

# The Sabbath Pattern

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### Pattern finding creatures

Humans are particularly good at finding patterns<sup>1</sup>, even to the point of finding what appear to be patterns when there are none.<sup>2</sup> The pattern finding ability gives us the ability to learn various languages, even at the same time, and even while we are young children. We even have the capability of visualizing someone's prominent features, drawing those features in simple but exaggerated ways in a caricature, and then other people are able recognize who the caricatures represent.<sup>3</sup> This pattern finding (and conversely, pattern creating) ability extends into all sorts of areas and at many levels of abstraction.

Our exceptional pattern-finding, pattern-creating ability comes from our role as creatures who are privileged to bear within our own being, patterns of the image of the One who designed and created the cosmos.<sup>4</sup> We are creatures who are given the capability to be stewards of the Creator, assisting in the flourishing of a world that is ordered and amazingly complex.<sup>5</sup> Our design pattern includes other features of the Creator, including the ability to love so that we can respond in love to the one who created us in love.<sup>6</sup>

### Patterns of history

But when we look for patterns of love, we find the patterns obscured and confused. Our rebellion against God keeps leading us to destructive, even self-destructive behavior. The signs of rebellion are everywhere.

As we examine human history for signs of progress, we instead find ourselves repeating patterns of destructive rebellion that keep us from progressing.<sup>7</sup> But overlaid on those patterns, we find that other patterns have been laid out for us. Patterns that lead beyond our self-destruction. Patterns laid out from creation that lead us through the times of our rebellion to the restoration of heaven and earth.

If we are honest with ourselves, we can even admit we can feel the continuous inward pull against authority, even when we know that such authority is designed to be helpful, and even when we know that our rebellion will make things worse. The world around us reveals that the rebellion is universal – and devastating. The violence of wars and famine cover the world. Those in positions of authority are continually subject to the temptation to abuse that authority and to the illusion that the ability to exert force means that they are in control of their life.

But we can also see countervailing forces to that rebellion. Selflessness erupts around us with bursts of kindness and compassion, showing that love is still possible even in the most difficult of times.

The history of humankind reveals a constant battle between the forces of rebellion and selflessness. Sometimes one force seems to momentarily prevail against the other, but in the long run, nothing seems to change. Historical cycles seem to just keep on going, optimism gives way to pessimism which gives way to optimism, nations rise and fall. While history never exactly repeats itself, the patterns are there.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barkman, Robert C. "Why the Human Brain Is So Good at Detecting Patterns" *Psychology Today* 19 May 2021 <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/singular-perspective/202105/why-the-human-brain-is-so-good-detecting-patterns>>

<sup>2</sup> Peterson, Ashley L. "What is ... Aophenia (Finding Patterns Where None Exist) *Mental Health @ Home* 10 Dec 2021 <<https://mentalhealthathome.org/2021/12/10/what-is-apopenia/>>

<sup>3</sup> Lorusso, Lorenzo., Lorch, Marjorie., Wade, Nick. "Seeing Caricatures *Neuroscience by Caricature in Europe throughout the ages* <<https://neuro-caricatures.anaath.at/seeing-caricatures/>>

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:28; 2:15. Ritenbaugh, Richard T. "What the Bible says about Stewardship" *Bible Tools* <<https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/2166/Stewardship.htm>>

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 33:1-22

<sup>7</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9; Judges 1-21; Verstappen, Stefan. "Historical Cycles: are we doomed to repeat the past?" *Renaissance Man, The complete works of Stephan Verstappen* [https://www.chinastrategies.com/historical-cycles-are-we-doomed-to-repeat-the-past/#:~:text=Historians%20divide%20this%20cycle%20into%20four%20parts%3B%20the.and%20more%20recently%20in%20the%20Strauss%E2%80%93Howe%20generational%20theory](https://www.chinastrategies.com/historical-cycles-are-we-doomed-to-repeat-the-past/#:~:text=Historians%20divide%20this%20cycle%20into%20four%20parts%3B%20the.and%20more%20recently%20in%20the%20Strauss%E2%80%93Howe%20generational%20theory;); Hanson, Victor Davis. "Repeating historical patterns rooted in human nature" *Washington Times* 31 Aug 2016 <<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/aug/31/repeating-historical-patterns-rooted-in-human-natu/>>; Stratton, Geoff. "How Civilizations Fall: A Theory of Catabolic Collapse" *Ecosophia* 2004 <<https://www.ecosophia.net/civilizations-fall-theory-catabolic-collapse/>>

<sup>8</sup> Dyer, Geoff. "The day that killed optimism" *Prospect* 16 June 2016 <[https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/the-day-that-killed-optimism#:~:text=The%20morning%20of%201st%20July,historian%20John%20Keegan%20puts%20it.](https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/the-day-that-killed-optimism#:~:text=The%20morning%20of%201st%20July,historian%20John%20Keegan%20puts%20it.;)>; Module 4: The End of Optimism? The Great Depression in Europe" *European History* <[https://www.dhr.history.vt.edu/modules/eu/mod04\\_depression/index.html](https://www.dhr.history.vt.edu/modules/eu/mod04_depression/index.html)>; Acreman, Thomas. "Western Civilization prior to World War I" *Classic History* 25 May 2015 <<http://www.classichistory.net/archives/western-civilization-prior-to-world-war-i>>; McKay, Brett & Kate. "How the Generational Cycle of History Explains Our Current Crisis" *Art of Manliness* 5 June 2020 [https://www.artofmanliness.com/character/knowledge-of-men/strauss-howe-generational-cycle-theory/#:~:text=The%20four%20historical%20turnings%20are,to%20power%20the%20generational%20cycles](https://www.artofmanliness.com/character/knowledge-of-men/strauss-howe-generational-cycle-theory/#:~:text=The%20four%20historical%20turnings%20are,to%20power%20the%20generational%20cycles;); IGI Global. "Civilization Life Cycle: Introduction" *dLibra* 2009 [https://bcpw.bg.pw.edu.pl/Content/2148/PDF/07atits\\_civilization.pdf](https://bcpw.bg.pw.edu.pl/Content/2148/PDF/07atits_civilization.pdf);

### Patterns in the text

It should not be a surprise that although the Bible has some facts about the nature of the world, it is not a science text. Neither should it be a surprise that although the bible contains narratives of historical events, that it is not a history book. It should make sense that the Bible is primarily a theological text. When read carefully (particularly the Hebrew text) the biblical text reveals patterns, patterns that are not only in the text (and they are abundant), but patterns for us to live into.

*The careful attention to the sevenfold structure indicates that Genesis in its final form is a liturgical text. We may go further and state that, in fact, Genesis 1 reads as a sort of liturgical hymn.* Morrow, Jeff. "Creation as Temple-Building and Work as Liturgy in Genesis 1-3" *Wisdom in Torah* < <https://www.wisdomintorah.com/wp-content/uploads/Creation-as-Temple-Building-and-Work-as-Liturgy-in-Genesis-1-31.pdf>>

One of the problems that has obscured our understanding of the biblical text is the way we tend to read that text through modern western eyes instead of how the text was meant to be read when it was written 2000-3500 years ago. The Bible contains history but is not a modern historical document. The historical accounts contained in the Hebrew Bible are not framed in a modern historical chronological framework, but are historical accounts written in a theological framework.

*Biblical authority is tied inseparably to the author's intention ... when we read Genesis, we are reading an ancient document and should begin by using the assumptions that would be appropriate for the ancient world. We must understand how the ancients thought and what ideas underlay their communications ... although the Bible is written for us (indeed, for everyone), it is not written to us ... If we read modern ideas into the text, we skirt the authority of the text and in effect compromise it.* (Walton, John. "The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Proposition 1: Genesis is an Ancient Document" *Intervarsity Press* 2015)

This is not to say that the chronological and other details or those accounts did not happen as recounted but were framed for us to remember those details within a theological framework. In that respect, the Bible is not a history book, but a sophisticated book containing stories, using literary techniques that were ahead of its time.

*The Bible's verbal artistry, without precedent in literary history and unrivaled since, operates by passing off its art for artlessness, its sequential linkages and supra-sequential echoes for unadorned parataxis, its density of evocation for chronicle-like thinness and transparency. Yet those who are take in will rarely feel the difference, however much they may miss, because they will not feel out of their depth.* (Sternberg, Meir. "The Poetics of Biblical Narrative" 1985 *Indiana University Press* Bloomington)

One such technique that is remarkably present in the book of Mark,<sup>9</sup> but also is used in the Hebrew Bible<sup>10</sup>, is the technique of inserting a story within a story, and done in such a way, that it is obvious that the way the story is revealed is not the exact chronological sequence of events.

In the Hebrew Bible, the heavy use of patterns such as the pattern of 7,<sup>11</sup> can make one wonder whether such details exactly portray what really happened or whether the narrator of the Biblical text adapted the details to make a particular theological point. While it is impossible to verify what actually happened, we don't need to question the reality of the basic events recounted but we can accept the events as given, trying to understand the theological points being presented. So, as we encounter patterns within the historical accounts, we should keep in mind that events are not necessarily organized in a strict chronological framework, but rather organized in a Theo-chronological framework, where events are presented in a context of theological meaning. The intent is not to simply ignore the chronological and other details but to realize that the chronological context is secondary to theological context.<sup>12</sup>

Another aspect to consider is that the Hebrew Bible, more typically referred to by Christians as the Old Testament, is a collection of Ancient Near East texts not so much designed to be read as to be listened to and meditated upon. And as meditative literature, we should try to discover what literary techniques are contained in the text and how they are meant to connect passages together and deepen the meaning each text.

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards, James R. "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives" 1989 *Novum Testamentum* XXXI, 3 193-216  
<[https://jbburnett.com/resources/mark/Edwards\\_Markan-Sandwiches.pdf](https://jbburnett.com/resources/mark/Edwards_Markan-Sandwiches.pdf)>

<sup>10</sup> 2 Samuel 11

<sup>11</sup> Rodriguez, Angel Manuel. "Genesis 1 and the building of the Israelite sanctuary" *Ministry: International Journal for Pastors* Feb 2002  
<<https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2002/02/genesis-1-and-the-building-of-the-israelite-sanctuary.html>>

<sup>12</sup> In modern days, we sometimes remember events, not on the actual calendar date of the events but according to some other scheme, like we want to remember the event on a Monday because of the priority of the weekend. It is similar In Biblical texts, where events are remembered in a theological context. This is particularly evident in Exodus where theologians through the years have recognized that the events are not narrated on the actual chronological order. (Sailhammer, John. "Introduction to Old Testament Theology" *Zondervan* 2010, Appendix B: Compositional Strategies in the Pentateuch). This is also evident in the different Gospel accounts where the different authors were remembering the events of Jesus' life according to their own particular theological context.

### Patterns in time and space

#### The Cosmic Temple

We need to put to the side our current modern western controversies about trying to interpret the pre-modern biblical text of Genesis 1-2 as if it was meant to have scientific meaning about the beginnings of the universe and of humanity. As we can understand it now, the text in Genesis 1 was meant to be interpreted as the dedication of a temple.<sup>13</sup>

Before the point of dedication, the universe was in a state of chaos. Imposing the pattern of a temple onto the chaos brought order out of the chaos. The dedication took place in the first “six days.” The “seventh day,” does not end with the phrase “there was evening and morning.” That is, the seventh day is supposed to be ongoing. Putting this all together, the cosmos/temple was finished being dedicated on the 6<sup>th</sup> day and from that time forward was meant to be lived in. The entire cosmos was now dedicated for the rest of eternity to be a place where God, introduced in Genesis 1 as Elohim, would meet with his image-bearing creatures.

In Genesis 2, God is now introduced by his personal name, Yahweh, as he introduces us to those creatures who will bear his image, creatures who he intends to have a personal relationship with. Between Genesis 1 and 2, we can see that God has intended that his image-bearing creatures are intended to serve as his stewards, as co-regents in the temple he created, particularly in the garden where he placed his first image-bearing creatures. God’s kingdom was complete, all of cosmos was now the place of God’s perfect reign and rule.

#### Rebellion in the temple

To make image-bearing creatures who could be capable of responding with love to the love he has shown them, Yahweh had to give his image-bearing creatures free-will, that is, to have the ability to choose to not respond in love. And it is in Genesis 3, where we see those image-bearing creatures turn away from Yahweh’s love and choose to go their own way. The sad result was the breaking of relationships, between God and his creatures, between the creatures themselves and between the creatures and the land they were supposed to steward. The rest of the Bible tells the story of God’s plan to restore all those relationships, to restore His kingdom.

God’s plan of restoration would unfold only gradually, over, at least what seems to us, would be a long, long time. Despite the rebellion of his image-bearers, God still intended to act through those image-bearers as his co-regents. All sorts of things were broken, but God did not revoke his expectation that his image-bearers would be stewards of the now-broken kingdom. God still intended to carry out his will through his image-bearers.

Many generations would pass, and God’s people would multiply and from those people nations would form.<sup>14</sup> From out of those nations, God selected one particular man through which begin to visibly begin to carry out His plan of restoration.<sup>15</sup> God would work through that that one man to form one family among others through which God would form one nation among others, through which God would eventually bless the entire world, restoring the entire world to himself.<sup>16</sup>

Within the context of that entire plan, God would speak through his prophets, and through scripture, to show us through patterns of time and space how we can participate with him in restoring His kingdom.

After the rebellion, one of the first patterns we see is the silence and apparent absence of God. The pattern we see emerge is that our rebellion destroys God’s order, bringing chaos back to God’s creation with the resulting apparent absence of God. Fortunately, even though the God’s apparent absence is a natural consequence of our rebellion, that apparent absence can also be used by God to help us draw near to him. This then, becomes one of the patterns God reveals to us, showing us how we can be restored to Him.

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<sup>13</sup> Walton, John. “The Lost World of Adam and Eve,” Proposition 3, pp. 35-45; Driver, Cory. “Commentary on Genesis 1:1-5” Working Preacher 10 Jan 2021; [www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/baptism-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-genesis-11-5-5](http://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/baptism-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-genesis-11-5-5) ; Carlson, Reed. “Commentary on Genesis 1:1-2:4a 12 Working Preacher Sept 2011 [www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/creation-by-the-word/commentary-on-genesis-11-24a-5](http://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/creation-by-the-word/commentary-on-genesis-11-24a-5); Throntveit, Mark. “Commentary on Genesis 1:1-2:4a; or 1:1-5,26-2:4a 1 Working Preacher 1 Sept 2011 [www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/creation/commentary-on-genesis-11-31-21-4](http://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/creation/commentary-on-genesis-11-31-21-4)

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 10

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 12

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 13ff

### Patterns of restoration

#### Patterns of the place where Yahweh intended to be with his people

While the first people were still in the Garden of Eden, God merely “walked” among them. If all of cosmos was the temple where God would be with his people, then the Garden was the sanctuary within that temple. The rebellion caused God’s people to be put outside that sanctuary, but God would use the Garden of Eden as a pattern to create other spaces where God would be with His people.

Throughout scripture we can find the images of Eden in the ark,<sup>17</sup> in the tabernacle and the temple,<sup>18</sup> in Jesus,<sup>19</sup> in our bodies,<sup>20</sup> in the church.<sup>21</sup> Then finally, we will see, that all those patterns point to the moment when all of creation is restored and the whole of heaven and earth finally and fully joined together and the Kingdom of God is fully complete.<sup>22</sup>

#### Patterns of the time when Yahweh intended to be with his people

Scripture points to more than the place where God will dwell with us, it also points to what we expect to do when we are in that place. This perspective helps us to understand the Genesis 1 creation account. Why would the all-powerful God who could have ‘created’ or ‘dedicated’ everything at once and who never gets tired take 6 days for the creation/dedication and then, on an unending 7<sup>th</sup> day, take a rest.<sup>23</sup> That structure was not meant to indicate God’s needs or restrictions but was meant to create a template for us, a template we can use to find other similar patterns in scripture that will help us discover God’s revelation to us. There are several patterns to be found in the creation account of Genesis 1.

#### Patterns and meaning of 7

In Genesis 1 there are several items that occurs 7 (or a multiple of 7) times:

- 7 words in Gen 1:1,
- 14 words in Gen 1:2,
- 7 commands “let there be”
- 7 paragraphs in Gen 1:1-2:3 marked by the phrase “evening and morning,”
- With the concluding (7<sup>th</sup>) paragraph begins with 3 lines of 7 words
- the words “God” appears (7x5) 35 times, “land” (7x3) 21 times, “skies” (7x3) 21 times.

Another pattern, only seen if you know Hebrew, is that the consonants (original Hebrew had no vowel markings) used to create the number 7 (שבע) are used as consonants for other words: Sabbath (שבת – to stop, to cease from), Shabbathon (שַׁבְּתוֹן – sabbath observance, complete rest), Shaba (שָׁבַע – to be full), Shavuot (שָׁבועַת – 7 weeks (feast day), Sheba (שֵׁבַע – seven), Shevua (שְׁבוּעָה – so swear an oath), Shmita (שְׁמִטָּה – release, a letting drop, the 7<sup>th</sup> year when slaves are released and debts are canceled). The pattern meant to be seen here is that whenever we see the number *seven* in scripture then we are to link that text to all these other terms: *culmination, completion, perfection, wholeness, sabbath, cease from, full, oath, release*.

The examples above are just a small sampling how “seven” is used as a pattern in the Hebrew bible.

#### Stopping to dwell

All the meanings associated with the 7<sup>th</sup> day point to the 7<sup>th</sup> day as the culminating day of creation/dedication and the temple/cosmos was now complete. Genesis 2:2 says that God stopped (Heb. “shabbat”) from all his work. Shabbat means to stop, to cease.<sup>24</sup> In Exodus 20, the commandment given to the Israelites was for them to remember the 7<sup>th</sup> day when God ceased from his “work.”

<sup>17</sup> Powell, Mark Allen. “Noah’s Ark as Mosaic Tabernacle”; Holloway, Steven W. “What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near East Temple Ideology” *James Madison University* 1991; Triolo, Joseph. “The Tabernacle as Structurally Akin to Noah’s Ark: Considering Cult, Cosmic Mountain, and Diluvial Arks in Light of the Gilgamesh epic and the Hebrew Bible” *SBL Pacific Coast Regional Conference* 2019

<sup>18</sup> Morrow, Jeff. “Creation as Temple-Building and Work as Liturgy in Genesis 1-3” *Seton Hall University*

<sup>19</sup> John 2:21

<sup>20</sup> 1 Cor 6:19-20

<sup>21</sup> Ephesians 2:19-22

<sup>22</sup> Rev 21:22

<sup>23</sup> *The Genesis 1:2-2:3 creation week is most fruitfully read as a “calendar narrative.” It is a special kind of historical narrative in which historical events are given the dates of a festival observance (sabbath observance in the case of the creation week), without regard for the timing of the original occurrence ... Genesis 1:1-2:3 provides a narration of creation events, but the timing and details of its telling are transparently “remapped” to the cadence and themes of Israel’s weekly sabbath festival.*” LeFebvre, Michael. “The Liturgy of Creation” *Intervarsity Press* 2019

<sup>24</sup> Benner, Jeff A. “The Living Words: Sabbath” *Ancient Hebrew Research Center* <<https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/living-words/the-living-words-sabbath.htm>>

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The 7<sup>th</sup> day of creation is called the “Sabbath” which means to stop or to cease. The commandment says that God stopped his work so that he could “nuach” and that we should do the same. “Nuach” is typically translated as “rest,” but it also means to settle down and to dwell in.<sup>25</sup> Which means that when God “stopped” his work of dedicating the cosmos as the temple for him and his image-bearers, it was so he could then settle into it and to use the cosmos for his intended purpose. The purpose of the cosmos was to be a place where God to be with his people for the rest of eternity.

The purpose of the commandment given to the Israelites about the Sabbath was to create a schedule where every 7<sup>th</sup> day the normal work was to stop so that the Israelites could dedicate their time to be with God. The Sabbath was a reminder to the Israelites that they live and work in order to be with God, they did not live to work. Not working on the Sabbath also served as a reminder that they were dependent on God for their provision.<sup>26</sup>

The Sabbath, then became a temple in time where the Israelites carved time out of the week to be dedicated to being with the Creator to help them remember their purpose for being. The purpose of stopping their normal routines (“shabbat”) was so that they could take time to rest in the presence of God (“nuach”).

When the commandments were repeated later in Deuteronomy 5, the Israelites were given another thing to remember on the Sabbath. They were to remember that they were slaves in the land of Egypt, but that Yahweh brought them out of there. So, there were two memories to be invoked on the Sabbath, memory of the purpose of creation and memory of God’s provision by bringing the Israelites out of slavery. And yet another memory would be invoked later, when Sabbath could be a time of remembering how God would release them from captivity in Babylon.

Both of the Sabbath memories 1) evoke the responsibilities given to God’s image-bearers at the beginning, to settle into the garden God provided with the responsibilities to fill the earth, to rule, subdue, and have dominion over other creatures, to serve (work) and oversee (guard) the garden, and 2) evoke the consequences of not trusting God which changed their service to a garden protected by God to a slavery of a land that resisted their efforts. The work that we were designed to do, to aid God as co-regents in the world was meant to be enjoyable. We originally were to serve the garden which was provided as a gift of God. But in the post-exile from Eden work, we have to work the ground until it kills us from the hard labor and the sweat. As God said to Cain, “The ground will only with difficulty, give you its yield.” (CSB)

## The Sabbath of Yahweh

The Commandments in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 say that “the seventh day is a Sabbath of Yahweh.” The day belongs to him. All things and all time belong to Yahweh. The weekly celebration of the Sabbath is an opportunity for the Israelites to renounce their ownership of their possessions and their time, everything they have is a gift from Yahweh. It is in that spirit that the Israelites take the opportunity to refrain from their own pleasures.<sup>27</sup>

The goal of Shabbat (to stop) is not just to stop but to Nuach (to dwell in the presence of Yahweh). The point of the cosmos is to have a place for Yahweh’s image-bearers to be with Him. The seventh day of creation was intended to be a prolonged period of experiencing God’s love by responding in love and obedience. When Yahweh saw his image-bearers rebel against him, he continued to show His love by implementing his plan to restore them to Himself.

To that end, Yahweh called Abraham through whom He would bless the world. From Abraham, Yahweh created a family which then became the nation, Israel, through which the Son of God would become born as the God-man, the Messiah. Israel therefore became the Covenant people who were given the Law and the Promises through which God would bless the entire world. After many years, when no one in the nation of Israel was able to fulfill the Law, the God-man, the Messiah came in order to fulfill the law, making it possible for not just Israel, but all of God’s image-bearers to be restored to Himself and to finally experience the opportunity to dwell at rest with Him.

The Sabbath was given to Israel as an opportunity to grow into the trust and obedience that are necessary for humans to experience *nuach* with God, and also to anticipate the ultimate Sabbath rest when God restores all of Creation to Himself.

But until the time of final restoration, Sabbath practices are meant to be inconvenient. The Sabbath discipline of voluntary inconvenience helps to endure the inconveniences imposed by circumstances or by other people. The practice of voluntary

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<sup>25</sup> Benner, Jeff A. “No’ahh” *Ancient Hebrew Research Center* [https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/mt/articles\\_names.html](https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/mt/articles_names.html); Nabors, Amy. “Nuach” “*Ordinarily Extraordinary*” 1/31/14 <<http://ordinarilyextraordinary.com/nuach/>>

<sup>26</sup> Exodus 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15

<sup>27</sup> Is 58:13-14

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inconvenience reminds us that we are not masters of our lives or time, that we need God's provision, that our time" does not, in fact, belong to us, and that our labors are not what actually keeps us alive.

## The Sabbath, the Law, and the Christian

The Sabbath Commandment, like the rest of the "law" was a practice for the nation of Israel but not for the Gentiles.<sup>28</sup> However, that does not mean we can ignore all the obligations we do have as Christians: to build one another up and to share our gifts and resources with one another. Beginning with the early church in Acts, we see them regularly gathering for teaching, prayer and fellowship.<sup>29</sup> After the New Testament times, those who were Messianic Jews (in current and early church) may have practiced Sabbath and the Lord's Day, but Sunday was never meant to be the "Christian Sabbath."

Non-Jewish Christians are not obligated to keep the Sabbath, as such, but they are subject to higher standards, such as the daily practice of yielding our time and possessions to God<sup>30</sup> and the regular obligations of supporting our fellow believers,<sup>31</sup> building each other up<sup>32</sup> and participating with the church in making disciples.<sup>33</sup> Not just one day a week, but every day of our lives we should be remembering that we are not masters of our time or our possessions, that the daily discipline of inconveniencing ourselves is an expression of our trust in God's provision, that every day of our lives we should be trusting and resting in the Lord.

These principles which apply to the Sabbath, can be applied to the whole law. We are told that those who are born "of the Spirit" are not "under the law"<sup>34</sup> because Jesus fulfilled the law. However, that does not mean that the law can be ignored. In fact, not only does the law provide guidance for us,<sup>35</sup> but the expectations for our behavior are even more comprehensive. The New Testament explicitly tells us that

- hating our brother is equivalent to murdering our brother<sup>36</sup>
- we should not hate our enemy but love them<sup>37</sup>
- looking at someone with lust is like committing adultery<sup>38</sup>
- if we are forced to go one mile, then we should go two miles<sup>39</sup>

Our motivation should not come from trying to obey the external law "written in stone" but rather from the internal desires "written in our hearts"<sup>40</sup> to love – love God and to love one another. We should be

Not driven to obey the Commandment to keep the Sabbath  
but rather encouraged to live every day to God

Not driven to obey the command to tithe  
but rather encouraged to be generous

Not driven to obey the command to not covet  
but rather encouraged to promote the welfare of others

Not driven to obey commandments  
but rather encouraged to express the fruits of the Spirit

Not driven to obey externally given commands  
but rather encouraged to grow in our internal desire to love

Not driven to avoid doing wrong  
but rather encouraged to delight in finding the best way to do what is right

Understanding how the Sabbath celebration was only pointing to an eternity of daily enjoying the presence of God in all that we do can help us see how all the other "laws" are designed to do the same. Just as the tabernacle was a symbol of

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<sup>28</sup> Acts 15:1-21, 29; 21:25

<sup>29</sup> Acts 2:42-47; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2

<sup>30</sup> Acts 2:44-47

<sup>31</sup> Acts 4:32; 1 John 3:16-18; 2 Cor 9:6-15; 8:14-15;

<sup>32</sup> 2 Cor 13:10; Eph 2:21; 4:29

<sup>33</sup> Matt 28:19

<sup>34</sup> Rom 6:14

<sup>35</sup> Gal 3:24-26

<sup>36</sup> 1 John 3:15

<sup>37</sup> Matt 5:43

<sup>38</sup> Matt 5:28

<sup>39</sup> Matt 5:41

<sup>40</sup> 2 Cor 3:3

### **The Sabbath Pattern**

God being with us in space, the Sabbath was a reminder of God being with us in time and together they remind us that God owns all of space and time and desires to share it all with us.