food and drink.” While *brōsis* and *posis* may designate “eating” and “drinking,” they are better rendered contextually with the nouns “food” and “drink,” as in formal translations (ESV, NAB, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, etc.).⁴⁷ Since the “food and drink come in the context of circumcision and the observance of special days,”⁴⁸ it appears “these words doubtless refer to the meal and drink offerings presented by the Israelites.”⁴⁹

The meaning of the Greek term *sabbata*

The New English Bible renders Colossians 2:16, “Allow no one therefore to take you to task . . . over the observance of festival, new moon, or sabbath.” The word *sabbath* in the original languages has various meanings, including the weekly Sabbath and the annual ceremonial sabbath, all of which are identified by linguistic links as well as the context.⁵⁰ Since some New Testament texts, including Colossians 2:16, “can be understood only through an accurate understanding of their OT counterparts,” it is vital to take such matters into account.⁵¹

1. An “annual/monthly/weekly” triad? At first glance it may appear as though the “festival, new moon, sabbath” sequence derives from several

passages where the Hebrew term *šabbāt* (prefaced by a definite article) does refer to the weekly Sabbath.⁵² However, exegesis indicates otherwise.⁵³ For example, none of these passages has the crucial three terms in the singular, as does Colossians 2:16;⁵⁴ all have at least four parts (not three as in Col. 2:16); and, all include a *daily* sacrifice (not found in Col. 2:16).⁵⁵ Despite a scholarly tradition that Colossians 2:16 is dependent on a presumed calendar sequence, textual evidence demonstrates that Paul was not using any of the above passages here.

2. *Intertextual link with Hosea 2:11.* Hosea 2:11 may function as an intertextual link: “her festival, her new moon, and her sabbath” (YLT). Note these areas of accord: both Colossians 2 and Hosea 2 consist of a three-part grouping; both have the same sequence (first “festival,” then “new moon,” finally “sabbath”); both have the key terms stated as collective/generic singulars;⁵⁶ both deal with *days* per se, and not with any burnt sacrifices; both lack linguistic links crucial for identifying “sabbath” as the seventh day; and both have a negative context of the misuse of these sacred times.⁵⁷

Linguistic analysis shows that “festival” (*ḥag*) in Hosea 2:11 refers to one or more of the *pilgrim* festivals—Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and/or Tabernacles. Next comes the new moon (*hōdeš*)—pivotal in determining dates for the appointed times.⁵⁸ Finally, the phrase “her sabbath” (*šabbattāh*) identifies this as Israel’s ceremonial sabbath(s), rather than the weekly Sabbath, which is never spoken of in this manner but which the Lord refers to as “My Sabbath(s).”

Likewise, linguistic investigation of Colossians 2:16 shows that the Greek term *heortē* is limited to the same three pilgrim festivals. While *neomēnia* indicates the new moon observances, *sabbata* includes the nonpilgrimage “rest times” of the Day of Atonement and apparently Trumpets. Hence, Paul

was not redundant by listing both *heortē* (pilgrim feasts) and *sabbata* (“rest times”). In short, the *pilgrim feast, new moon, ceremonial sabbath* sequence in Hosea corresponds to that of Colossians.

3. *Chiastic structure of the three terms.* Moreover, this tripartite phrase appears as a chiasm, moving from annual to monthly and then to annual seasons (figure 2).

Figure 2

A “festival” = 3 annual pilgrimage feasts

B “new moon” = monthly celebrations

A+ “sabbath” = 2 annual rests (& 1 septennial)

As in single peak chiasms, the center (“B”) holds a pivotal place. In short, “the moon governed the dates for other religious festivals.”⁵⁹ This central position of the new moon, by which the other religious occasions were calculated, corroborates the conclusion that the *sabbata* can refer to solely ceremonial sabbaths, since the weekly Sabbath was never determined by lunar computation.

4. *Implications of the definite article with sabbata.* English versions do not indicate that “sabbath” derives from two different Greek roots (*sabbaton* and *sabbata*), as morphological studies attest. The lexical form *sabbaton* is used about 40 times for the weekly Sabbath,⁶⁰ yet it includes a definite article for only about half of these occurrences.⁶¹ However, when the form *sabbata* is used for the Sabbath (i.e., at least 18 times),⁶² the word precedes a definite article every single time, except when the immediate context makes it linguistically inappropriate (as in Acts 17:2) or completely unnecessary (as in Matt. 28:1). Significantly, the lexical form *sabbata* is utilized in Colossians 2:16. If the *sabbata* were here intended to identify the weekly Sabbath, there would be an attached definite article, or some other direct contextual information, as seen consistently in the New Testament. This unique usage of

sabbata points compellingly once again to it being an unmistakable reference to annual sabbaths.

The “Sabbath” in the “shadows”

“So let no one judge you . . . regarding . . . sabbaths, which are a shadow [Greek: *skia*] of things to come, but the substance [Greek: *sōma*] is of Christ” (Col. 2:16, 17, NKJV).

General scholarly consensus is that *skia* here is not a literal “shadow,” but a “foreshadowing,”⁶³ since the word is directly linked with *tōn mellontōn*, that is, “things to come.” Paul Deterding

“In the past these things were like a shadow of what was to come.”⁶⁷

This is where *sōma* comes into play. The lexicon describes *sōma* (i.e., literally “body”) in this context, as “*the thing itself, the reality*.”⁶⁸ Hence, the New International Version’s rendition: “The reality, however, is found in Christ.” Ian Smith aptly observes, “Since the reality has appeared, there is no need to delight in the shadows that are cast by that reality.”⁶⁹ Indeed, they “have become completely meaningless.”⁷⁰

William Hendriksen notes, “Though it was not wrong for *the Jew*, trained from his infancy in the law, for a period

death on the cross;”⁷⁵ but the seventh-day Sabbath instituted in Eden and enshrined in the Ten Commandments as an ethical norm for everyone should still be kept holy to the glory of God. 🙏

The seventh-day Sabbath instituted in Eden and enshrined in the Ten Commandments as an ethical norm for everyone should still be kept holy to the glory of God.

indicates that this expression “is almost a technical term for the messianic age and kingdom that arrived with Christ at his first advent and that will be consummated at his return. Hence Jesus could call John the Baptist ‘Elijah, who is going to come’ (*ho mellōn erchesthai*) even when John—and Jesus—had already arrived (Mt. 11:14).”⁶⁴

Francis Beare noted that “*things to come* [*tōn mellontōn*] means, of course, things which lay in the future when the observances were ordained; not things which still lie in the future. The *things to come* have come with Christ.”⁶⁵ As Gordon Clark articulated, “The apostle employs *esti* in the present [i.e., which is a shadow] . . . because the apostle transports himself ideally into the past period of ritualism.”⁶⁶ *The International Children’s Bible* thus renders verse 17a,

of transition to observe some of these customs as mere customs, having nothing whatever to do with salvation, it was certainly wrong to ascribe to them a value they did not have, and to try to impose them upon the Gentiles.”⁷¹ However, as Robert Wall notes, “For the Christian to participate in these Jewish celebrations was tantamount to a denial of Jesus’ messiahship.”⁷²

In brief, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* . . . notes that Paul “made clear that Christians were under no obligation to keep these yearly rest days, because Christ had nailed the ceremonial laws to the cross.”⁷³ Intriguingly, several nonsabbatarians concur with this understanding of Colossians 2:14–17.⁷⁴ These ceremonial sabbaths, which were *types* pointing to the Messiah, “terminated with His

1 Verse 16 is from the RSV, and verse 17 from the NKJV, since together they provide a clear and reliable rendition of the original underlying Greek text. Note: All other direct references to the seventh-day Sabbath per se are located in the historical parts of the New Testament (i.e., the Gospels and Acts). However, Colossians 2:16 is the *only* place in the theological part where the actual term *sabbath* is found. While all Scripture is accepted as inspired by God, it is well recognized that doctrine needs to be established on clear theological instruction and not merely on narratives, which are often interpreted in diverse ways.

2 For a brief overview of this trend among both Roman Catholic and Protestant writers, see chapter 1 of Ron du Preez, *Judging the Sabbath: Discovering What Can’t Be Found in Colossians 2:16* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2008), 1–16. More extensive endnotes, limited due to space considerations in this article, are available in *Judging the Sabbath*.

3 Kenneth A. Strand, “The Sabbath,” quoted in Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 506.

4 Derek Tidball noted in 2011 that Colossians “was probably written from Rome.” In *Christ, in Colossae: Sociological Perspectives on Colossians* (London: Paternoster, 2011), 11. See also Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 471.

5 See James D. G. Dunn, “The Colossian Philosophy: A Confident Jewish Apologia,” *Biblica* 76, no. 2 (1995): 153.

6 Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Astrid B. Beck, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 32.

7 Peter H. Davids, *Colossians, Philemon*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 229.

8 H. Dermot McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians & Philemon* (Waco, TX: Word, 1980), 14.

9 Ibid., 15. See also H. Wayne House, “The Doctrine of Christ in Colossians,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (April–June 1992): 180–192.

10 Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, *Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 181.

11 See, e.g., Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians and Philemon*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 81; N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 118.

12 Bonnie Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 44.

13 Unless otherwise noted, verses in this chiastic structure are from the NKJV. This verse is from the *New American Standard Bible*.

14 Verse 16 from Revised Standard Version; verse 17 from the American Standard Version.

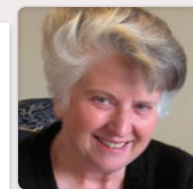
15 See Ian H. Thomson, “Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series 111 (1995): 153–156.

16 John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the New Testament,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 222. Others who have identified the use of chiasmus in Colossians include Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul’s Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 115; and Ekkehardt Mueller, “Focus on Scripture: The Firstborn (Col. 1:15),” *Reflections: A BRI Newsletter*, October 2005, 7.

17 Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 225.

- 18 In fact, "the reference to 'circumcision' may indicate circumcision was among the practices being recommended by the false teachers; these practices clearly included many Jewish elements (2:16–23)." McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians & Philemon*, 106.
- 19 Based on the use of this term in extrabiblical literature, some have suggested that the *cheirographon* is "the record of debt" (ESV), or "a certificate of indebtedness." See, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 164.
- 20 See, e.g., Francis D. Nichol et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957), 1009, where Ephesians 2:15 is explained: "Law of commandments. This is generally thought of as referring to the ceremonial law." See also, Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 204.
- 21 C. R. Hume, *Reading Through Colossians and Ephesians* (London: SCM, 1998), 44. See also Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians*, 45; McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians & Philemon*, 102.
- 22 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick William Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 201. This usage of *dogma* for the Mosaic law also appears in 3 Maccabees 3:1, where it talks about a "Jew by birth who later changed his religion and apostatized from the ancestral traditions [*dogmat*]." (NRSV).
- 23 See, e.g., R. McL. Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, the International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 214; Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 107–109; Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 201; House, "The Doctrine of Christ in Colossians," 189.
- 24 Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 328.
- 25 See, e.g., Gordon Haddon Clark, *Colossians: Another Commentary on an Inexhaustible Message*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 89, 90.
- 26 See Wright, *The Epistles of Paul*, 25, 26.
- 27 David W. Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 171.
- 28 John Woodhouse, *Colossians and Philemon: So Walk in Him* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2011), 140.
- 29 John Paul Heil, *Colossians: Encouragement to Walk in All Wisdom as Holy Ones in Christ*, Society of Biblical Literature, no. 4 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 119.
- 30 Barth and Blanke, referring to the expression "to nail fast to the cross," state, "We can most easily assume with E. Percy (PKE, 91) that Paul invented the image ad hoc." *Colossians*, 331.
- 31 Vaughan, "Colossians," 201.
- 32 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 365.
- 33 This use of God being "against us" or "contrary to us" can be seen repeatedly in the counsel Moses gave Israel before he died. For example, Lev. 26:17, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 40, 41; Deut. 28:48, 49; 29:27; 31:17, 19, 21, 26.
- 34 Ellen White affirmed that "Peter here referred to the law of ceremonies, which was made null and void by the crucifixion of Christ." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 194.
- 35 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 274.
- 36 McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians & Philemon*, 87.
- 37 See Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1991), 82; Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians*, 4; Clark, *Colossians*, 88.
- 38 Tidball, *In Christ, in Colossae*, 27.
- 39 Ibid., 19.
- 40 For example, recognizing several similarities between the teachers in Colossae and those in Galatia, Michael Bird comments, "In Colossians as in Galatians, freedom from the designs of the Colossian philosophers and from the Galatian proselytizers is indebted to dying with Messiah and being baptized into Messiah (Col 2:12; 3:3; Gal 3:26–27). Colossians and Galatians both refer to the freedom of the Christian from circumcision and festivals (Col 2:11–12, 16; Gal 5:2; 6:12–15; 4:10) and refer to deliverance from evil powers (Col 1:13–14; Gal 1:4)." *Colossians, Philemon: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 19.
- 41 See Petr Pokorný, *Colossians: A Commentary*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 113, who mentions several, including Alford and Peake.
- 42 "The precise details of these teachings at Colossae cannot be ascertained. . . . Unquestionably they contained Judaizing tendencies. . . . The false teachers at Colossae . . . insisted on an extremely legalistic ceremonialism, following the Jewish pattern, and emphasizing circumcision . . . and observance of festivals. . . . Not only is Paul concerned to refute Judaizing legalism, he also must contend with certain pagan elements that sought to degrade or eclipse the office of Christ." Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Commentary*, vol. 7, 184.
- 43 David E. Garland, *Colossians/Philemon*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 27.
- 44 McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians & Philemon*, 88. See also, Pokorný, *Colossians: A Commentary*, 143; T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, International Critical Commentary, eds. C. A. Briggs, S. R. Driver, and A. Plummer, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), xlviii; Wright, *The Epistles of Paul*, 27, 119; Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Commentary*, vol. 7, 204; John MacArthur Jr., *Colossians & Philemon*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992), 118.
- 45 Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 121.
- 46 Harris concludes, "The Colossians should resolutely resist any effort that certain propagandists . . . might make to restrict their freedom by legalistic regulations." *Colossians & Philemon*, 104.
- 47 See Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 148, 694; Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 337; Harris, *Colossians & Philemon*, 118.
- 48 Allan R. Bevere, "Sharing in the Inheritance: Identity and the Moral Life in Colossians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series 226 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 86.
- 49 Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 2050.
- 50 For a comprehensive analysis of these 180 appearances of "sabbath" terms in Scripture, see du Preez, *Judging the Sabbath*, 20, 21, 39, 155–168.
- 51 Skip MacCarty, "Responses to Craig L. Blomberg," in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, ed. Christopher John Donato (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011), 371.
- 52 These are Num. 28:2–29:39; 1 Chron. 23:29–31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:12, 13; 31:3; Neh. 10:33; Ezek. 45:13–17; 46:1–15.
- 53 Careful scholarship has shown that there is no evidence that Paul ever utilized 1 or 2 Chronicles or the book of Nehemiah in any of his writings. While Paul did paraphrase one passage from Ezekiel and allude to two other passages from Ezekiel, there is no evidence that he ever directly quoted from this book either. See Robert G. Bratcher, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament*, rev. ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1961); Gleason L. Archer and Gregory Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1983).
- 54 While some may question whether the issue of singulars or plurals matters, Paul's own emphasis on number demonstrates the significance of such, especially when addressing Christological concerns. For example, consider Gal. 3:16: "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ" (NKJV; emphasis added).
- 55 For more information, see du Preez, *Judging the Sabbath*, 55–70.
- 56 Some allege that the final term, *sabbatōn*, of the calendric string in Col. 2:16 is not ambiguous, but that it is a genitive plural and cannot be singular. However, as noted above, meticulous research of the Septuagint, the Modern Greek Bible, extrabiblical works (such as Zenon, Philo, and Josephus) and deuterocanonical writings clearly shows that the lexical term *sabbata* was regularly used as a singular Greek word, completely interchangeably with the normal singular word *sabbaton*. The only time that *sabbata* is rightly understood to be a plural is when directly followed by a numeral, as in Acts 17:2. Hence, as various scholars have correctly concluded, the lexical term *sabbata* (in Col. 2:16), should be understood as a generic singular. Since all three terms in Col. 2:16 are thus seen as generic singulars, this strengthens the connection with the three key terms in Hosea 2:11, which are also generic singulars.
- 57 For more information, see du Preez, *Judging the Sabbath*, 135–137. Note: Some have wondered about the meaning of *en meri* in verse 16. Bauer notes that in Col. 2:16 it means "with regard to a festival." *Greek-English Lexicon*, 506.
- 58 Furthermore, the new moon is mentioned at the center of the chiasm because it is crucial for determining the timing of the pilgrim festivals (mentioned first in this tripartite phrase) as well as the ceremonial sabbaths (mentioned last in this three-part calendric string).
- 59 Ronald F. Youngblood, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1995), s.v. "Moon." See also Hobart E. Freeman, "Festivals," *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, eds. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1975), 601.
- 60 See Matt. 12:2, 5, 8; 24:20; Mark 2:27 [x2], 28; 6:2; 15:42 [i.e., *prosabbaton*]; 16:1; Luke 6:1, 5, 6, 7, 9; 13:14 [x2], 15, 16; 14:1, 3, 5; 23:54, 56; John 5:9, 10, 16, 18; 7:22, 23 [x2]; 9:14, 16; 19:31 [x2]; Acts 1:12; 13:27, 42, 44; 15:21; 18:4 (as well as Luke 6:9 in the Nestlé Aland text).
- 61 See Matt. 12:5, 8; Mark 27 [x2], 28; 15:42; 16:1; Luke 6:5, 7, 9; 13:14 [x2], 15, 16; 14:3, 5; 23:56; John 5:18; 9:16; 19:31 [x2].
- 62 See Matt. 12:1, 5, 10, 11, 12; 28:1; Mark 1:21; 2:23, 24; 3:2, 4; Luke 4:16, 31; 6:2; 13:10; Acts 13:14; 16:13; 17:2 (as well as Luke 6:9 in the Textus Receptus).
- 63 Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 755.
- 64 Paul E. Detering, *Colossians*, Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2003), 113.
- 65 Francis W. Beare, "The Epistle to the Colossians," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 11 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1983), 201. See also Bevere Sharing, 141; Vaughan, *Colossians and Philemon*, 83.
- 66 Clark, *Colossians*, 97.
- 67 Similarly, the English Version for the Deaf reads, "In the past, these things were like a shadow that showed what was coming."
- 68 Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 799.
- 69 Ian K. Smith, *Heavenly Perspective: A Study of the Apostle Paul's Response to a Jewish Mystical Movement at Colossae* (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), 118.
- 70 McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians & Philemon*, 89. See also MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon*, 119.
- 71 William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1965), 124.
- 72 Robert W. Wall, *Colossians & Philemon*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 121.
- 73 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 287.
- 74 See, e.g., David W. Jones, *Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 165; Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989), 185, 186; emphasis added.
- 75 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 285.

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The Sabbath:

A celebration of God's work

The Sabbath is a celebration of both work and rest. Certainly, the Sabbath celebrates God's work, not human work, and humans are the blessed recipients of a day of rest to commemorate God's work. But the question is, Does the Sabbath concept contribute to our understanding and performance of ordinary, everyday, human work? This essay argues that the fourth commandment Sabbath sanctity is not only about a day's rest but also about total commitment to God seven days a week. The seventh-day Sabbath can be kept holy only by working as God intends the other six days.

The ancients

The gods of some ancient societies shunned work. The Mesopotamian Atrahasis epic of the first and second millennia B.C. describes how the gods, wearied from work and fighting with each other over who was to do it, created humans to solve the problem.¹ The Greek Hesiod, writing in the eighth century B.C., suggested that gods created humans to do their work as punishment for stealing fire. They sent their "gift" Pandora, who unstopped her jar and let out all the grievous toils and sickness that have plagued humanity since.² In such religious systems, work was seen as not fit for gods, who were meant to luxuriate in eternal leisure. Humans still

share with the ancients the illusion that leisure is the ultimate happiness.

Against this background, the God of the Hebrews is triumphantly described as working. The first information the Bible offers about God is that He worked, and moreover, He worked to make a beautiful world for humans (Gen. 1:1–2:3). Humans, made in the image of God, were lovingly offered the gift of work (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15). The Sabbath celebrated God's own creation work. Made for blessing and holiness, the Sabbath hints at a connection between God's work and human lives (Gen. 2:2, 3).

Commandment endorsement

The Ten Commandments endorse the Creation narrative that God works on behalf of humans. God wrote on stone that the rationale for the fourth commandment was God's creation of the world and that He decreed that the seventh day be kept holy and restful by humans as a memorial of this creation activity (Exod. 20:8–11). When Moses reiterated this command in his farewell sermon, he added the work of redeeming Israel from the slavery of Egypt (Deut. 5:15) as a rationale for the Sabbath rest. Thus, both forms of the fourth commandment assert something that ancients who were contemporary with Israel would have

seen as a shocking concept: that God works on behalf of humans.

But the Sabbath commandment also recognizes the work of humans. Human work is acknowledged, and provision is made that the landowner and family, with their male and female servants (employees), and even the animals used to help humans, have opportunity for rest. Moreover, all labor for all people was to cease: work could not simply be passed on to unknown foreign migrants (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14). The Sabbath was for the benefit of all Israelites and also the "strangers in their gates."

Thus, the fourth commandment offers a threefold rationale for Sabbath's holy rest opportunity: first, the Sabbath commemorates God's work for humanity; second, its provision is for all living creatures; and third, it recognizes the dignity of human labor.

A Hebrew literary perspective

In the Genesis account of the Sabbath inauguration, the verb "to sanctify" is in the *piel* form that indicates intensification and repetition of action.³ The intensification implies sanctification had an immediate effect, and repetition implies that the blessing of the Sabbath would be repeated for all the posterity. The Sabbath did not come into being purely as a Jewish blessing.⁴

A single Hebrew letter, the *waw*, generally acts to add something to the text and is translated as “and” or similar. Sometimes this simple word contrasts meaning and is translated “but” or similar.⁵ For most Bible translators the *waw* that occurs in the fourth commandment between the injunction for humans to work for six days and then remember the Sabbath has seemed to act as a contrast, and therefore has been translated as “but” (see Exod. 20:10 in KJV, ESV, NKJV, RSV). However, it can justifiably be translated as “and” and is presented thus by Jay Green in the *Interlinear Bible*.⁶ The Sabbath contrasts human work with divine work, but the change in *waw* translation would consequently not contrast human work with the Sabbath but could indicate God’s intention to connect the Sabbath blessing intimately with human daily work, just as He blessed His creation work (Gen. 1:22, 28). Work, of course, was God’s intention for humans even in Eden (Gen. 1:26; 2:15).

The perspective of Jesus

One of the principles of His kingdom that Jesus sets forth in the Sermon on the Mount is, “ ‘Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them’ ” (Matt. 5:17, NIV). Yet, many times during His earthly ministry Jesus seems to have been at odds with the religious leaders of His day over keeping the Sabbath. His recurrent offense was healing, an activity regarded as work. Although these healings hinted at creative ability, Jesus defended Himself by simply noting it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:12). Yet, when Jesus healed the man by the pool of Bethesda, He made a shocking declaration: “ ‘My Father is working still, and I am working’ ” (John 5:17, RSV). Jesus seems to present God as breaking His own Sabbath command!

Jesus’ seemingly contentious approach to Sabbath keeping suggests that He was trying to teach something about the purpose of the Sabbath day

that was not understood by the Jewish people of His time. He declared that the Sabbath was for doing good, that it was a gift, made for humans, and most shockingly, that it connects God and human work.

Immanuel: God with us

The Sabbath is a regular reminder that God intended to be present with humanity from the very beginning. The world was not made in six days, but in seven (Gen. 2:2). Certainly God’s material creative activity occurred in six days, at the end of which time He saw everything He had made and pronounced it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The heavens and the earth were finished (Gen. 2:1), but on the seventh day God finished His *work*, not the earth and the heavens, by making something immaterial but vital, a day blessed and sanctified (vv. 2, 3). The commandment notes the day was made holy, and what makes anything holy is the presence of God. The rest provision of the commandment allowed the day to be one for fellowship between God and humans whom He had made without the distraction of daily work.

When humans chose to try to manage the world by their own work efforts, by their own knowledge that they hoped would be as good as God’s but soon found was not (Gen. 3:1–7), God did not abandon them. He was still there to work on their behalf and “bring them out of the house of slavery.” God’s first act for post-Edenic humans was to make them durable clothing because their own choice of fig leaves was inadequate (v. 21). Thus, the text shows people could not successfully clothe themselves nor later redeem themselves from slavery without the help of God.

Some have seen erroneously the present imperfection in the world to mean that God’s creative work is still unfinished, and humans are called to finish it. Human work is said to be a “continuation of the creative work of God,” that humans “continue God’s work by turning earth into heaven,”⁷ and that humans have been designated

to complete God’s work and bring the world into perfection.⁸ But the Sabbath shows that it is God who is working for and with us. Although the original purpose of the Sabbath was to indicate God’s ongoing presence in the perfect world He had made, a beautiful memorial of God’s creative activity, and His desire for human fellowship, Deuteronomy reminds us that a work of God was required not only to create humans but also to redeem them from (sin’s) slavery (Deut. 5:15).

While the creation activity of God is presented as virtually effortless—God merely speaks to bring the world into existence—the work of redemption from slavery is presented as physical and demanding: “ ‘The LORD your God brought you out from there [Egypt] with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm’ ” (v. 15, NKJV). God has not retreated to leave humanity to try to clean up the world of sin, but He wants to be present with His mighty hand and outstretched arm to redeem. Further, Israel was reminded to “not forget” (reminiscent of the Sabbath command) that it was God who brought them out of Egypt, and they were especially warned that, as they flourished in Canaan, they were not to attribute to their own power the prosperity they would experience (Deut. 8:11–19).

Thus, the Deuteronomy Sabbath commandment presents beautiful assurances that God still works on our behalf. Rather than handing over the world for us to complete for Him, He is present to support us in both our need of eternal salvation and our daily work. And God reminds us that He, not we, will make all things new (Rev. 21:6).

The resurrection of Jesus was an amazing event that clearly demonstrated the power of God over death. But this triumphant work of God cannot be separated from His commitment to work for the entire created order, to create and redeem it, and finally to remake it. To do so tragically truncates our appreciation of the majesty of His creative and redemptive work for us. It is not for humans to judge what is the

most important work of God. He has chosen the Sabbath as the memorial of all His work in this world, and we question His choice at our peril.

The yoke of Christ

Six days of our work have an “and” that connects them to the Sabbath, the memorial of God who works tirelessly with and for His people. God made the Sabbath not just to provide humans with rest but also to assure them that He was with them, a sign between Him and His people (Ezek. 20:20). Humans need physical rest; that is a given. But Jesus recognized the human need for a deeper rest, expressed in the beautiful words: “‘Come to Me all you 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.’” Rest not just for your bodies but “‘for your souls’” (Matt. 11:28, 29, NKJV).


By taking Christ’s yoke, we recognize our inability to achieve on our

own. But yoked with Him, we can rejoice in the work He does in and with us. God working with us allows our work to be a blessing. God blessed the original couple (Gen. 1:28). After the Flood, God again blessed Noah and his family (Gen. 9:1). When God called Abram, He promised not only to bless him but, more amazingly, that He would make him a blessing (Gen. 12:2).⁹ This would seem a very onerous, indeed preposterous demand, unless the covert promise of Jesus is remembered: “‘Without Me you can do nothing’” (John 15:5, NKJV). Without Jesus nothing indeed will happen, but yoked with Him the command to be a blessing can be fulfilled.

Sabbath work

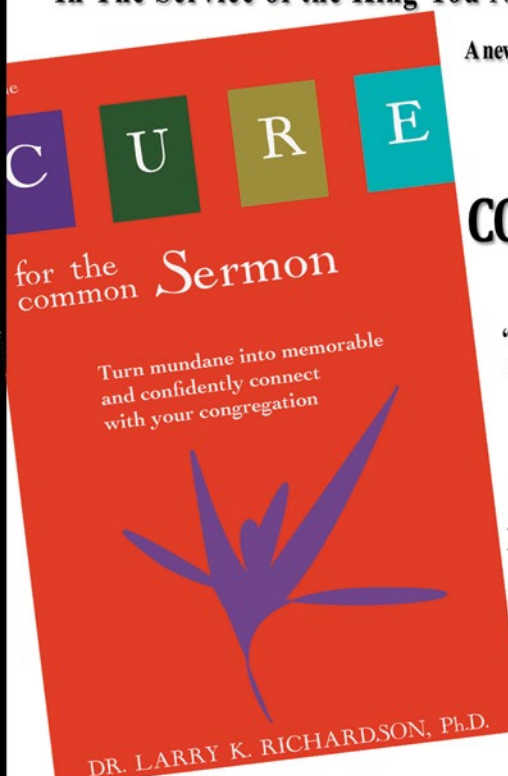
The Sabbath is thus a beautiful celebration of work. While primarily God’s creative and redemptive work on our behalf is celebrated, the Sabbath also contains a wonderful promise that God’s presence will enable us to carry

out our daily work in a manner of blessing. The Sabbath ennoble our concept of work. While humans are furiously trying this and that method to save the planet, prolong life, and destroy abuse of all types, God promises that adding His Sabbath worship into our thinking of our daily work, as a complete sanctified day committed to Him, will enable us to be a blessing. The God of the Sabbath is God, the Great Worker. We are privileged to be included in His plans. “Keeping” the Sabbath means more than having a day of rest, it means factoring God into every aspect of our working lives.

The Sabbath thus gives us a yardstick by which to measure the value of work done. Evaluation of His own work was a pre-Sabbath activity of God, and He pronounced it “very good” (Gen 1:31–2:3). In the light of the Sabbath blessing, all human work can be assessed. The criterion is simple: Has the work been a blessing, performed in the strength and under the yoke of Jesus? If it has, we can look forward to hearing “ ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your master’ ” (Matt. 25:21, 23, RSV), the eternal Sabbath rest made real by the presence of God. 

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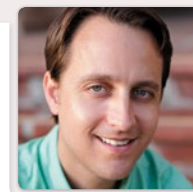
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- 1 Quoted in Norbert Lohfink, *Great Themes From the Old Testament*, trans. Ronald Walls (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1982), 204, 205.
- 2 Hesiod, “Theogony” and “Works and Days,” trans. M. L. West (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38, 39.
- 3 Ethelyn Simon, Irene Resnikoff, and Linda Motzkin, *The First Hebrew Primer*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: EKS Publishing, 2005), 255.
- 4 See an example of the presentation of the opposite view in Lohfink, *Great Themes*, 216.
- 5 David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 95.
- 6 Jay Patrick Green Sr., ed., *The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English*, 1986 ed., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986; reprint, 2011), 65, 159.
- 7 Lohfink, *Great Themes*, 220.
- 8 Pope John Paul II, “*Laborem Exercens*,” (1981), section 25.
- 9 The Hebrew of this passage is a command, not a promise; see Laurence Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 64; and W. Lee Humphries, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 83.

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A pastor among rabbis:

Learning Sabbath from the religious other

Many people argue that the Sabbath is universally applicable and not primarily Jewish because of its genesis in the Creation account.¹ While this is certainly true and argued even by noted Jewish scholars,² it is crucial to remember that the Sabbath is embedded in the exodus of Israel from Egypt (Deut. 5:12–15) and the covenant with God. “The point of such apparent hair-splitting,” writes Michael Lodahl, “is to assert that in the Jewish notion of Sabbath, even when its observance somehow recalls creation, that recollection itself is founded in God’s covenant with the Jewish people.”³ In other words, if it were not for God’s covenant people, Israel, who also wrote and preserved the Scriptures, the world would not even be aware of the Sabbath, the day God blessed and sanctified, “because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen. 2:3, NASB).

Christians who observe the Sabbath, therefore, must acknowledge they do so as a sign of solidarity and celebration of Israel’s covenant election, still sustained by the faithful God of the Exodus. For this reason, Sabbath observance also serves as a witness to Christianity’s origin in Jewish faith and practice. This is a timely testimony for today considering the anti-Jewish

sentiment the church has harbored throughout its history. Fortunately, this thinking is now slowly being undone through the work of post-Shoah theologians,⁴ denominational statements,⁵ and genuine dialogue.⁶

Christians and the Sabbath

One result of rethinking Christianity’s relationship to Judaism has been a renaissance among Roman Catholics and Protestants who see Judaism as a rich resource for Christian practice, including the Sabbath. Walter Brueggemann’s recent book on the Sabbath is a prime example of how, despite the numerous texts that have rolled off Christian presses in recent years, the topic of the Sabbath proves to be seemingly inexhaustible.⁷ This swelling interest in the Sabbath and its Jewish roots among Christians is laudable insofar as it does not result in the replacement theology of days gone by. This also raises complex questions pleading for a practical theological reflection, such as the following posed by Claire Wolfeich: “Where might Jews and Christians meet in a shared appreciation for the gift of the Sabbath, while avoiding supersessionism or misappropriations of Jewish understandings of Shabbat?”⁸

Examining Shabbat as a practice

Numerous voices within the Seventh-day Adventist Church have urged the denomination to consider what can be learned from the Jews about the Sabbath. Jacques Doukhan and Richard Davidson are two prominent figures who have done notable work along these lines.⁹ Both draw from the Hebrew Bible, Jewish texts, and liturgical resources, as well as their own Shabbat encounters, to highlight how symbols, food, music, and ritual portray the potential beauty, joy, and hope contained in a Jewish Shabbat experience.¹⁰ Although Sigve Tonstad argues that the “portfolio of meaning” inherent in the Sabbath “inevitably lead[s] beyond the Jewish perspective” for the believer in Jesus, he asserts how our Jewish mentors point Christians in the right direction.¹¹

These three biblical scholars have advanced our understanding of the Sabbath’s Jewish roots. Yet, still much more needs to be done. What is lacking is a substantial investigation of the Sabbath as an embodied practice. It is not a detached object devoid of a context; it is experientially known. What is needed is the incorporation of empirical research into our theological reflection. How do religious Jews

actually practice Shabbat? Failure to ground any Christian application of Jewish Shabbat practices in the reality of contemporary lived Judaism not only results in anecdotalism but could easily lead to the gross caricaturization of Jews that Christianity desperately tries to overcome.

To address this void, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with Jewish rabbis in an attempt to mine the depths of their Shabbat experience. I have also spent the past several years as a participant-observer at Shabbat services in Southern California, the northeastern part of the United States, and Israel. The remainder of this article is based on my research as a practical theologian.¹² I will highlight two inter-related themes that surfaced from the data and then draw implications for Christian praxis.¹³

Shabbat and the spectrum of Judaism

The story of Jews in the United States is often untold among Christians. Were the pages of history allowed to speak, writes Jonathan Sarna, we would not hear a “stereotypical tale of linear descent” but a tale of a people struggling to be Americans and Jews. We would also learn of a people who shaped events, “establishing and maintaining communities, responding to challenges, working for change.”¹⁴ One significant change incurred by the presence of Jews was to extend the boundaries of American religious liberty “so that they (and other minorities) might be included as equals.”¹⁵ Today, an estimated 6.8 million Jewish adults and children live in the United States, 50 percent of whom live primarily in urban areas either along the East Coast or in California.¹⁶ The 4.2 million adults who self-identify as Jewish, when asked about their religion, are spread across a diverse range of denominations, or movements, within Judaism: 35 percent belong to the Reform movement; 18 percent, to the Conservative; 10 percent, to the Orthodox; 6 percent, to other movements (e.g., Reconstructionist or Renewal); and 31

percent say they do not identify with any Jewish movement.¹⁷

This statistical snapshot demonstrates that it would be a misconception to think of Judaism as if it were one entity and that all Jews believe and practice their beliefs in the same way. It follows that if there is indeed a spectrum within Judaism, there also exists a diverse range of Shabbat practices and experiences among rabbis as well. This theme was perhaps one of the greatest revelations for me as I conducted my research. As Christians considering what can be learned from the Jews about the Sabbath, it is critical that the history and diversity of Judaism—past and present, historical and lived—be examined on its own terms. Although the interview data revealed a basic shared structure to how these rabbis practiced Shabbat, there were vast variations between Orthodox rabbis, Conservative rabbis, and rabbis from the Reform, Reconstructionist, or Renewal movements. This included one’s preparation, the role of community, the location of celebration, and the function of ritual, to name just a few.

Jewish law and Shabbat practices

Another significant theme surfaced when probing deeper and asking the question as to *what accounts for the diversity of practice among these rabbis*. The role of Jewish law (*halakhah*), more specifically the 39 general categories of forbidden labor on Shabbat (*melachot*), is one of the major dividing lines among the Jewish movements.¹⁸ These rabbinic prohibitions serve as religious guidelines for how observant Jews (*shomer Shabbat*) are to honor Shabbat. Such prohibitions include not driving, shopping, cooking, mowing the lawn, writing, using electricity, carrying items in public space (unless there is an *Eruv*¹⁹), or moving certain objects in a private domain (*muktzah*). They are also the source of consternation, which is aptly illustrated by an experience I had sharing a rabbi’s “pulpit” in New York City. While fielding questions from a largely secular Jewish congregation

about what I have been learning from the rabbis, I heard many stories from people who had been raised *shomer Shabbat* but found such practices too restrictive.

Interestingly, according to my interviews, both Hasidic and Orthodox rabbis who follow Shabbat laws experienced these laws as peaceful, joyful, and a delight. One of the most poignant moments while conducting field research was the time I spent with a Modern Orthodox rabbi. He spoke eloquently about the implications of what it means not to drive on Shabbat, namely a community of people who all live within walking distance of each other. Shabbat meant freedom for him and his family—the freedom to be in open and comfortable relationships with people who share similar values and commitment to a distinct way of life, not only on Shabbat but also throughout the week.²⁰ In the words of this rabbi, “The restriction on electricity and technology and being connected, as well as living proximate to each other, I think, are two of the things that help shape our culture.” What may be considered restrictive for some is a beautiful way of living for others. And if Shabbat at its heart is relational, an observant community is illustrative of how that can appear.

Those rabbis who do not strictly adhere to the 39 *melachot* experimented with the aspects they viewed as spiritually beneficial. Thus, the Reconstructionist rabbi I interviewed did not have a problem with his children participating in competitive sports on Shabbat (whereas the Modern Orthodox rabbi did), but he did not want them to drive to the tournament. The solution came when his children took responsibility for their own Shabbat practices, deciding not to drive to the game. He explained that “they walked from the motel to the playing field, whereas the other kids stayed at people’s homes and then drove there.” The rabbi’s commitment not to drive on Shabbat is admirable, considering the majority of his Reconstructionist colleagues are not observant. This

puts him and his family at odds with members of their congregation, who promptly get in their cars to drive home after the service. Needless to say, without sharing the practice in a supportive community, this rabbi described his family's Shabbat experience as "sad" and "lonely," "because it was not part of the practice of the [other] members of the community."

Implications for Christian praxis

Returning to Wolfeich's penetrating question mentioned previously: *How can Christians learn from the Jews about the Sabbath without falling prey to misappropriation and/or supersessionism?* Based on my research, I propose two recommendations. The first would be to cultivate sensitivity to the range of beliefs and practices within living Judaism, tending to Shabbat on their own terms and in their own language. This can be done in part by reading texts authored by Jews about Judaism and Shabbat. Meaningful dialogue with Jews across the spectrum is especially important, for language is the primary means of transmitting and discovering truth. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is gaining exposure to Shabbat services in the home and the *shul*, or synagogue.

The second recommendation for revised Christian praxis of the Sabbath is based on a reflection of the sources that govern Sabbath observance. On numerous occasions, when learning that I was a Christian who observes the Sabbath, I was questioned as to my sources for how to observe it. All the rabbis I interviewed indicated that the prohibitive laws for working on Shabbat, and Shabbat observance in general, are primarily derived not from the Bible but rather from the Oral Torah. One Orthodox rabbi stated that outside of the introduction of the Sabbath in Genesis, the two sets of commandments, and several other independent mentions of the Sabbath, "you'll not have any idea how to observe the Sabbath because the Hebrew Bible says precious little about how people

observe it." So, how do you define and apply it? He continued, "The rabbis say that the laws of the Sabbath are like mountains hanging by a thread. The thread is the biblical prescription, but the mountain is a very robust, you know, corpus of laws of how to observe the Sabbath."

This forced me to pause and consider where I, as an Adventist, derive my Sabbath parameters. Is it really from scripture, or are other sources at play? Perhaps more importantly, once we identify those sources, what is our relationship to them? According to Nicholas de Lange, "*Halakhah* is not the only issue dividing Jews today; . . . it is the theology that underpins it that really divides Orthodox Judaism from the progressive movements and the secularists."²¹ For Adventists, certainly the experience and writings of Ellen G. White play a role in our interpretation. However, we must remember to contextualize her life's work as a person who lived during the Victorian era, which had a Puritan heritage of observing Sunday as the Sabbath.²² I suspect that for early Adventists, seventh-day Sabbath observance was commensurate with a Sunday Sabbatarians' observance, just on a different day. It was the shift of the *day* that set Adventist pioneers apart from other churches and their understanding of the significance of the seventh-day Sabbath—not necessarily their practices on that day.²³

Much more nuance exists when it comes to how seventh-day Sabbatarians actually practice the Sabbath than we may wish to admit.²⁴ It is interesting that over the millennia, Judaism has held together despite a variety of interpretations of how to observe the Sabbath. There are certainly debates as to who is right; yet through it all, the Sabbath, in its myriad ways of observance and celebration, has kept Judaism Jewish. Without any prompting, every rabbi I interviewed quoted Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am: "More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews." Celebrating Shabbat during the festival of Purim at the Western Wall in

Sabbath observance also serves as a witness to Christianity's origin in Jewish faith and practice.

Jerusalem—the holiest place on earth in Judaism—has been one of the greatest examples of this. I saw Orthodox Jews *davening*, or praying, with tears streaming down their faces alongside equally emotional young secular Jews serving in the military who locked arms as they danced with machine guns strapped to their backs. Both are expressions of Sabbath joy and speak to how varied practices encompass a great breadth of meaning. Consequently, it could be helpful to embrace a broader approach to Sabbath observance and encourage a variety of expressions, not mistaking Sabbath uniformity for denominational unity or fearing that diversity will lead to division.

Conclusion

I am reminded of a statement made by the late Walter Wink: "The ultimate religious question today should no longer be the Reformation's question, 'How can I find a gracious God?' but rather, 'How can we find God in our enemies?'"²⁵ If this is true, where do we begin? For the Christian, particularly the Seventh-day Adventist, we must not ignore our connection to Judaism. As Michael Barnes argues, "The retrieval of Christianity's roots in its relationship with the people of the Covenant forms the matrix or creative heart of a new way of relating to people from other faith traditions."²⁶

Hence, if the church cannot resolve its relationship with Judaism, what can

be done for the future of Christianity, which is quickly being pushed to the margins of Western society? I would argue that given our current pluralistic and fragmented world, to make Jewish-Christian dialogue and reconciliation a priority is an important aspect to what makes present truth present. Moreover, “when grace and law come together,” muses Doukhan, such reconciliation could even be a “sign of the end.”²⁷ In this respect, the Sabbath as an embodied practice offers a rich starting point. 📖

- 1 Jacques B. Doukhan cautions that when Seventh-day Adventists overemphasize how the Sabbath came from God at the event of creation, to the exclusion of the Sinai account, “it may in fact disguise the old anti-Semitic prejudice: they do not want to have anything to do with the Jews, precisely the motivation which led the early Christians to reject the Sabbath.” Jacques B. Doukhan, “What Can Adventism Learn From the Jews about the Sabbath?” *Spectrum* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 15–20.
- 2 For example, commenting on Gen. 2:2, 3, Umberto Cassuto writes: “Scripture wishes to emphasize that the sanctity of the Sabbath is older than Israel, and rests upon all mankind,” in *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part I: From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1972), 64. See also Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* (New York: Humanity, 2011); Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985).
- 3 Michael Lodahl, “Sabbath Observance as a Theological Issue in Jewish-Christian Conversation,” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, eds. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, and William H. Shea (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 264.
- 4 For a few examples, see Johann Baptist Metz, “Christians and Jews After Auschwitz: Being a Meditation Also on the End of Bourgeois Religion,” in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (New York: Oxford University, 2001), 238–250; Clark M. Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993). For an Adventist contribution, see Jacques B. Doukhan, ed., *Thinking in the Shadow of Hell: The Impact of the Holocaust on Theology and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2002).
- 5 Vatican II was the watershed that set the standard not only for Roman Catholicism but also for statements issued thereafter by denominations across Protestantism. See Pope Paul VI, “*Nostra Aetate*: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” October 28, 1965 (Holy See, 1965), www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_dec_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html; Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1975). For the historical and theological reasons as to why and how the Roman Catholic Church radically reversed its adversarial position to the Jews, consider John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2012). For the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s involvement, see Adventist-Jewish Friendship Conference, “Consensus Statement,” *Shabbat Shalom* 52, no. 3 (2005): 24, 25; Biblical Research Institute Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Official Statement on the Jewish-Adventist Connection,” *Reflections: Biblical Research Institute Newsletter* 3 (July 2003): 2.

- 6 A couple of good introductory texts include Mary C. Boys, ed., *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity’s Sacred Obligation* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000). Summarizing these developments within Adventism, Stefan Hörschle writes, “The last decade [2000–2010] has seen a number of publications that stress the continuity of the Jewish and Adventist faiths . . . and that counteract the theory that Israel has been rejected by God in the Christian dispensation.” Stefan Hörschle, “The Emerging Adventist Theology of Religions Discourse: Participants, Positions, Particularities,” in *A Man of Passionate Reflection: Festschrift in Honour of Jerald Whitehouse*, ed. Bruce Bauer, *Andrews University Mission Studies*, vol. 8 (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2011), 364. Another rich resource is a journal Doukhan edited for sixteen years: *Shabbat Shalom: A Journal of Jewish-Christian Reconciliation*.
- 7 Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014). See also Dorothy C. Bass, “Keeping the Sabbath,” in *Practicing Our Faith*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 75–89; Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989); Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam, 2000); Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006).
- 8 Claire E. Wolfteich, “Re-claiming Sabbath as Transforming Practice: Critical Reflections in Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Religion, Diversity, and Conflict*, ed. Edward Foley (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), 248.
- 9 Among their many writings, see Jacques B. Doukhan, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002); Richard M. Davidson, *Love Song for the Sabbath* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988); and “Sabbath, Spirituality and Mission: Torah’s Seven Dimensions of Sabbath Rest,” in *Encountering God in Life and Mission: A Festschrift Honoring Jon Dybdahl*, ed. Rudi Maier (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2010), 3–19.
- 10 Although *Shabbat* and *Sabbath* are the same word—the former is transliterated from the Hebrew and the latter is English—in this article I cite them with a specific intention in mind. When I use *Shabbat*, I am generally referring to the Jewish expression, and when I use *Sabbath*, I am generally referring to the Christian expression.
- 11 Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2009), 511.
- 12 Empirical research is one of the hallmarks of the academic field of practical theology. But what exactly is “practical theology”? Here, I follow Richard Osmer’s definition: practical theology is “that branch of Christian theology that seeks to construct action-guiding theories of Christian praxis in particular social contexts.” Moreover, “it focuses on the ‘how to’ within Christian ministry, but is guided by an informed theory of ‘why to’—why we ought to practice the Christian way of life in certain ways in light of an interpretation of a particular social context and the normative claims of the Christian community,” in Richard Robert Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), xiv. For an example of Sabbath empirical research on pastors, see Erik C. Carter, “The Practice and Experience of the Sabbath Among Seventh-day Adventist Pastors,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (February 2013): 13–26.
- 13 It is important to note that my findings, which are based on six interviews, are not intended to be generalized to represent all Jewish rabbis. Despite relatively small sample sizes, in qualitative research this is not viewed as a methodological flaw nor does it prohibit transferability of meaning as findings “resonate with the experiences of the participants or others.” John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 122. More specifically, as a study that draws from a phenomenological research methodology, attention to particularity is key. In other words, it is idiographic: “It wants to know in detail what the experience for this person is like, what sense this particular person is making of what is happening to them.” Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, and Research* (London: SAGE, 2013), 3 (emphasis theirs). For a fuller treatment, see my forthcoming dissertation, Erik C. Carter, “American Pulpit Rabbis’ Sabbath Practices in Practical Theological Perspective” (PhD diss., Claremont School of Theology).
- 14 Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University, 2004), xiv, xx.
- 15 Ibid., xv.
- 16 Elizabeth Tighe et al., “American Jewish Population Estimates: 2012,” *Steinhardt Social Research Institute*, Brandeis University (September 2013), 1.
- 17 “A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings From a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews,” *Pew Research Center* (October 2013), 10.
- 18 Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal* (New York: Columbia University, 2009), 69.
- 19 An *Eruv* is an enclosure created by demarcating eligible public domain to extend private domain because certain items can be carried in private, but not in public. From Jewish Virtual Library, s.v. “Shabbat: Eruv,” www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/source/Judaism/eruv.html.
- 20 On this point, Roy Branson’s observation coincides with the experience of this particular rabbi: “Orthodox’s discussion of the Sabbath emphasizes how conformity to the law brings man’s actions into line with the will of the Creator. But conformity to God’s will does not result in dreariness. On the contrary, for the Orthodox, as for all Jews, the Sabbath brings a sense of freedom and joyfulness.” Roy Branson, “The Sabbath in Modern Jewish Theology,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 269.
- 21 Nicholas de Lange, *An Introduction to Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 221.
- 22 Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (New York: Oxford University, 2014).
- 23 For an exposition of this development of Christian Sabbath observance, see Erik C. Carter, “Sabbatarianism,” in *Encyclopedia of Christian Education*, eds. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).
- 24 See May-Ellen Marian Colón, “Sabbath-Keeping Practices and Factors Related to These Practices Among Seventh-day Adventists in 51 Countries” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2003). Her dissertation has been edited for accessibility and published for a popular audience under the title *From Sundown to Sundown: How to Keep the Sabbath and Enjoy It!* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2008).
- 25 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 263.
- 26 Michael Barnes S. J., *Interreligious Learning: Dialogue, Spirituality and the Christian Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2012), 50.
- 27 On this point, Doukhan writes, “The dream of reconciliation, when grace and law come together, I believe would be a sign of the end. . . . In a way, without knowing it, Seventh-day Adventist people are working toward reconciliation without necessarily knowing or wanting it. It happens that in [the Seventh-day Adventist] context, you have grace and law, Old and New Testaments together, and that promotes and allows reconciliation.” Quoted from “Building Bridges,” Office of Research and Creative Scholarship, Andrews University (2011), accessed June 25, 2014, www.andrews.edu/services/research/research_highlights/research_brochure/2011_brochure/building_bridges/index.html.

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The Sabbath experience

Early in my ministry, while confidently conducting a Bible study to prove that the Sabbath originated at Creation, I faced challenges that I had not previously encountered. The person I was studying with, having given thought to this topic, presented the following argument about what Genesis 2:2, 3 reveals about Sabbath origins.

First, he admitted that God rested on the seventh day, but then proposed that there is no command in the Creation account for anyone else (Adam and Eve) to rest. Yes, he said, God blessed the seventh day, but nothing in the Creation account specified that each subsequent seventh day was also blessed or sanctified. Add to this, he argued, the words *Sabbath*, *law*, or *commandment* do not appear in Genesis 2:2, 3. When I said that the idea of keeping the Sabbath was implied, if not specifically stated, he answered that silence is not a valid or acceptable exegetical principle.

What is the evidence found in the Scriptures regarding creation and the Sabbath? And if indeed the gift of a weekly Sabbath was given in Eden, how did our Creator intend for His creation to experience Sabbath?

Rest and fellowship in Eden

On the first seventh day on planet Earth, God was not tired from speaking our world and its inhabitants into existence. Likewise, Adam and Eve were probably not worn out after just hours of life. In harmony with the Creator's

plan, the first full day of life for Adam and Eve was a day of restful fellowship with their Creator and each other. It makes sense that when God set aside a special day by resting upon it, blessing it, and setting it apart for a holy use, He did so for the benefit of His created children and their descendants. Thus, keeping the Sabbath holy necessitates a connection with the Holy One and constitutes a regular reminder of God's desire to fellowship with us.

Rest and fellowship at Sinai

Probably the most compelling passage where God refers to Creation Sabbath is Exodus 20:8–11. The Sabbath commandment is the longest commandment; the only one that begins with the word *Remember*; and a clear reference to the Genesis Creation account, the latter part being an almost direct quote from Genesis 2:3. The only difference is that in Genesis 2:3 God blessed the *seventh* day and made it holy, while in Exodus 20:11 God blessed the *Sabbath* day and made it holy. This connection between the Sabbath and creation is supported in that the Hebrew word translated “Sabbath” (*Shabbat*) and the Hebrew word translated “rest” (*shabat*) are cognates.

Perhaps another indication that the Sabbath's origin was at creation is the fact that all of the verbs in Exodus 20:11 (made, rested, blessed) are in the past tense. Even the words “made it holy,” within this context, are in the past tense. This suggests that God's resting on the

Sabbath and His blessing of the Sabbath took place at the time when He made the Sabbath, that is, as the text says, when God created the heavens and the earth.

Rest and fellowship in Jesus' day

In Mark 2:27, Jesus said, “‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’” (NIV) In response to the Pharisees' accusations of Sabbath breaking, Jesus did not enter into arguments regarding Jewish Sabbath laws. Rather, He sought to impress them that the Sabbath was made to be a blessing to humankind in the sense that the Sabbath was a weekly opportunity to focus on rest and relationship and not on the numerous laws instituted to dictate acceptable or unacceptable Sabbath practices.

Instead, Jesus was referring back to the original creation itself. Man could not have been created for the Sabbath because, when humankind was created, the Sabbath was still some hours away. On the other hand, the Sabbath could be created for humankind because, when God created the Sabbath on the seventh day, people were already there and could enjoy the blessings of this special fellowship day. Jesus Himself puts together the creation of man, the institution of the Sabbath, and the time when things were made. He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28) because He is the Creator (John 1:1–3, 14).

Rest and fellowship today

God is the One with whom the idea of Sabbath originated. It is He who

set aside this special day. It is He who specified why we need a Sabbath day, and it is He who calls us into fellowship with Himself on this day. This relational emphasis is demonstrated through an apparent purposeful ordering of the first four commandments.

The first commandment forbids having any other gods. Now if we have other gods and put them first, they will be idols. So, the second commandment forbids idols and the worship of them. If we did worship idols, we would surely be misusing the name of God. Consequently, the third commandment tells us not to misuse His name. Now if we were misusing God's name through the worship of idols, we would be giving time to false worship, so in the fourth commandment, God tells us to keep the Sabbath holy by spending time with Him.

Of course, if the Sabbath was given at creation, then the Sabbath was not just for the ancient Jewish nation but a


gift for all humankind. God did not mistakenly insert a temporary Jewish law into a set of moral principles intended for all of humankind for all time. The Sabbath is a part of God's moral law, the Ten Commandments. Morality has to do with right and wrong, and the Sabbath is a part of God's moral law as it relates to right and wrong in our relationship with Him.

Also important for us to understand is that the Sabbath is part of the good news about God. Not only has God provided the great plan of salvation, He also provided a special day on which to fellowship while the plan unfolds. And just as God is particular about this day, so His followers should be particular about this day.

How well we keep the Sabbath does not depend on how well we know the rules or how hard we try, or even on how often we rebuke others whom we consider to be Sabbath breakers,

but on how well we know the Lord of the Sabbath and connect with Him, particularly on the Sabbath.

God wants our Sabbath rest to be a complete rest both physically and spiritually. That is what Jesus speaks about in Matthew 11:28 when He invites us to receive rest from our labors and rest for our souls. That complete rest, however, as Jesus points out, is conditional on our coming to Him.

If then, as we have seen, the Sabbath as a day of restful fellowship and worship originated at creation, and if, as we have also seen, the Sabbath is a day for connecting spiritually with God through worship in response to His love, we are in a better position to understand what happened on that very first Sabbath, the seventh day of Creation. And therefore, we are in a better position to enter and enjoy the Sabbath experience with God that He intended from the beginning. 

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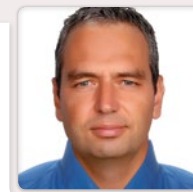
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Naming the days of the week: Overlooked evidence into early Christian Sabbatarian practice

From the Creation account through the mighty movement of Exodus and the ups and downs of Israel's history chronicled in the Old Testament, the Sabbath stands out as God's memorial of creation and redemption and as a unique day of worship and fellowship for God's people. But, what about the New Testament? Did the apostles and early Christians keep the Sabbath? Or did the death of Jesus on the cross mark the beginning of new realities in relation to Sabbath? The answer to these questions affects the attitude we adopt today toward Sabbath because, as Christians, we endeavor to emulate the faith and practice of the early church.

Three main views may be noted regarding the attitude of early Christians on Sabbath observance. First, Jesus, the apostles, and the early Christians continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath, just as it was done in the Old Testament times. Second, a transition from Sabbath to Sunday took place in the early centuries of Christian history, with Sunday gradually taking the place of the seventh-day Sabbath. Third, the concept of Sabbath itself underwent a change, suggesting that with the death

of Jesus, Sabbath was abolished altogether and now there is no longer any holy day in the weekly cycle and all days are the same.

This study will not attempt a comprehensive answer to all issues involved. Rather, it will focus on one aspect: the names of weekdays in the New Testament and other early Christian literature and how these names inform the above debate.

The New Testament gives us names for three of the days of the week, the first, sixth, and seventh; Sunday, Friday, and Saturday in modern parlance. We will begin with these and explore them in reverse order before looking at the remaining days of the week in other literature.

The seventh day

The New Testament calls the seventh day "Sabbath," Greek *sabbaton*.¹ It translates the Hebrew word *shabbat* (Sabbath), that in turn comes from the verb *shabat*, "to cease, desist, rest,"² a term that denotes the biblical day of rest and worship. *Sabbaton* appears 68 times in the New Testament, all relating to the seventh day, with the possible exception of Colossians 2:16.³

Biblically speaking, *Sabbath* is a title, not a name. When we speak of John the Baptist, "John" is the name, and "Baptist" is his title that defines his role.⁴ When we refer to the apostle Paul, "Paul" is the name and "apostle" his title.⁵

Likewise when we read, "'The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God'" (Exod. 20:10),⁶ the name of the day is "seventh." Such usage is in line with the practice of the Hebrews in both biblical times⁷ and now to name the days using numerals.⁸ "Sabbath" is a title. As such, "Sabbath" defines the special role of the seventh day as a day of rest and worship.⁹ While true that eventually it came to be used as a name, biblically and theologically, "Sabbath" is a title.

The title usage is especially evident in the writings of Luke. While other New Testament writers refer to the seventh day simply by the noun "Sabbath," Luke uses six times the form "day of the Sabbath," *hēmera tōn sabbatōn*.¹⁰ In biblical Greek, when the nominative, accusative, or dative of the noun "day" (*hēmera*) is followed by a substantive in the genitive as is the case here, the genitive functions adjectivally and defines the head noun "day."¹¹ For example, the "days of wheat harvest" of Genesis

30:14 are the days in which the harvest takes place. The day of purification of Exodus 29:36 was the day in which certain sacrifices were offered. Likewise, we have the day of “gladness” (Num. 10:10), “atonement” (Lev. 23:27; 25:9), “vow” (Num. 6:5), “plague” (Num. 25:18), and many more.

Likewise, *hēmera tōn sabbatōn* should be translated as an adjectival genitive of apposition, “the day *which* is the Sabbath” confirming that Sabbath is used as a title descriptively.¹² To define a day by its title when the title was supposedly no longer valid makes no sense. The most natural conclusion is that Luke described the seventh day thus because the seventh day, approximately 30 years after the death of Jesus on the cross, was still the Sabbath.

Furthermore, Luke’s “day of the Sabbath” is a relatively rare construction and is used for the first time in the LXX of the fourth commandment. Literally, “remember the day which is the Sabbath to keep it holy.” A similar construction appears in the Deuteronomical reiteration of the commandments (Deut. 5:12, 15). Most subsequent usages appear in legal texts where prescriptive and prohibitive Sabbath behavior is defined.¹³ It would be strange indeed for Luke, a Gentile Christian, to use terminology that derives from the LXX and appears almost exclusively in legal contexts, if he considered these legal contexts to be entirely defunct.

Apart from the use of the word *Sabbath*, the seventh day is twice referred to simply by the numerical designation “seventh day.” Both instances are in Hebrews 4:4.

The sixth day

The New Testament refers directly five times to the sixth day. All are found in the Crucifixion accounts. Two titles are used: *paraskeuē* (Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31)¹⁴ and *prosabbaton* (Mark 15:42).

Paraskeuē means “preparation.”¹⁵ Preparation for what? Clearly for the seventh-day Sabbath that follows.¹⁶ This is evident in Luke’s use, “It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was

beginning” (Luke 23:54). As a preparation day, it was bound up with the keeping of the Sabbath. Nolland comments, “‘The day of preparation’ is the day before the sabbath, on which preparations needed to be made so that the sabbath restrictions could be faithfully observed.”¹⁷

The word *prosabbaton* literally means “the [day] before the Sabbath.”¹⁸ It assumes a sense of movement towards the Sabbath. The word only appears in Mark 15:42, but Luke, in his parallel text, likewise highlights the sense of movement by stating that it was preparation day and “the Sabbath was beginning” (Luke 23:54). The designation of Friday as both *paraskeuē* and *prosabbaton*, therefore, clearly point to the Sabbath as the apex of the week.

The first day

Perhaps the most telling terminology relates to the “first day of the week.” There are eight references in the New Testament (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).¹⁹ The Greek term is *mia sabbatōn* or variants with similar semantic force. They are all comprised of the numerical adjective “first” followed by the noun “Sabbath.”

English translations unanimously render *mia sabbatōn* and its variants as “first day of the week”; that is, they translate *sabbatōn* with the English “week.” But is such a translation correct? The word *sabbatōn* nowhere refers to the week; it always refers to the Sabbath. The Greek word for week is *hebdomas*.²⁰

The phrase should instead be translated in any of the three following ways. Bruce translates *mia sabbatōn* as “first day after the Sabbath.”²¹ Lenski prefers the translation, “the first day with reference to the Sabbath.”²² A third possibility is “first [day] towards the Sabbath.”²³

Whichever of the three translations of *mia sabbatōn* we opt for, the point is that all three highlight the importance of the Sabbath as the apex of the week.²⁴ Of the three, I prefer the third option, “first [day] towards the Sabbath” on account of the fact that the term *prosabbaton* noted above as referring to Friday, also indicates direction towards the Sabbath.

Remaining days of the week

We have looked at the New Testament designations for the first, sixth, and seventh days of the week, Sunday, Friday, and Saturday in modern English. What about the remaining ones?

The New Testament does not provide the names for these, but other contemporary sources do. The second day (Monday) was called *deutera sabbatōn*; the third (Tuesday), *tritē sabbatōn*; the fourth (Wednesday), *tetartē sabbatōn* or *tetrad sabbatōn*; and the fifth (Thursday), *pemptē sabbatōn*; “second . . . third . . . fourth . . . fifth . . . [day] towards the Sabbath” respectively.²⁵ These, too, are therefore designated with reference to the Sabbath.

Latin does not have a direct relevance to the New Testament text because the New Testament was written in Greek. Nonetheless, Latin was the second most common language after Greek among early Christian writers.

In the Vulgate, a Latin translation of the Bible dating from the fourth century, we find the following names for the days of the week. Sunday is designated *prima sabbati*,²⁶ or *una sabbati*,²⁷ both of which carry the meaning “first [day] to/after the Sabbath.” Monday is called *secunda sabbati*, “second [day] to/after the Sabbath,”²⁸ and Wednesday *quarta sabbati*, “fourth [day] to/after the Sabbath.”²⁹ Friday is called *parasceve*,³⁰ a direct transliteration from the Greek word *paraskeuē*, which, as was noted above, indicates preparation for the Sabbath. Names for the other days of the week are lacking.

In nonbiblical ecclesiastical Latin, the days were likewise grouped around the Sabbath. For example, Sunday was named *feria prima*.³¹ *Feria* designated a “free day,” a day in which individuals, and even slaves, were not required to do any work and on which courts did not meet. Initially a secular Roman concept, in Christian vocabulary it became a reference to a religious holiday or holy day.³²

As such, *feria prima* means the “first [day] after the holy day” (i.e., the first day after Sabbath).³³ Monday was called *secunda feria*, “second [day]

after the holy day”; Tuesday, *tertia feria*; Wednesday, *quarta feria*; Thursday, *quinta feria*; Friday, *sexta feria*; namely “third . . . fourth . . . fifth . . . sixth . . . [day] after the holy day.”³⁴

The seventh day was called *sabbatum*, Sabbath, a loan word from the Hebrew *shabbat* through the Greek *sabaton*. This Latin system of naming the days is still followed by the Portuguese language.

Evaluation

Bringing the evidence together we can create the following table:

English	NT/Early Christian Greek	Alternative NT Greek	Vulgate Latin	Church Latin
Sunday	1st towards the Sabbath		1st to/after the Sabbath	1st after the holy day
Monday	2nd towards the Sabbath		2nd to/after the Sabbath	2nd after the holy day
Tuesday	3rd towards the Sabbath			3rd after the holy day
Wednesday	4th towards the Sabbath		4th to/after the Sabbath	4th after the holy day
Thursday	5th towards the Sabbath			5th after the holy day
Friday	Preparation [for the Sabbath]	Day before Sabbath	<i>Parasceve</i> (Preparation)	6th after the holy day
Saturday	Sabbath	Day of the Sabbath	Sabbath	Sabbath

From the above discussion and table, it is evident that the New Testament (NT) and other early Christian writers, Greek and Latin, uniformly used a weekday nomenclature that is decidedly Sabbatarian.

They called the seventh day “the Sabbath,” though it supposedly no longer was; the sixth day either “Preparation [for the Sabbath]” or “the day before the Sabbath,” though it supposedly no longer was either;³⁵ and the remaining days of the week, with a designating numeral followed by a reference to the Sabbath, highlighting the Sabbath as the focus of the week, when supposedly there no longer was a Sabbath.

Why did the early Christians use such language? One can speculate that they did it out of habit. Most New Testament writers were Jews and, therefore, would have been accustomed to the habit of Jews to designate the week on the basis of the Sabbath.

But such speculation cannot stand. First, at least one of the New Testament writers, Luke, was a Gentile convert,


not a Jewish Christian. Second, most of the New Testament books, though written by Jews, were addressed to Gentile Christians. As such, the writers could have used language palatable to Gentiles. Third, most other Christian Greek and Latin writers were of Gentile background.

Greeks and Latins already had names for the days of the week, planetary names much like modern English.³⁶ So in adopting a different set of names, they were going *against* their habit, *against* the usual names used in their societies.

One could still object that planetary names could give an impression of idolatrous practice because the secular Greeks and Romans who used such names were pagan. But even in this case, Christian writers could have designated the days of the week using numerals, without including any reference to the Sabbath. This is the case in many languages today and was in use among Jews at the time of Jesus and the apostles. After all, Hebrews 4:4 twice refers to the seventh day as “seventh” or “seventh day,”³⁷ while “sixth day” is the most usual Old Testament appellation for Friday.³⁸

But Christian writers deliberately rejected both planetary names and (with the exception of Hebrews 4:4) simple numeric names in favor of a nomenclature that is decidedly Sabbatarian.

Why? The only logical conclusion is that the apostles and other early Christian writers used Sabbatarian language because they were Sabbatharians; that is, they continued to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, just like God’s people had done for millennia

before them. To suggest that either the Sabbath was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week or it was abolished altogether goes against the evidence examined above. 

- 1 F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text With Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 260.
- 2 William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 991.
- 3 See, e.g., Ron du Preez, *Judging the Sabbath: Discovering What Can't Be Found in Colossians 2:16* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2008). Du Preez argues with erudition that the “Sabbaths” of Colossians 2:16 referred to the three major annual feasts of Israel. By contrast, see Kim Papaioannou and Michael Mxolisi Sokupa, “Does Colossians 2:16, 17 Abolish the Sabbath?” *Advertiser Review*, February 23, 2012, for the view that Colossians 2:16 refers to the weekly Sabbath.

- 4 See F. F. Bruce in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. James Dixon Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), s.v. “John the Baptist.”
- 5 See A. F. Walls, *ibid.*, s.v. “Apostle.”
- 6 All Scripture passages in this article are from the English Standard Version.
- 7 See Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:3; compare to numeral system in Hebrew.
- 8 R. K. Harrison, *Teach Yourself Biblical Hebrew* (London: Richard Clay, 1955), 104–108; E. Kautsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 286–292.
- 9 John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 289.
- 10 Luke 4:16; 13:14, 16; 14:5; Acts 13:14; 16:13. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 509.
- 11 Daniel B. Wallace notes that all adjectival genitives are in some way descriptive. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 78, 79.
- 12 For the uses of the genitive of apposition, see *ibid.*, 95.
- 13 Exodus 35:3; Leviticus 24:8; Numbers 15:32, 33; 28:9; Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15, 17, 19, 22; Jeremiah 17:21, 22, 24, 27; Ezekiel 46:1, 4, 12.
- 14 John 19:14 and 42 also use the same terminology but most likely refer to the preparation for the Passover rather than for the Sabbath, though in that instance the preparation for the Sabbath and the Passover coincided (John 19:31).
- 15 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1324.
- 16 Walter Bauer and Frederick Danker, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 771, define it as the day “on which . . . everything had to be prepared for the Sabbath.”
- 17 John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol.

- 35c (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 1164.
- 18 Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1499; Robert H. Stein, Mark, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 723, 724. Stein insightfully observes that Mark is using the Jewish calendar and reckoning of days and explains it to his Greek readers. See also Horst Balz, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982–1983), s.v. “paraskeuh.” Balz notes that the term continued into early Christian usage.
- 19 Some would argue that the “Lord’s Day” of Revelation 1:10 is also a reference to Sunday. This is unlikely because there is no evidence that Sunday was named so at the time John wrote Revelation. Biblically speaking it is a reference either to the seventh-day Sabbath, which in the Bible is called the “Sabbath to the Lord” (Exod. 20:10), or to the prophetic “Day of the Lord” (e.g., Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), the day of the appearing of Jesus.
- 20 See, e.g., Genesis 29:27, 28; Exodus 34:22; Leviticus 23:15, 16; 25:8; Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 16:9 (2x), 10, 16; 2 Chronicles 8:13; Daniel 9:24, 27; 10:2, 3; *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 269.
- 21 Bruce, *Acts*, 372. Ben Witherington III, though in favor of the translation “first day of the week,” acknowledges that the phrase originally was a reference to the Sabbath. He renders the original meaning of the phrase *mia sabbaton* as “first day after the sabbath.” Bruce, *Acts*, 606.
- 22 Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* 175–28 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1944), 824. Lenski notes that “the Jews had no definite names for the days of the week.” This is not completely true because numerals functioned as names. The choice to define the week by the Sabbath was not due to an absence of an alternative naming system but rather an indication of respect for that important institution.
- 23 See the genitive of destination in Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 100, 101. Examples of genitive of destination are Matthew 10:5; Acts 16:17; Romans 8:36; 9:22; Galatians 2:7; Ephesians 2:3, among others.
- 24 A. T. Lincoln admits the Sabbatarian designation of the week when he states that the phrase *mia sabbaton* and cognates “reflect the terminology of Gentile Christian churches for Sunday as the first day in the sequence determined by the Sabbath.” “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie, 1982), 398.
- 25 See LXX Psalms 47:1; 93:1; Josephus, *Wars* 2.289; *Didache* 8:1; “Εβδομήδα,” *Wikipedia*, accessed May 27, 2014, <http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/Εβδομήδα>; Werner Fröhlich, “The Days of the Week in Various Languages,” accessed May 27, 2014, <http://www.geonames.de/days.html>; GDZ, accessed May 27, 2014, http://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/de/dms/load/toc/?PPN=PPN655965645&DMDID=DMDLOG_0001.
- 26 See Vulgate, Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:9.
- 27 See Vulgate, Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2.
- 28 See Vulgate, Psalm 47:1.
- 29 See Vulgate, Psalm 93:1.
- 30 See Vulgate, Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31.
- 31 Faith Wallis, “Chronology and Systems of Dating,” in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, eds. Frank Anthony Carl Mantello and A. G. Rigg (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1996), 385.
- 32 See, e.g., “Feria,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, New Advent, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06043a.htm>.
- 33 In later centuries, the name of the first day of the week was changed from *feria prima* to *dominica* or *dies dominicus*, “day of the Lord,” but this was a later development.
- 34 Fröhlich, “The Days of the Week,” <http://www.geonames.de/days.html>.
- 35 Eduard Lohse points out this discrepancy but fails to explain it. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), s.v. “sabbaton.”
- 36 There is some uncertainty as to when planetary names became commonplace, but E. G. Richards cites Plutarch, who indicates that planetary names were becoming well known. *Mapping Time: The Calendar and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 269.
- 37 The use of the numeral “seventh” for the seventh day of the week is common in the LXX (Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 16:26, 27, 29, 30; 20:10, 11; 23:12; 24:14; 31:15, 17; 34:21; 35:2; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:14; 2 Sam. 12:18; and possibly Esther 1:10).
- 38 Genesis 1:31; 2:2; Exodus 16:5, 22, 29.

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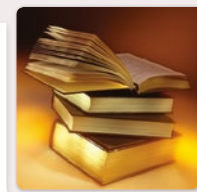
READING THROUGH THE BIBLE TOGETHER

Better is a dry morsel, and quietness
thitherto, than an house full of
fees with strife.
2 A wise servant shall have rule over a
day of judgment for which the wicked were made, there-
fore, the hearts of the redeemed.
16-18 **Proph. pride** was the primeval sin of Satan
before his fall (1 Timothy 3:6; 1 Corinthians 10:12).
16-18 **snags of death.** See the same verse in
Proverbs 14:12. This is an important truth.

17-16 **their fathers.** A great incentive for godly living
is the example set for one's children and grandchildren,
that they may indeed "glory" in their parents.

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Toughest People to Love: How to Understand, Lead, and Love the Difficult People in Your Life—Including Yourself

by Chuck DeGroat, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.

The author draws upon his experience as a pastor, seminary professor, therapist, and church leader to challenge the reader to think differently about very difficult people and to explore new ways of relating to them.

He observes that leaders often complicate the process of interacting with perplexing people by demanding repentance, devising fix-it strategies, or offering insights to straighten them out. What is needed, instead, is a broader vision, a recognition that many times people are the way they are because of the events that shaped their lives and by the ways in which they responded at those crucial turning points in their stories.

With this larger perspective comes the recognition that, although people can make changes if they are ordered to change, deep change goes beyond mere compliance demanded by an authority figure. This occurs when people are invested in making self-chosen change in order to further a shared vision that they embrace.

This calls for a significant shift in thinking on the part of leaders. They need to move away from a command-and-control posture to one in which relationship becomes the essential means of partnering with people to achieve success.

In order to get the most out of leading relationally, two things are necessary. Leaders need to address their own counterproductive ways of

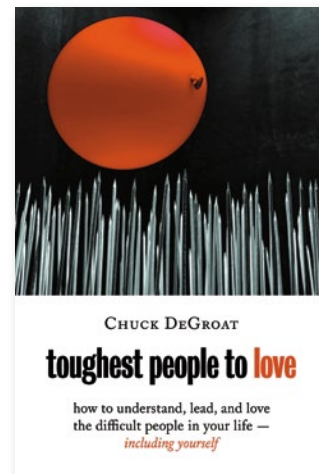
relating that interfere with relationship building, and they need to understand how to relate in healthy ways with both amiable and difficult people.

Despite a natural reticence to do so, leaders need to examine their lives to become better acquainted with themselves and to discover the extent to which the wounds of childhood, which everyone suffers to one degree or another, complicate their adult relationships. They need to understand how securely or insecurely they were attached to their primary caregivers and how their early relational complexities are reflected in healthy or maladaptive interaction patterns.

With a deepened awareness about how relationships work and informed by their own experiences, leaders can give their attention to understanding three categories of the “toughest people to love.”

Individuals with personality disorders are among the most broken people among us, and interacting with them can be the hardest thing leaders do. Yet, there remains in them a dim reflection of the image of God. And He appeals to leaders to love and care for them as well.

Without delving into the clinical complexities, the author provides practical insights that assist leaders in interacting beneficially with persons who are beset with narcissistic personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive




personality disorder, or histrionic personality disorder.

Persons with addictions are particularly challenging to relate to because lies, deception, and manipulation are deeply engrained survival tactics that they use. The author suggests a threefold approach that addresses the immediate behavioral issues, root causes, and family-related matters.

DeGroat also provides valuable counsel about dealing with those he refers to as fools—simple fools, self-consumed fools, and sinister fools. This includes wading “into the murky waters of relationship” with some and protecting one’s self and others from dangerous fools.

This spiritually insightful book is about the essential role that leaders play in cooperating with the Holy Spirit’s efforts to restore the image of God in people. This book eloquently articulates that, through the uplifting influence of their leaders’ godly relationships, even the most difficult people can find deeper meaning in their lives, enjoy greater fulfillment in what they do, and, by following their leader’s example, can learn how to relate more winsomely with others.

—Reviewed by Peter Swanson, PhD, associate professor of pastoral care at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. 



Avoiding pastoral burnout

What is your greatest challenge in ministry? I am sure we could find numerous answers to that question, but let me suggest one that is mentioned more and more frequently: exhaustion.

Pastors are tired, drained, depleted. Pastoral burnout can occur at any time and in any location. Burnout happens for pastors early in their ministry and for pastors with just a few years left before retirement. Pastors experiencing a fruitful ministry get burned out. So do pastors who see minimal fruit for their labors.

What are some of the major causes of pastoral burnout? Thom Rainer suggests seven reasons:*

- 1. The 24/7 mentality.** Many pastors feel driven to work 24/7. After all, there is a world to save, and the needs are great. Unfortunately, such an attitude will inevitably lead to exhaustion and put you at risk of breakdown and burnout.
- 2. Conflict.** Experiencing ongoing conflict in a church congregation is draining both for the pastor and for the congregation. Conflict not handled in a healthy way results in a physical and emotional toll.
- 3. Expectations.** Pastors who try to meet everyone's expectations all of the time will inevitably fail and burn out.
- 4. Unwillingness to let go.** Have you ever found yourself doing something at the church that you know you should have delegated to someone else? Failure to delegate to others will both stifle your ministry and put you at risk of burnout.
- 5. No friends.** Pastors tend to move several times during their career. If

you are not careful and intentional, you can become isolated and separated from meaningful friendships.


- 6. Not suited for some tasks.** If the majority of your time is spent on tasks for which you are not suited, you will feel drained and depleted.
- 7. No life outside the church.** Pastoral ministry can swallow you up like quicksand. If you have no life outside of your church work, you will become unbalanced and unhealthy.

Some proactive strategies to avoid pastoral burnout:

- 1. Set realistic work goals.** You are not expected to work 24/7. Emergencies may occur, but you do not have to live your whole life in emergency mode. Schedule quality time for your family, and make sure that you get an adequate amount of rest.
- 2. Learn to manage conflict in a healthy way.** Conflict is unavoidable. If the situation seems unmanageable, seek counsel. If the environment is toxic, you always have the option to leave in order to stay healthy. Do not allow burnout to be one of your options for dealing with conflict.
- 3. Clarify expectations with church leaders.** Clear expectations lead to stability. Learn what your church leaders expect of you as their pastor. Engage the assistance of key leaders in clarifying those expectations, and make sure that they are doable and realistic.
- 4. Delegate responsibility wisely.** Do not try to do everything yourself. Follow the counsel of Scripture and delegate to those who are of

good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of wisdom. Release authority to those leaders and devote your time to equipping and nurturing them.

- 5. Recognize your need for social support.** You may be acquainted with a multitude of people and yet lack any meaningful friendships. Be honest about your need for social support, and allocate time in your schedule to nurture significant friendships.
- 6. Know your strengths.** Some pastors try to excel in every area of ministry. That is an unrealistic expectation. If special gifts are needed for a particular season in your congregation's journey and those gifts are not your strengths, seek to delegate those responsibilities to other capable leaders or consider a move to a setting where your strengths are needed at the present time.
- 7. Develop outside interests.** A lifelong commitment to pastoral ministry does not mean that you have no life outside of your church responsibilities. Find hobbies and recreational activities that replenish you. Allocate an appropriate amount of time in your daily and weekly schedule to enjoy these meaningful activities.

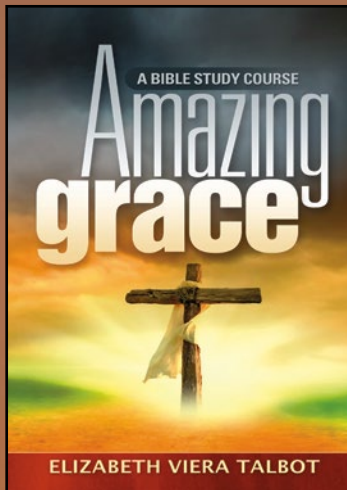
What are some other reasons for pastoral burnout, and what choices have you made that help you to stay healthy in your ministry? We would like to hear from you. 

* Thom Rainer, "7 Reasons Pastors Burn Out," Thom Rainer, accessed November 25, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2013/09/28/seven-reasons-pastors-burn-out/>.

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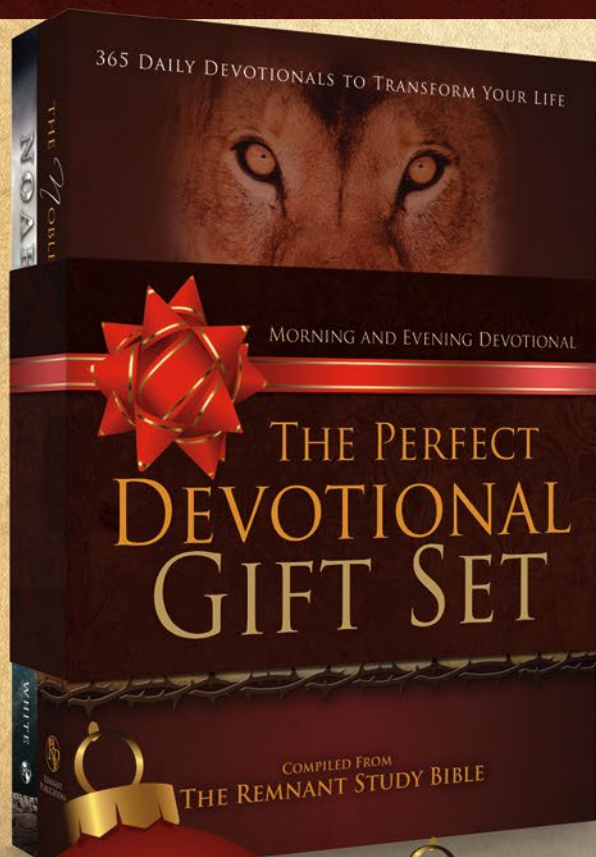
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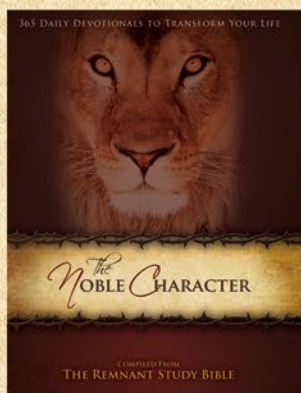


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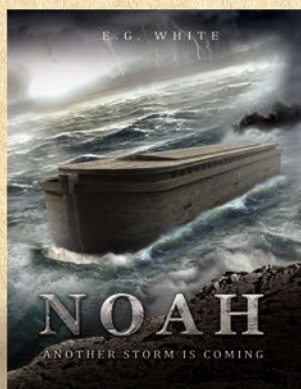


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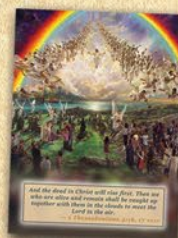


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