

Washed in Time:

An Invitation to Participation in the Divine Work through the Rhythms of Sabbath

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Abstract

On any given day, one glance at the news headlines reveals that the world we live in is no utopia. We find ourselves embroiled in political and cultural polarization, crises of environmental and social injustice, wars, and facing many other incredibly complex problems. Followers of Christ are meant to be a people oriented toward an eschatological hope that enables them to live according to God's vision, bringing the Biblical concept of *shalom* into their historical moment in the midst of all these complexities. However, Christians today struggle to live out this hope. We find ourselves complicit in the chaos in a way that distorts our own understanding of God's vision and loses sight of the invitation to participate in the abundant peace God offers us and the world. At its core, the Biblical concept of Sabbath rest offers a pattern of formation that can help reorient Christians to the reality of God's vision and empower us to become agents of *shalom*. While the language of "Sabbath rest" can evoke images of stillness and calm, Sabbath is intended to be, in fact, active, not only for a moment, but throughout the movement of time. Looking at the history and development of the Sabbath in the Hebrew scriptures and the gospel of John, we will seek to connect what could become abstract ideas, namely Sabbath rest and the concept of time, with the visible actions of Jesus Christ and offer a vision for dynamic participation by the faithful in our cultural moment.

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When Dr. Katherine Greiner asked me whether I intended to complete a thesis at Carroll, I responded with a solid maybe. Given that I wasn't sure exactly what constructing a thesis would entail (coupled with the crippling sense of self-doubt that insisted I couldn't possibly have anything thesis-worthy to say), I agreed to schedule a meeting to just chat about the idea. As the final stages of this writing are now underway, I am deeply grateful for her gentle push to take on this challenge. Her input and insights have helped bring clarity to the shape of this writing and have built in me a confidence that I do, in fact, have something thesis-worthy to say.

So, to you, first, Dr. Katherine Greiner, I extend my thanks. Thank you for kick-starting this whole thing.

As someone who deeply desires to live a life of body-soul integrity, the disconnect between theological talk and lived faith has long been a source of frustration for me. This frustration is sometimes directed outward in response to my observations of Christian culture in the United States at-large, but often it is a frustration directed inward in light of the inconsistencies I find within the depths of my own spirit. For many years now, rhythmic liturgical practices have served to ground my own experiences and help produce a more integrated walk of faith. Consistent submission to the rhythms of Sabbath is a relatively new shift in my own practice, but one that has been profoundly impactful. (Thus, I chose to write about it here!) In addition to a deeper sense of personal integration, one noticeable and noteworthy effect that the move toward consistent Sabbath observance has brought into my life is a deeper integration of my individual self into the communal walk of faith. It is in light of this that I would like to acknowledge the

valuable role my own family has played in this process. My husband and children have not been exempt from the renunciations of Sabbath and the challenges to our comfortably engrained way of existence that it has brought.

So, now, to you, Calvin, Leo, Clive, Malachi, and Josey, thank you for being a part of the Sabbath “experiment” that is now a permanent feature of our family life.

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Sabbath of Scripture and how Sabbath can meet the needs of our cultural moment was both accurate and clear.

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Chapter I

On any given day, one glance at the news headlines reveals that the world we live in is no utopia. Reports of civil wars, multi-country conflicts, and political instability are commonplace. The earth is ill, and the prognosis is dire.¹ The advent of AI draws to the fore new questions, challenges, and fears surrounding its use.² Food insecurity haunts even wealthier nations.³ Global outbreaks of disease reveal the fragility of healthcare infrastructures.⁴ The world is on fire, and it doesn't look like the flames will be brought under control anytime soon.

Even if we find that the chaos on the world stage is too overwhelming to think about, we cannot insulate ourselves from the bad news. Our immediate communities and personal lives experience the insecurity of this age in unavoidable ways. For the American people, the statistics are formidable. In February of 2026, 7.4 million Americans were facing unemployment.⁵ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention records that over 16% of married couples have faced the pain of infertility.⁶ In 2023, the top two causes of death for Americans were heart disease and cancer.⁷ The lives of over 40,000 human beings were taken by car accidents in 2023, leaving family and friends

¹ "Predictions of Global Future Climate" UCAR, Center for Science Education, accessed March 5, 2026, <https://scied.ucar.edu/learning-zone/climate-change-impacts/predictions-future-global-climate>.

² "7 Terrifying AI Risks That Could Change the World," Forbes, Bernard Marr, August 18, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2025/08/18/7-terrifying-ai-risks-that-could-change-the-world/>.

³ "Food Security in the U.S.," Economic Research Service, USDA, accessed March 5, 2026, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics>. "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025," UNICEF Data, UNICEF, August 8, 2025, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/sofi-2025/>.

⁴ "Global distribution and Health Impact of Infectious Disease Outbreaks, 1996-2023: a worldwide retrospective analysis of World Health Organization Emergency Event Reports," National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Library of Medicine, May 15, 2025, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12082254/>.

⁵ "Employment Situation Summary - 2026 M01 Results," Economic News Release, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed March 6, 2026, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>.

⁶ "Infertility," FastStats, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, updated January 12, 2026, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/infertility.htm>.

⁷ "Deaths and Mortality," FastStats, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, updated January 9, 2026, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>.

shocked by the sudden loss.⁸ RAINN reports that at least 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men have experienced sexual assault.⁹ The FBI recorded 24 active shooter events in 2024.¹⁰ Our daily lives bring us face-to-face with anxiety for the future, tensions in present relationships and circumstances, and grief over past wounds. Suffering is an unavoidable fact of life for each of us.

God's people are not immune to the troubles of our time. Like pilgrims in the wilderness, we struggle and suffer alongside the whole of humanity; but in the midst of all of the bad news, Christians are called to share the Gospel of God's peace. God's good news is not simply words spoken from the outside, but it is a message to be lived out from the inside. We see that, in and through the life of Jesus Christ, God participates in time and invites us to do the same. Jesus is born as an infant, dependent on the care and provision of others. He grows up in poverty, under an oppressive regime as part of a group of people that is marginalized and dehumanized throughout the course of their lives. He is an intimate witness to the pain of human suffering as he experiences the loss of loved ones, misunderstanding, betrayal, and disease. Calling people to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,"¹¹ Jesus reveals what that kingdom encompasses as he engages with the struggles of his temporal moment by healing the sick and bringing hope to the broken. Theologian Jon Sobrino puts it this way, "The Kingdom of God appears as good news in the midst of bad things, in the midst of an Anti-Kingdom, that is."¹² The sufferings of this earth are not merely natural or random, but are the work of a kingdom

⁸ "National Statistics-Crash Data," Fatality Analysis Reporting System, National Highway Traffic Administration, accessed March 6, 2026, <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/datastats/crashdata.aspx>.

⁹ "Statistics:Victims of Sexual Assault," RAINN, accessed April 22, 2026, <https://rainn.org/facts-statistics-the-scope-of-the-problem/statistics-victims-of-sexual-violence/>

¹⁰ "Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2024," Reports and Publications, FBI, accessed March 6, 2026, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/reports-and-publications/2024-active-shooter-report/view>.

¹¹ Matthew 4:17, *NRSVUE*.

¹² Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, (Orbis Books, 2001), 72.

that is “formally and actively opposed”¹³ to God’s kingdom. As Jesus participates even in the pain of death, he moves to bring the kingdom of God to earth “in opposition to the oppression of the Anti-Kingdom,”¹⁴ promising a day when it shall be experienced in its fullness by all. In light of the “understandable despair built up in history from the evidence that what triumphs in history is the Anti-Kingdom,” Jesus’s life and embodiment of the Kingdom of God “generates a hope that is also liberating.”¹⁵ Far from a simple optimistic speech in light of history, the good news requires an inhabiting of time that brings the hope of the revealed Kingdom to life in the present.

Throughout the Scriptures, God’s invitation to humanity to be active participants in the shaping of history is framed by the concept of *shalom*, the Hebrew word for “peace.” Its definition certainly includes the traditional English understanding of peace as a lack of conflict, but it moves beyond this to encompass a vision of wholeness. Biblical scholar Tim Mackie notes that “*shalom* refers to something that’s complex... that’s in a state of completeness.”¹⁶ It can be used to describe the state of a household, nation, or even personal well-being. When used as a verb, *shalom* is the active work of bringing together the complex pieces to form a whole. Where there had been war, not only would the act of *shalom* involve the ceasing of that war, but it would also include the movement to restore what has been broken by the conflict. For Mackie, “The core idea [of *shalom*] is that life is complex, full of moving parts and relationships and situations, and when any of these is out of alignment or missing, your *shalom* breaks down. Life is no longer

¹³ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 72.

¹⁴ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 72.

¹⁵ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 72.

¹⁶ Tim Mackie, host, *Advent Word Study*, season 1, episode 2, “Shalom/Peace,” Bible Project, accessed March 6, 2026 3 minutes., 30 seconds., <https://bibleproject.com/videos/shalom-peace/>

whole. It needs to be restored.”¹⁷ *Shalom* is not a peace that just happens, but it is actively cultivated and brought forth.

The Hebrew prophets envision God as the ultimate source of *shalom*. Isaiah 54 records a promise from God that, though the hills and the mountains fade away, the Divine covenant of *shalom* will “not be removed”¹⁸ from the people of God, signalling an eternal restoration of what has been broken through the history of the earth. Micah 5 prophesies that a ruler sent from God will be like a shepherd to the people, his sheep. Vulnerable to the wilderness and predators, these “sheep” will be protected and provided for and “shall live secure”¹⁹ because their leader will “be their *shalom*.”²⁰ Even when God’s people have abandoned the call to be bringers of *shalom*, God invites them to return to their peace-bringing work and promises to restore what has been lost.²¹ Isaiah records God’s promise to “extend *shalom* [to Israel] like a river,”²² an abundant and perpetual provision that flows through time bringing wholeness to the nations. The later section of this prophecy tells of a new heaven and a new earth to come where all shall worship God and flourish.

The New Testament carries forward this expectation of a future eternal restoration and a present invitation to participate in *shalom*.²³ There are exhortations for the people of God to let peace “rule in [their] hearts”²⁴ and to “pursue what makes for peace and

¹⁷ Mackie, “Shalom,” at 0:56-1:06.

¹⁸ Isaiah 54:10, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁹ Micah 5:4, *NRSVUE*.

²⁰ Micah 5:5, *ESV*.

²¹ Joel 2, *NRSVUE*.

²² Isaiah 66:12, *NRSVUE*.

²³ As the New Testament was not written in Hebrew, but in Greek, the word *shalom* is not in the text. However, the Greek word *eirēnē*, which is translated “peace” in English, carries in itself some sense of the harmony of *shalom*.

²⁴ Colossians 3:15, *NRSVUE*.

mutual upbuilding.”²⁵ Where the apostle Paul calls Jesus “our peace,”²⁶ Mackie explains that “the idea is that [Jesus] restored to wholeness the broken relationship between humans and their Creator.”²⁷ Upon entering into time, Christ works to bring *shalom* to all humanity and invites his followers to do the same. Day-in and day-out, we are to be agents of peace. This requires active engagement with the historical moment in order to identify the injustices and brokenness of the Anti-Kingdom so that we can discern where to start rebuilding. As Mackie asserts, to bring “peace takes a lot of work because it’s not just the absence of conflict. True peace requires taking what’s broken and restoring it to wholeness, whether it’s in our lives, our relationships, or in our world.”²⁸ The people of God have the opportunity to participate in the Divine work and bring a taste of the world to come into our particular temporal moment. Attuned to the rhythms of time, we can act both individually and communally in alignment with the Divine will.

However, instead of being a peace-bringing unified people, we have forgotten who we are and how to engage with time in a way that participates in this vision of *shalom*. Christianity in the United States finds itself deeply divided over how to respond to social, political, and cultural issues of justice. Caught up in the hurried and unceasing pace of modern life, we become a people who forget that our temporality provides an opportunity to join with God’s work. Instead of finding a community empowered to participate in time, we find a generation of the faithful who are perpetually anxious, exhausted, and paralyzed by a fear of scarcity. Philosopher James K.A. Smith asserts that there is an epidemic of “spiritual dyschronometria”²⁹ among modern Christians. Smith

²⁵ Romans 14:19, *NRSVUE*.

²⁶ Ephesians 2:14, *NRSVUE*.

²⁷ Mackie, “Shalom,” at 2:28-2:33.

²⁸ Mackie, “Shalom,” at 3:09-3:18.

²⁹ James K. A. Smith, *How to Inhabit Time*, (Brazos Press, 2022), 5.

defines this as Christians with “an inability to keep time,” who “lack awareness to know what time”³⁰ they are in, and are unable to discern how to journey well through time. Many Christians find themselves “*nowhen*”³¹ and, instead of bringing peace, contribute to injustices of their time.

Replacing an engagement with faith that acts according to the needs of the particular historical moment, Smith notes that “too much of Contemporary Christianity” is temporally “tone deaf,” looking to Biblical ideas as “timeless formulas to be instituted anywhere and everywhere in the same way,”³² living “*nowhen*” instead of inhabiting the time they find themselves in. “Holding an outward form of godliness but denying its power,”³³ *nowhen* Christianity speaks of God’s truth and God’s sovereignty over time in reverent tones, but forgets that God works in and through temporality. Smith reminds us that “being a Christian is not so much a matter of believing something about God as much as living in light of [the Incarnation’s] cascading effects on history.”³⁴ Within our context of rapid technological and cultural change, *nowhen* Christians understand faithfulness to be “the prolongation and preservation of what has been”³⁵ and as a “guarding against change.”³⁶ This reaction is an understandable response to the insecurity that can be produced as we encounter what is unknown. Tradition can bring a healthy sense of security that grounds and comforts us in the face of transition. However, Smith notes that “while we rightly entrust ourselves to a God who is the same, yesterday, today, and forever, we mistakenly imagine this translates into a one-size-fits-all approach to

³⁰ Smith, *Inhabit*, 5.

³¹ Smith, *Inhabit*, 4.

³² Smith, *Inhabit*, 5.

³³ 2 Timothy 3:5, *NRSVUE*.

³⁴ Smith, *Inhabit*, 16.

³⁵ Smith, *Inhabit*, 19.

³⁶ Smith, *Inhabit*, 19.

what faithfulness looks like.”³⁷ When ritualistic traditions supersede the call to bring *shalom*, the presentation of cultural ideals that challenge the expectations of the past is interpreted as an attack on the life of faith. The *nowhen* Christian reacts to the suffering of the present moment by asserting themselves as guardians of truth or protectors of God’s honor. They fight to hold the line, so-to-speak, from the onslaught of changes that come with time. This *nowhen* approach forgets the call to be bringers of *shalom* as it builds fortifications instead of communities and fails to notice the difference.

Seeing the “other” as a threat to the sanctity of faith, the *nowhen* Christian entrenches themselves according to the formulaic approach to Scripture with no space for dialogue or consideration of what the cultural moment needs. Communal identity then becomes factional and inflexible. Compounding the schisms is an utter lack of remembrance. There are the “good” or “real” Christians, and there are those who have abandoned the “traditional” expectations of faith. The authoritative standards of “tradition” are limited to experiences from a narrow window of time and space and forget the larger whole of their spiritual heritage. Smith points out, “Whenever the past is invoked as a template for the present, the first question we should always ask is, *Whose* past? Whose version of the past? And what does this invoked past ignore, override, and actively forget?”³⁸ Each of us has been shaped by our personal and collective histories in ways that we do not or cannot fully perceive. When we fail to locate ourselves within the overarching history of humanity, there is a nostalgic tendency to long for the “good ‘ol days” or work towards a “return to Eden.” “Rather than having gratitude for a legacy meant to propel us forward,”³⁹ the *nowhen* Christian builds according to their idealistic

³⁷ Smith, *Inhabit*, 5.

³⁸ Smith, *Inhabit*, 39.

³⁹ Smith, *Inhabit*, 38.

template of the past. The failure to take a full account of our spiritual stories leads to a Christianity that fundamentally misunderstands what it is to participate in the work of God and ultimately builds structures that lack the ability to fulfill their fundamental purpose. Instead of moving to remember, *nowhen* Christianity moves to protect its limited experience of the faith, and as a result, the opportunity to participate in alignment with the Divine will in the present is lost.

Intensifying the inflexibility of the *nowhen* Christian are two underlying and culturally-pervasive elements: Consumerism and a “scarcity mindset.” Contemporary American culture is built around buying, selling, and consuming. Individuals work to gain funds in order to purchase products. Needed resources for survival are now commodities available to those who can pay for them. The privatization of healthcare and the profit-oriented paradigm from which it functions is a prime example of this. Additionally, Americans operate within a structure that commodifies even the intangible spheres of life. For instance, social media influencers offer a version of community that can be bought by “likes” and education is marketed as a path to procuring financial abundance. The whole of life is seen as a series of products to be obtained, and the path to their possession requires unceasing effort. When criticized for overworking his employees, billionaire Elon Musk quipped that, “There are way easier places to work, but nobody ever changed the world on 40 hours a week.”⁴⁰ While it may be that Musk is primarily thinking about monetary progress, his comment embodies the underlying moral ethos of American “hustle culture,” namely that one’s value to society is measured by their productivity. Even while there has been a recent cultural push toward the prioritizing

⁴⁰ “Elon Musk said Nobody Changed the World on 40 Hours a Week: He’s Dead Wrong,” Dave Smith, Business Insider, November 27, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-nobody-changed-world-40-hours-a-week-not-true-2018-11>.

of “self-care” in response to the constant pressure to perform in the workplace, this movement still commodifies comfort and sets the focus on personal consumption. Ultimately, the cultural compulsion to offer some tangible product to the world in order to be deemed valuable still prevails, leading to a populace that is highly anxious and exhausted.

When life is oriented around acquiring what you can from a limited stock of resources, the fear of lack becomes a significant behavioral motivation. The “scarcity mindset” that pervades modern American culture is a result of both real and perceived risk. Recognizing the reality of resource limitations throughout human history, Caroline Roux, Kelly Goldsmith, and Andrea Bonezzi note in their article “On the Psychology of Scarcity,” that further “reminders of resource scarcity activate a competitive orientation, which guides consumers’ decision making toward advancing their own welfare.”⁴¹ In a society where consumers are fairly disconnected from the processes of production, it becomes difficult for the individual to measure resource supply. However, Roux, et al. note that “even in resource-rich environments, consumers routinely encounter cues that emphasize the limited nature of products and resources.”⁴² The persistent emphasis of advertisements, political rhetoric, and economic guidance on the deficiency of resources implants the fear of scarcity deep within our cultural memory. As a result, there is a tendency to view those around us as competitors to our personal satisfaction and to anxiously grasp for that which we value before someone else can take it from us.

Failing to recognize the time in which they exist, coupled with the cultural formation of consumerism and a “scarcity mindset,” *nowhen* Christians find that

⁴¹ Caroline Roux, et. al, “On the Psychology of Scarcity,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42, no. 4 (2015): 615.

⁴² Roux, “Scarcity,” 615.

challenges to the status quo bring an intolerable risk of going without. Forgetting their vocation as agents of *shalom* in the earth, much of contemporary Christianity has actively perpetuated brokenness. A poignant example of this would be the early responses to the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013. Smith points out that “a number of white Christians were suddenly surprising purveyors of universal human solidarity,”⁴³ as they countered the protestors’ cries of, “Black Lives Matter!” with their own shouts of, “All Lives Matter!” these Christians saw themselves as protectors and articulators of “an eternal idea and ideal.”⁴⁴ Smith articulates the problem with this reaction in this way: “To assert that ‘All Lives Matter’ as a response to ‘Black Lives Matter’ is not wrong in principle but *temporally*. It fails to recognize that ‘Black Lives Matter’ is something that has to be said here and now because of a specific (contingent) history that got us here.”⁴⁵ All of our histories are “contingent” upon the decisions, circumstances, and happenings of times that precede us. In other words, the Black Lives Matter movement didn’t simply materialize out of thin air. It came to the fore as a response to a persistent series of injustices against a particular community (black human beings) in a particular place (The United States) that began before the nation was even established as an independent sovereign state. From the atrocities of slavery to the failures of the Reconstruction era to Jim Crow laws to modern policing tactics and mass incarcerations, the United States has a history of subjecting black lives to economic and social oppression.⁴⁶ Unable to confront the fullness of their spiritual and national history, *nowhen* Christianity responded

⁴³ Smith, *Inhabit*, 7.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Inhabit*, 7.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Inhabit*, 7.

⁴⁶ Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* does an excellent job of tracing the development of modern legislative and judicial tactics and their effects on both minority and low-income communities with more depth than this paper can delve into. It’s an excellent resource and an eye-opening read if you want to learn more about the shape of this particular “contingent” element of American history.

with a “timeless” spiritualized truism instead of taking the opportunity presented to participate in the restorative work of bringing *shalom*.

Additionally, I would note that this response also fails to recognize the self-protective influence of the consumeristic “scarcity mindset” that undergirds it. There’s a sense that justice is a commodity to be acquired, and lurking in the shadows of this reaction is the assumption that there is not enough of it to go around. For those Christians who had experienced a safer and more secure life within the American context, the elevation and restoration of the “other” is seen as a threat to their own experience or comforts. The incredulous response of “All Lives Matter,” is borne out of a fearful grasping to maintain the status quo. Instead of being an answer to the needs of the moment, the *nowhen* Christian wields a theological truth to ensure their own status is secure.

While it is true that all lives are important to God, the reactionary response to Black Lives Matter reveals a people formed more according to the cultural principles than by the Divine rhythms of time. As Smith points out, “the question isn’t simply what’s true; the question is what needs to be said and *done* now, in this place and in this moment given this particular history.”⁴⁷ There is a dynamic element of participation in the life of faith that is dependent upon a proper orientation to time. Instead of fearing scarcity, both the individual believer and the community as a whole must recognize the abundant provision of God in and through time in order to live out of an eternal hope. Christians need the ability to discern how to participate in the work of *shalom* in light of “the spiritual repercussions of a history that precedes [them], lives in [them], and shapes

⁴⁷ Smith, *Inhabit*, 7.

the future to which [they] are called.”⁴⁸ We cannot simply declare spiritual truths as timeless and refuse to engage with our current moment. We need a path to remembrance that re-forms and realigns the people of God.

At its core, the Biblical concept of Sabbath offers a pattern of formation that can develop Christians into a people who can discern how to participate in the work of God within their particular temporal location.⁴⁹ While the language of “Sabbath rest” can evoke images of stillness and calm, Sabbath is, in fact, active, not only for a moment, but throughout the movement of time. If our understanding of the Sabbath is relegated to simply being still or following a formulaic ritual, we will miss its connection to temporality, and as such, miss recognizing its power to shape a life of faith. The Sabbath mediates to the people of God abundance and wholeness. Its observances call us to remember and to act according to the justice of God as bringers of the Kingdom of God in opposition to the Anti-Kingdom at work. Sabbath directs the people of God to live in light of an eternal *shalom* to come. The gospel of John utilizes an understanding of the Sabbath that situates the life and ministry of Christ within a temporal framework. Throughout his writing, John connects what could become abstract ideas, namely Sabbath rest and the concept of time, with the visible actions of Jesus Christ, calling followers of Christ to join his work and bring *shalom*. We will look more closely at John in Chapter III, but for now, let’s turn our attention to the Hebrew Bible to explore the foundational elements of Sabbath.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Inhabit*, 9.

⁴⁹ Considering discernment and the role of the Spirit of God in this process is vital to the practice of the Christian faith post-Pentecost. However, pneumatology is its own complex area of study, and as such, is beyond the scope of this work. As we talk about Sabbath as an agent for guiding and forming discernment in the people of God, this paper assumes engagement with and the work of the Holy Spirit as a foundational element of this process. This paper is not suggesting that Sabbath observance is a replacement for dependence upon or seeking the Spirit of God, but rather that it is a practice or tool that is used by the Spirit to frame our understanding of the world around us.

Chapter II

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”⁵⁰

These opening words of the Hebrew Bible are more than a poetic literary hook. They begin a symbolic framework of patterns that are revisited throughout the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament related to the concept of Sabbath. The Genesis creation myth introduces a vision of time that is rhythmic, with the worship of God actually “woven into the fabric of the universe.”⁵¹ As authors of the Scriptures take up this theme of Sabbath, they present through it an understanding of time that orders life and worship. Jewish Rabbi and theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel proclaims that, “It is the Sabbath that inspires all creatures to sing praise to the Lord.”⁵² Given by God for the sake of the people, the Sabbath invites human participation in the movements of God within the historical events of the earth and in the cosmic work of eternal renewal. As both the individual and the community choose to step in time to its cadence, the Sabbath mediates rest, abundance, and the wholeness of *shalom*. Sabbath presents a path through life that requires active engagement and preparation in the days preceding its arrival and orients life’s pilgrims toward a hopeful journey’s end.

Before digging into the texts regarding the Sabbath, it is important to note some linguistic features of Biblical Hebrew. Several Hebrew words become associated with the Sabbath throughout the development of Judaism due to their visual and auditory relationships.⁵³ Of particular importance for this discussion are the relationships between the Hebrew words *sheva* (seven), *shalom* (peace/prosperity/completeness) and *shabbath*

⁵⁰ Genesis 1:1, *NIV*.

⁵¹ Tim Mackie, Jon Collins, co-hosts, “What does the Number 7 Mean in the Bible?,” *Seventh Day Rest*, episode 2, Bible Project, October 21, 2019, 1 hour, 5 minutes.

⁵² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*, (Farrar, Strous, and Giroux, 2005), 24.

⁵³ Mackie, “Number 7.”

(Sabbath) and the verb from which it derives, *shabath* (to cease/to rest).⁵⁴ These linguistic associations contribute to the understanding of Sabbath as a representation of completion and abundance. Additionally, these links lead the Jewish interpretative tradition to symbolically connect Sabbath to the number seven. In other words, moving forward from the creation myth of Genesis 1, encountering an iteration of the number seven in the Hebrew Scriptures should at the very least cause the reader to consider whether the passage is connected to ideas associated with Sabbath rest, even if it isn't overtly mentioned.⁵⁵

In the opening narrative of the Hebrew Bible, the creation myth recounts God's fashioning of life on earth by describing a series of six active days, with God's creative work culminating on a seventh day in which God is said to *shabath*,⁵⁶ to cease from labor. It is important to note that, by the time the written Hebrew Scriptures are available, the specific rituals of Hebrew cultic worship would have already been deeply embedded into Israelite culture. Tim Mackie notes that, upon encountering the seven-day creation myth, Israelites would have "surely seen their own worship patterns reflected back at them."⁵⁷ This presentation of an initial "Sabbath" in the creation of the world reinforces a sense of the cosmic significance the Israelite ritual calendar possessed, especially regarding the necessity of strict observance of Sabbath qua Sabbath. This initial cycle of seventh-day rest reveals the key to which all of creation is meant to attune, and the Sabbath provides the chance for humanity to celebrate "time rather than space...to turn from the results of

⁵⁴ I have found throughout my research that there are variations in the transliterated spelling of the Hebrew words across scholarly sources. For consistency, this paper will use the spellings and glosses found in Strong's Hebrew Dictionary. (*shabath*, 7673; *shabbat*, 7676; *sheva*, 7773; *shalom*, 7965)

⁵⁵ Mackie, "Number 7." Mackie utilizes Umberto Cassuto's "*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*," where he lists in great detail the inundation of sevens as symbols in the Genesis 1 myth alone and discusses the related interpretive tradition.

⁵⁶ Note that *shabath* is a verb meaning "to cease," whereas *shabbath* is a noun to denote a day of "ceasing."

⁵⁷ Mackie, "Number 7."

creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.”⁵⁸

As something that is both temporally linked and extends its impact beyond time, ritual Israelite worship leans on the Sabbath to provide a structure for orienting one’s entire life around the praise and worship of God. The official temporal establishment of *shabbath* doesn’t enter the Biblical narrative until the Exodus account. After the liberation of the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt, God speaks with Moses upon Mount Sinai. It is here that God gives the famous Ten Commandments among other religious, social, and ethical commands, initiating what is known as the Mosaic Covenant. In the midst of these, Exodus 20:8-11 records the initiation of the Sabbath as a rhythmic ritual for the people. Recalling the creation myth, the directive insists that as God rested on the seventh day, so God’s people shall rest. Leviticus 23 provides the regulations for the seven annual festivals that make up the Israelite ritual calendar. Variations of the refrain, “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest,”⁵⁹ resound throughout the descriptions of the appointed feasts, and the regulations given for each of these feasts are inundated with the symbolic usage of *sheva*.⁶⁰ The Festival of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement both occur during the seventh month. Food offerings are presented for seven consecutive days during both Passover and the Festival of Tabernacles. On the seventh week following the Sabbath after the first harvest, seven lambs are presented as a part of the Festival of Weeks. Leviticus 25 outlines two more significant ritual sevens: The Seventh Year and the Year

⁵⁸ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 10.

⁵⁹ Leviticus 23:3, *NRSVUE*.

⁶⁰ Leviticus 23:3, 8, 24, 31-32, 39.

of Jubilee.⁶¹ J. Alberto Soggin notes that among some Second Temple period Jewish groups, such as the community at Qumran, “the year of Jubilee was transformed into a unit for measuring time and classifying history.”⁶² Days, weeks, months, and years are organized according to the *sheva*-saturated rhythms of *shabbath*.

However, for the Israelite community, the ritual cycle doesn’t simply fill out a calendar; it also connects the people to their God and their history. More than a simple day of rest, the people are to consider the seventh day as “a Sabbath *to* the Lord”⁶³ (emphasis added). As the modern Passover *Haggadah*⁶⁴ declares, “This day is not like other days.” The Sabbath (both the weekly seventh day and the various Sabbaths observed as a part of the various festivals throughout the year) is “blessed” and made holy by the Lord, and as such, the people are to consecrate it back to God. In so doing, they remember who they are, where they have been, and receive a vision of what’s to come, namely *shalom*. Describing the ritual practices of Passover, where the people of God revisit their ancestral deliverance from slavery and death and their sudden flight from Egypt,⁶⁵ Soggin says that “the cult commemorates this event and makes it present; the community which celebrates has become contemporaneous with the community in pre-history; with it, it fears the imminent peril, and with it sighs with relief once the danger has passed.”⁶⁶ All the while, it is remembered that it was God who delivered them, and it is God who brings them to rest and restoration.

⁶¹ Note that although both of these ritual events denote a type of a Sabbath year, they are two distinct temporal events.

⁶² J. Alberto Soggin, *Israel in the Biblical Period: Institutions, Festivals, Ceremonies, Rituals*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), 156.

⁶³ Exodus 20:9, *NRSVUE*.

⁶⁴ The *Haggadah* is a written liturgy for the observance of Passover. There are a variety of versions available for use, but the declaration that “this day is not like other days” is a standard inclusion.

⁶⁵ Exodus 12, *NRSVUE*.

⁶⁶ Soggin, *Biblical Period*, 89.

Entering into the Sabbath rhythm, the people of God are formed by the memory of the past and then empowered to participate in the coming *shalom*. For Rabbi Heschel, “Jewish ritual may be characterized...as *architecture in time*.”⁶⁷ While many ritual practices are temporally dependent, there is an eternal aspect to the Sabbath that invites the Israelites to participate in the movements of God even from the days of their ancestors, building a temple that isn’t bound to one location in space or moment in history but spans across time. Scholar Jon D. Levenson comments that “to understand the Sabbath, even at an early period of ancient Israelite history, one must reckon with the fact that the operative identification is not only of Israel with the vulnerable slave and stranger: it is also of Israel with that which is holy - the holy day for the holy people, the holy people for the holy day.”⁶⁸ Consecrating the Sabbath as a day unto the Lord shapes the communal identity of the people of God.

Interestingly enough, the Hebrew Bible is ambiguous as to the particular shape that this consecration is to take. Exodus 35 records Moses reminding the people to do as God had commanded and to keep the “holy Sabbath of solemn rest.”⁶⁹ This is a day in which the people shall do no work and “shall kindle no fire in all [their] dwellings.”⁷⁰ Later in the history of the Israelite people, the prophet Isaiah speaks of honoring the Sabbath by not “serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs,” and asserts that the people must “call the Sabbath a delight.”⁷¹ As a result, they shall then “take delight in the Lord,”⁷² who will reward them with satisfaction. As Levenson notes, “All

⁶⁷ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 8.

⁶⁸ Jon D. Levenson, *Israel's Day of Light and Joy: The Origin, Development and Enduring Meaning of the Jewish Sabbath Account*, (Eisenbrauns, 2004), 79.

⁶⁹ Exodus 35:2, *NRSVUE*.

⁷⁰ Exodus 35:3, *NRSVUE*.

⁷¹ Isaiah 58:13, *NRSVUE*.

⁷² Isaiah 58:14, *NRSVUE*.

of these leave it unclear precisely what the good-faith Sabbath observer is supposed to do.”⁷³ Throughout the development of Judaism, interpretations of how *shabbath* is meant to be observed will become more specific and restrictive. These clarifying movements regarding Sabbath observance are able to be seen in the interactions concerning the Sabbath that Jesus Christ has with the religious authorities of his day, which will be briefly explored in the next chapter.

However, throughout the Hebrew Bible, the meaning of Sabbath as a holy day for a holy people, while perhaps lacking in specific regulations for the observance of Sabbath, begins to take on an ethical tone. As *shabbath* is established in Exodus 20, the call to rest is given, not only to the Israelites, but also to their livestock and to any “alien resident”⁷⁴ among them. It is clear that the Sabbath day is for all creation, not just the people of Israel. Rabbi Heschel describes the Sabbath as “a day for the sake of life,”⁷⁵ and Levenson points out that there are “strong humanitarian associations” with both the seventh year and the seventh day.⁷⁶ For example, embedded in the instructions for The Festival of Weeks in Leviticus 23 is a commandment for farmers to leave the gleanings from the harvest “for the poor and the alien.”⁷⁷ The Seventh Year is set forth as an opportunity “for the land to observe a Sabbath for the Lord.”⁷⁸ For six years, the farmer can cultivate their fields; but in the seventh year, the land is to be left uncultivated, allowed to rest. The ceasing of production gives an opportunity for the soil’s nutrients to be restored, bringing a type of *shalom* to the earth itself. The text clarifies that anything the land yields of its own accord may be consumed by anyone in the farmer’s household

⁷³ Levenson, *Light*, 177.

⁷⁴ Exodus 20:10, *NRSVUE*.

⁷⁵ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 14.

⁷⁶ Levenson, *Light*, 28.

⁷⁷ Leviticus 23:22, *NRSVUE*.

⁷⁸ Leviticus 25:2, *NRSVUE*.

and by their “livestock also, and for the wild animals in [their] land, all its yield shall be for food.”⁷⁹ Provision for the people is given even as Sabbath rest for the fields themselves is commanded. There is an implied assurance that participating in the Divine rhythms will not lead to scarcity, but instead will yield abundance.

Additionally, the Year of Jubilee, which occurs after seven “*shabbaths*” of years, is a hallowed year where the people of God are invited to bring *shalom* as they “proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.”⁸⁰ During this jubilee year, debts are released, familial lands sold in times of hardship are returned, and bondservants are redeemed. Where lack and loss have brought the suffering of humanity, the Sabbath rhythms are employed to mediate the renewal of hope. Also embedded in the call to bring *shalom* through the works of the jubilee year is a stern reminder that Israel’s status as agent of the Divine will is a gift from God. The open-handed release of property and debts owed is an act of trust in the provision of God and is an act of obedience as God warns the people that the land is not to be “sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me, you are but aliens and tenants.”⁸¹ Levenson draws a connection between this year of Jubilee and a “wide variety of various biblical laws.”⁸² Pointing to the law of the first fruits offering, he says that “the underlying idea” of both the Jubilee prohibition and the giving of the first fruits is that “only after God’s rights have been acknowledged may the farmer partake of what he has raised. It is not simply that the farmer expresses gratitude to the divine source of his bounty through his offering. Rather, he also identifies himself as a kind of tenant on God’s cosmic estate.”⁸³ Participating in the work of Sabbath

⁷⁹ Leviticus 25:7, *NRSVUE*.

⁸⁰ Leviticus 25:8, *NRSVUE*.

⁸¹ Leviticus 25:23, *NRSVUE*.

⁸² Levenson, *Light*, 77.

⁸³ Levenson, *Light*, 77.

observances (including the jubilee year) requires both a submission to God's authority and the remembrance of God's past faithfulness. Israel's formation by Sabbath rhythms then empowers them to mediate *shalom* to their human community and to the earth itself.

In light of this, it becomes evident that in order to engage with the seventh day, one has to journey through Day One into Day Two and so forth. In other words, the Sabbath is not attached simply to a special activity (or ceasing from activity), but is lived in each of the moments preceding, during, and after. In fact, Heschel points out that, "All the days of the week must be spiritually consistent with the Day of Days [*shabbath*]. All our life should be a pilgrimage to the seventh day..."⁸⁴ After the initial Sabbath law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, additional instructions were relayed for the creation of a portable sanctuary, known as the Tabernacle, where God would be able to dwell among the Israelite people for the entire duration of their journey toward the Promised Land. Numbers 28:1-10 records that the priests of the Tabernacle were to sacrifice one lamb each morning and another each evening, with additional offerings required on the Sabbath day. Every moment, from sunup to sundown and in-between, the Tabernacle and the work of the priests would be a visible reminder of both the persistent presence of God among the people and a communal reminder to the people of their responsibilities to God. Similarly, the ritually temporal elements of the Sabbath provide a "recurring and obligatory occasion for the application of the ethical norms specified"⁸⁵ within the Mosaic laws. While individuals do carry responsibility on their own to apply the values of the Sabbath and participate in its movements, Sabbath is not and cannot be observed in isolation. The community is held responsible for the keeping of the Sabbath. When this is

⁸⁴ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 89.

⁸⁵ Levenson, *Light*, 61.

done well, its rewards are mediated to the nation as a whole. God is speaking to the gathered community when promising that, for those who keep the Sabbath, “I will give you rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce...you shall eat your bread to the full and live securely in your land...I will grant you peace in the land...I will look with favor upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you...I will place my dwelling in your midst.”⁸⁶

It is important to reiterate that communal obedience doesn't simply include the ritual commands of the seventh day, such as ceasing from ordinary work, but includes obedience to the ethical requirements the Sabbath communicates as well on Day One through Day Six. The prophets bring scathing rebukes before the community of Israel for their failure to maintain the “spiritual consistency” of the Sabbath. For example, Amos 8 records God's declaration that “the songs of the temple shall become wailings,”⁸⁷ as they face Divine judgement. Even though the ritual rhythms of worship are being kept, the people “trample on the needy, and bring ruin to the poor of the land.”⁸⁸ They impatiently await the end of *shabbath* so that they can return to their commerce and “practice deceit with false balances,”⁸⁹ cheating the poor and consuming all they can grab hold of for themselves. God is not satisfied by their ritualistic *shabbath*, promising to “turn their feasts into mourning” as they have utterly abandoned its call to bring *shalom*. The prophet Isaiah calls attention to Israel's communal failure to defend orphans and widows, among other such corruption as murder and accepting bribes. He insists that their keeping of ritual Sabbaths is something that God “cannot endure.”⁹⁰ The people may be keeping

⁸⁶ Leviticus 26:1-13, *NRSVUE*.

⁸⁷ Amos 8:3, *NRSVUE*.

⁸⁸ Amos 8:4, *NRSVUE*.

⁸⁹ Amos 8:5, *NRSVUE*.

⁹⁰ Isaiah 1:14, *NRSVUE*.

the letter of the ritual law, but they have failed to honor the Spirit behind it. To be formed by the Sabbath, to be a people who truly walk in its rhythms, participation in *shabbath* must begin before the seventh day and continue from the moment the cycle of time restarts on Day One.

Just as the ethical associations of Sabbath are not guidance simply for the seventh day but are instructions for each and every day, the peace and abundance provided by the Sabbath aren't only mediated on the day of rest. Exodus 16 demonstrates the convergence of the ordinary work of the first six days of the Sabbath cycle and the seventh-day's blessings. The people of Israel, freed from slavery and wandering in the wilderness, begin to face the terrifying prospect of starvation. They cry out for help, and the Lord answers them declaring, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day."⁹¹ As Moses relays the instructions for gathering the bread to the people, he reminds them to gather twice the amount they need for the day on the sixth day, for "six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none."⁹² This passage actually marks the first use of *shabbath* in the written Hebrew canon. Before the laws of the covenant are even given to Moses, the people are invited to participate in and be formed by the seventh-day cycle. Inevitably, some in the community fail to follow the instructions. For those who neglected to gather double the manna on the sixth day, they awake on the Sabbath to find no supply of bread available to them. Instead of receiving the abundant provision of the seventh day, those who failed to engage with its rhythms in the preceding days go hungry.⁹³ It's also interesting to note that if the people gathered more than a day's supply

⁹¹ Exodus 16:4, *NRSVUE*.

⁹² Exodus 16:26, *NRSVUE*.

⁹³ Exodus 16:27-30, *NRSVUE*.

of manna during Day One through Day Five of the cycle, it would rot overnight. In an even more tangible way than the cyclic revisiting of Israel's communal history that will come with the later establishment of festivals such as Passover, the manna cycle necessitated a daily remembrance of who they were, how they were to consider their God, and the ways in which they were invited to participate in the Divine rhythms.

Over the course of Israel's history, the Sabbath also developed as a sign and a symbol of a future eternal *shalom* (peace/prosperity/completeness) brought about by the hand of God. As the Genesis account records God's creative work, the seventh day is the only day that doesn't denote a morning and an evening to mark its limits, as if this time of rest will continue indefinitely. In the same way, the prophets describe a restored creation to come where all shall worship God in peace from "new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath."⁹⁴ The creator God will one day bring about *shalom* that persists. Levenson notes, "In sum, the Sabbath both recalls the Garden of Eden and anticipates its return in the World-to-Come. Within the limits of the current world order, it ritualistically recreates the paradise that was lost but also provides a foretaste of the restored world...that lies ahead."⁹⁵ When prophets such as Isaiah set the promise of peace and restoration to come before the Israelites, it directs them to live with an eye toward eternity.

While it would not be incorrect to describe Sabbath as the seventh day where no work is to be done, it would certainly be an incomplete definition. It is a formative process that doesn't only come into effect on the seventh day, and it isn't simply an opportunity to "recharge" in order to face the days that follow. The Sabbath mediates a

⁹⁴ Isaiah 66:22-23, *NRSVUE*.

⁹⁵ Levenson, *Light*, 200.

shalom that satisfies the people of God, but it requires their active engagement with its temporal instructions. Submission to restrictions, such as refraining from lighting a fire on the hearth, were essential to the practice of *shabbath*. However, the renunciations of the day are not the essence or the focus of Sabbath. It is imperative to remember both the elements of Sabbath as a formative set of rhythms instead of as a formula to follow. Levenson asserts, “Reduce the Sabbath behavioristically to nothing more than an observable set of actions performed or avoided, and you have impoverished your understanding of Israel’s day of light and joy.”⁹⁶ Rabbi Heschel affirms that the “discipline” required in the observance of Sabbath serves as “a reminder of adjacency to eternity.”⁹⁷ Sabbath, then, invites one to participate temporally in order to engage life eternal. Choosing to actively orient one’s life in alignment with Sabbath rhythms presents a glimpse into the Sabbath as the mediator of this eternal *shalom* as it calls the people to remember the creative work of God, to rest in Divine provision, and to then move toward the future hope, living out Day One through Day Six as participants in the *shalom*-bringing work of God.

With this foundational overview of the Sabbath, we will now explore how the gospel of John takes the Sabbath symbolism of the Hebrew Bible and turns it into a lens for understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Chapter III

John reconfigures the Sabbath concept to present Christ as the one to whom praise and glory is due, the way in which to journey through life, and the hope of eternal *shalom*. Biblical scholar Richard B. Hays notes that John’s Gospel “calls for a

⁹⁶ Levenson, *Light*, 178.

⁹⁷ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 15.

retrospective rereading of Israel's Scriptures...that reinterprets Scripture in light of a new revelation *by* Jesus and focused *on* the person of Jesus himself."⁹⁸ After opening with a direct reference to Genesis 1 by employing the words, "In the beginning..." John then weaves his own iterations of the Sabbath pattern throughout the narrative. While John presents few word-for-word quotations from the Hebrew Bible, his connections are "symbolically potent, evoking a rich theological matrix within which the Fourth Gospel's presentation of Jesus is to be understood."⁹⁹ As John utilizes the *shabbath* symbolism to make a clear connection between Christ and the seventh day, he also inundates his gospel with overt references to time. He is not simply presenting Christ as a metaphorical fulfillment of an abstract ideal; he also maintains a vision of the Sabbath that encompasses both tangible temporal practices for the people of God and orients them toward a future where Jesus mediates the redemption of all creation. John presents Jesus as embodying in himself not only what the Sabbath is meant to be, but what the Sabbath promises to the world. Like the Sabbath, Christ is given by God for the sake of the people.¹⁰⁰ Jesus invites his followers to participate in the work of God in their historical moment and for the sake of eternity. He calls both individuals and entire communities to be "reborn" according to the rhythms of the Spirit that they might see the "kingdom of God,"¹⁰¹ and experience its abundant provision and whole-making rest. In the same vein as Sabbath observance, this attunement to the Spirit requires active preparation and participation in order to successfully make the pilgrimage to the "Promised Land."

⁹⁸ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, (Baylor University Press, 2016), 283.

⁹⁹ Hays, *Echoes*, 285.

¹⁰⁰ John 3:16, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁰¹ John 3:3, *NRSVUE*

From open to close, John connects the Sabbath with Christ. Taking his readers all the way back to the Genesis myth, John initiates his gospel with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being...”¹⁰² Confirming for his readers that the “Word” is the man Jesus,¹⁰³ John shows a distinct link between Christ and the Divine creative work. After presenting him as the creator of the first seven-day cycle, John then anchors the entire narrative of Jesus’s temporal life within the Sabbath rhythms. He strengthens this association by consistently “hiding” the symbolic *sheva* in plain sight. He reports seven miraculous “signs”¹⁰⁴ performed by Christ, and then embeds sevens within several of the sign narratives. For example, when Jesus miraculously feeds the crowd of over 5,000, he does so by transforming an offering of five loaves of bread and two fish (seven items of food) into sufficient nourishment for all. John then makes the Sabbath connection in this miraculous account even more explicit. As Jesus provides for the crowd of that day, he reminds the people of the first *shabbath* in the Torah, the giving of manna to Israel on their pilgrimage through the wilderness. Jesus asserts that as the Father rained down “bread from heaven” to their ancestors, so he is now giving a new “true bread” to “give life to the world.”¹⁰⁵ When the crowd clamors for this life-giving

¹⁰² John 1:1-2, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁰³ John 1:14-18, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁰⁴ It’s worth noting that there is some scholarly debate surrounding the number of “signs” found in the Gospel of John. The narrative itself only explicitly designates three miraculous “signs” (Signs 1, 2, and 4 in the list that follows). However, the interpretive tradition has long recognized the existence of seven signs, with debate over a possible eighth sign in John 21. (Additionally, John 21 has its own set of scholarly discussions concerning when it actually became a part of the gospel itself.) It would be fascinating to explore the ways in which the interpretive tradition has shaped the understanding of the text as much as how the features of the text itself have shaped the interpretive tradition. However, that is beyond the scope of this conversation. So, for now, we will simply list the seven “signs” as recognized by the collective religious imagination of the interpretive tradition: (1) Water into Wine, John 2:1-12; (2) Fever Healed, John 4:46-54; (3) Healing at Bethsaida, John 5:1-18; (4) Feeding 5,000, John 6:1-14; (5) Walking on Water, John 6:16-21; (6) Healing of Blind Man, John 9:1-41; (7) Raising of Lazarus, John 11:1-44.

¹⁰⁵ John 6:22-40, *NRSVUE*.

bread, Jesus proclaims that he himself is this bread, crying out, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”¹⁰⁶ In line with John’s propensity for Sabbath symbolism, this statement is one of fourteen¹⁰⁷ times in John’s gospel that Christ is recorded wielding the name of God given to Moses in Exodus 3 as his own. John makes it evident that Jesus is the God of creation and as such is the one to whom Sabbath belongs.

John’s gospel and its Sabbath-filled narrative also shapes the presentation of Christ’s participation within the bounds of time. Temporal language is nearly as prevalent as overt *shabbath* symbolism in John’s gospel. In the 21 chapters of John, there are twelve uses of the word “time,” twenty instances of “hour,” and thirty-nine instances of “day.”¹⁰⁸ Jesus’s personal choices and the failure or success of his opponents often find their explanations according to whether or not Christ’s “hour” had come. For instance, in John 7, Jesus teaches publicly in Jerusalem causing a stir among the crowds gathered there. When the Jewish authorities seek to have him arrested, their efforts fail and “no one laid hands on him because his hour had not yet come.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ John 6:35, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁰⁷ These fourteen examples of “I am” in John are significant because of the way they are constructed in the Greek. Composed of the words “ἐγώ εἰμι.” Biblical scholarship has long noted that John is intentionally connecting Jesus’s “I am”s to the revelation of the Divine Name as given to Moses from the burning bush of Exodus 3:14 (in the Greek: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὄν.) Seven of these statements are linked to analogical descriptions (such as “I am the bread of life”) that serve to further reveal the work and nature of Christ. It would be an interesting journey to connect each of these images with their Hebrew Bible roots, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. For now, this paper will simply list the 14 references. Seven “Revelatory” I Am Statements: (1) Bread of Life -John 6:35, 51 (2) Light of the World -John 8:12, 9:5; (3) Gate - John 10:7, 9; (4) Good Shepherd - John 10: 11,14; (5) Resurrection and Life - John 11:25; (6) Way, Truth & Life - John 14:6; (7) The True Vine - John 15:1,5. Seven I Am Statements: (1) John 4:26; (2) John 6:20; (3) John 8:24; (4) John 8:28; (5) John 8:58; (6) John 13:19; (7) John 18:6.

This chart is a helpful visual breakdown of these references:

Thom Rowe, “‘I AM’ Statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John”, [theologicalstraydogs.blogspot](https://theologicalstraydogs.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/i-am-statements-of-the-gospel-of-john.pdf), (2017), <https://theologicalstraydogs.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/i-am-statements-of-the-gospel-of-john.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ These are the English word counts from the *NRSVUE* compiled by my own personal accounting.

¹⁰⁹ John 7:31, *NRSVUE*.

In order to reveal this “hour,” John implements a seven-day cycle. Seven days before the coming of the Passover, John 12 records the anointing of Christ’s feet by Mary of Bethany. Jesus affirms Mary’s offering to him is in preparation for his coming burial.¹¹⁰ Over the course of the next four days, Jesus enters into Jerusalem to shouts of kingly praise,¹¹¹ makes his final public teaching,¹¹² and gathers his closest disciples for their last supper together.¹¹³ Entering into Day Six of this cycle and on the eve of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that “his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father,”¹¹⁴ kneels and begins to wash the feet of his disciples. Hays suggests that “by locating the time of Jesus’s ‘hour’ in conjunction with the Passover celebration, John strongly hints at a figural conjunction between the death/glorification of Jesus and the story of Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt.”¹¹⁵ Just as God had redeemed his ancestors, Jesus is preparing to face crucifixion and redeem all humanity from their sins, setting into motion the healing work that will bring about the *shalom* of God’s kingdom. It becomes clear that the “hour” that shapes Christ’s temporal journey is a *shabbath* hour, as it concludes on the seventh day with Jesus’s “rest” in death.

Even as John presents a cosmic picture of Christ’s life and purpose throughout his gospel, he simultaneously emphasizes the historical and embodied life of Jesus as one that is situated within the bounds of time. Hays notes that “more than any of the other evangelists, John draws attention to the festivals as critical temporal markers in Jesus’s story.”¹¹⁶ He documents Christ’s ministry over the course of (ostensibly) three years

¹¹⁰ John 12:7, *NRSVUE*.

¹¹¹ John 12:12-26, *NRSVUE*.

¹¹² John 12:20-50, *NRSVUE*.

¹¹³ John 13, *NRSVUE*.

¹¹⁴ John 13:1, *NRSVUE*.

¹¹⁵ Hays, *Echoes*, 316.

¹¹⁶ Hays, *Echoes*, 300.

marked by three separate Passover accounts.¹¹⁷ These recurring Passover accounts serve to “anchor Jesus and his followers within the symbolic world of Judaism, portraying them as faithful participants in the pilgrimage festivals that give shape to Jewish religious practice and identity.”¹¹⁸ Christ’s participation in the pilgrimage festivals serves to maintain the connection between his followers and their historical identity. For Hays, “It is impossible to understand John’s Jesus apart from the story of Israel and the liturgical festivals and symbols that recall and re-present that story.”¹¹⁹ Jesus’s understanding of God’s kingdom and his own purpose is informed by the spiritual inheritance he received as he is shaped by the rhythms of *shabbath*. Acknowledging that the language of the Kingdom of God develops in the inter-testamental period, Sobrino points out that it is common throughout the Hebrew Bible to associate God with kingship.¹²⁰ Post-exile, “a clearer idea emerged of what the hoped-for reign of God was: a future as a kingdom of justice for Israel...”¹²¹ For Sobrino. “Jesus came *following a tradition of hope for an oppressed history*, that the first impression he made was *above all in continuity with a hope-filled tradition*.”¹²² The Passover in particular, celebrated at the conclusion of the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread, serves to connect the memory of suffering to the hope of deliverance. Jesus himself is formed as a part of the human community around him. Sobrino notes the importance of recognizing the “deep significance of continuity between Jesus and the positive traditions of humanity.”¹²³ John does not set the life of Christ before his readers as something utterly detached from their own experiences, but

¹¹⁷ Passover Accounts: (1) John 2:13-25; (2) John 6:4; (3) John 12:1.

¹¹⁸ Hays, *Echoes*, 301.

¹¹⁹ Hays, *Echoes*, 287.

¹²⁰ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 70.

¹²¹ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 71.

¹²² Sobrino, *Liberator*, 74.

¹²³ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 75.

roots it in the realities of a life lived through time. Over the three years of ministry that John records, Jesus walks among the people, traveling through Cana, Galilee, Samaria, Jerusalem, Bethany and various wild places in between, healing the sick, teaching the people, and proclaiming his work as “the will of the Father”¹²⁴ throughout. Jesus is “tied to humanity in a specific manner: He is one of those who believe that it is possible to overcome the suffering of history.”¹²⁵ Participation in the *shabbath* rhythms oriented the man Jesus toward the hope of eternal *shalom* and gave direction to his ministerial work.

During these years of ministry, Christ asserts an authority over *shabbath* that disrupts the traditions of his day. For example, John 5 records the Sabbath-day healing of a man who had spent 38 years laying on a mat by the pool of Beth-zatha in Jerusalem. Day-in and day-out, living off the hope of a chance of entering the pool and finding the rumors of its healing waters to be true, the man finds himself overlooked and ignored as others push past him to grasp at acquiring healing for themselves. Jesus invites him to a new hope as he calls the man to “Stand up, take up your mat, and walk.”¹²⁶ Immediately the man is healed, and he does as Christ asks. After testifying to this miracle, John then tells of an encounter between the healed man and the Jewish leaders. The man is rebuked for breaking the Sabbath laws and carrying his mat on *shabbath*. As noted in Chapter II, the Hebrew Bible is ambiguous as to exactly what actions constitute “work” on the Sabbath. However, by the time of Christ, Second Temple Judaism had developed to include a myriad of specific restrictions to be followed in order to properly observe the Sabbath.¹²⁷ Building up from a passage in Jeremiah that forbids carrying burdens “out of

¹²⁴ John discusses the “will of God,” “will of the Father,” and “my [Christ’s] will” explicitly at least 9 times in the *NRSVUE*.

¹²⁵ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 75.

¹²⁶ John 5:8, *NRSVUE*.

¹²⁷ Levenson notes that, whether the specific Sabbath norms are developed by religious authorities of the Second Temple period or whether they are inherited from earlier tradition, it seems likely that “Despite the

your houses”¹²⁸ on *shabbath*, the specific action of carrying a mat becomes designated as “unlawful.”¹²⁹ As the man reveals Christ as his healer and as the reason for his mat-carrying, the Jewish leaders seek to keep Jesus from performing miraculous works on the Sabbath. Christ responds to them by saying that, “My Father is still working, and also I am working.”¹³⁰ As Jesus embodies the Sabbath’s call to bring *shalom*, he subverts the expectations of tradition as he “works” on the seventh day.

Jesus pushes the Sabbath dialogue even further when he describes the criticism he receives from the Jewish leaders as a failure to “judge with right judgement.”¹³¹ Knowing what to do and what to refrain from doing on the Sabbath requires judgement of what is good, not by human standards, but by the standards of God. As Hays suggests, there are times that the underlying intentions of the law and the ritual prohibitions will conflict and that the ritual prohibitions can “in some instances”¹³² be overridden. He notes that this is not a “negation of the law,” but it is “profoundly respectful of the law’s own inner logic.”¹³³ Since the work of *shabbath* is to bring rest, abundance and *shalom* to all of creation, Jesus’s rejection of the minutiae of ritual standards that supplement the original ritual commands of God are not a dismissal of the Sabbath and its practices. Instead,

ancient roots of the practice, [Sabbath observance] rose to prominence only in the time of the Babylonian exile (586–538 BCE) and the ensuing Second Temple period, when, not coincidentally, the Jews lacked national sovereignty.” (*Israel’s Light*, 153) As there is has been tendency in Christianity to villainize both the Jewish religious leadership found in the New Testament narratives and from there a tendency to discredit “religious” or “Pharisaical” behavior (such as practicing Sabbath by following particular standards or rules), it’s important to note that the prohibitions of Jesus’s day were not simply products of “misguided” leadership, but are borne out a deep connection to Jewish history and are intended to ensure the proper worship of God and to unify the people in their practice. The heart of such prohibitions seems to be in line with communal responsibility that Sabbath requires, even if Jesus seeks to correct how such restrictions were applied at the time he is actively ministering. As such, readers of John’s Gospel should take care not to miss the radicality of Jesus’s authority that John is emphasizing throughout his gospel by instead focusing on the “obvious” failure of the religious leaders.

¹²⁸ Jeremiah 17:22, *NRSVUE*.

¹²⁹ John 5:10, *NRSVUE*.

¹³⁰ John 5:17, *NRSVUE*.

¹³¹ John 7:24, *NRSVUE*.

¹³² Hays, *Echoes*, 298.

¹³³ Hays, *Echoes*, 298.

Jesus's actions present an example of what it is to be properly formed by its temporal rhythms and ethical call to act in opposition to the Anti-Kingdom and bring *shalom* into the world.

As Christ embodies *shabbath* through his “works, ” he “shines a light” on the memory of Israel’s call to be mediators of the Sabbath’s whole-making rest. For example, in Chapter 9, Jesus performs yet another healing on the Sabbath. This time, a man born blind in order that “God’s works might be revealed”¹³⁴ is made to see. Again using the language of work, Jesus insists that as long as he is in the world, he will be working as “the light of the world.”¹³⁵ The “night is coming, when no one can work,”¹³⁶ and so, Sabbath or not, God’s *shalom* must be brought right then and there. As this *shabbath* miracle is discovered by the Pharisees, division erupts amongst its members. Some begin to insist that “this man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.”¹³⁷ All the while, others ask, “How can a sinner perform such signs?”¹³⁸ Ultimately, the man who had been healed is driven from the religious assembly when he refuses to renounce the work of Jesus as an unrighteous breaking of the Sabbath. Upon hearing of this, Christ responds with a rebuke of the spiritually blind and proclaims that he has been sent to bring judgement upon the world. John again hearkens to the Hebrew Bible prophets as he wields this imagery of spiritual blindness. Isaiah 42 speaks of the people of Israel as God’s chosen “light to the nations”¹³⁹ sent to “open the eyes that are blind,”¹⁴⁰ calling out of the darkness those who have been imprisoned by the injustice of the world. However,

¹³⁴ John 9:3, *NRSVUE*.

¹³⁵ John 9:5, *NRSVUE*.

¹³⁶ John 9:4, *NRSVUE*.

¹³⁷ John 9:16, *NRSVUE*.

¹³⁸ John 9:16, *NRSVUE*.

¹³⁹ Isaiah 42:6, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁴⁰ Isaiah 42:7, *NRSVUE*.

Israel has failed to comprehend the significance of their own history with God, and the prophet calls to those who are blind, “Look up and see!”¹⁴¹ By invoking the language of the Isaiah passage, Jesus is identified with God’s servant who “will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth.”¹⁴² Jesus is revealing that the hour of the Kingdom of God where “the eyes of the blind will be opened”¹⁴³ is near, but the people of God fail to recognize what time it is. For Sobrino, the works of Jesus are “real signs of the approach of the God, and so generate a hope of salvation...miracles do not make the Kingdom real as structural transformation of reality, but they are like calls for it, pointing in the direction of what the kingdom will be when it comes.”¹⁴⁴ In Jesus’ rebuke of the “spiritually blind,” there is an invitation for the Pharisees to have their eyes opened and to participate in the rhythms of *shabbath* and its call to *shalom*.

Throughout his Gospel, John also connects the view of eternal hope mediated through *shabbath* to the purpose of Christ’s in-the-flesh actions. John 4 records an account of Jesus’s journey through Samaria, where he encounters a lone woman at Jacob’s well in the heat of the day. Ostracized from the community, with a series of broken relationships in her past, the woman is in deep need of the restorative hope of *shalom*. As he asks her for a cup of water, Jesus begins a dialogue with her and reveals that he can give, to any who would receive it, a drink that will become “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”¹⁴⁵ As Hays reminds us, John “relies upon evoking *images* and *figures* from Israel’s Scripture”¹⁴⁶ to present Christ. Here, John draws upon the prophetic language of Isaiah to connect the invitation of Jesus to the call of God to “everyone who

¹⁴¹ Isaiah 42:18, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁴² Isaiah 42:4, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁴³ Isaiah 35:5, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁴⁴ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 89.

¹⁴⁵ John 4:14, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁴⁶ Hays, *Echoes*, 284.

thirsts”¹⁴⁷ and to the promise that “the Lord will answer them.”¹⁴⁸ Hays comments that it is in this narrative that John insists that “Jesus himself is now the locus of God’s presence in the world, the site of true worship and revelation.”¹⁴⁹ As Isaiah asserts that God will bring hope and restoration out of the dry wilderness,¹⁵⁰ Jesus speaks again of the *sabbath* “hour” that is coming when all will worship the Father in “spirit and truth”¹⁵¹ ushered in by his eternally-thirst-quenching sacrifice. When Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman of his life-giving water, she expects to receive a cup right then and there. However, even without a tangible cup of this salvific water, Jesus mediates to her a sense of *shalom* as he reveals that, despite the fact that he knows “everything” she had ever done, he is the Messiah and has come as “Savior of the World.”¹⁵² Just as Sabbath restoration is practiced and experienced in the present moment and yet points to a future of complete wholeness, Jesus’s offering brings hope and healing now and in a later “hour.” Biblical scholar Mark Powell notes that “salvation in John’s Gospel has a decidedly-present tense orientation....eternal life begins now and flows into the future.”¹⁵³ And yet, Powell also notes that, “for John salvation is an ongoing process...as people come to know the truth, they experience the qualitative difference in life that marks those who believe.”¹⁵⁴ Even though the crucifixion and resurrection have not yet come to pass and the Kingdom of God hasn’t suddenly and completely appeared, the Samaritan woman is empowered in that moment to return to her community both receiving and bringing a taste of *shalom*.

¹⁴⁷ Isaiah 55:1, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁴⁸ Isaiah 41:17, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁴⁹ Hays, *Echoes*, 296.

¹⁵⁰ Isaiah 41:18, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁵¹ John 4:21, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁵² John 4:29-42, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁵³ Mark Allan Powell, *Fortress Introduction to The Gospels: 2nd Edition*, (Fortress Press, 2019), 205.

¹⁵⁴ Powell, *Gospels*, 207.

The invitation to act in light of the hope of *shalom* despite the suffering of the present is extended to all. In his last public teaching before the crucifixion, Jesus proclaims, “Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.”¹⁵⁵ Hays points out that “this section of John’s Gospel ends not with a pronouncement of condemnation of the unbelievers, but with a hopeful invitation to those who have not accepted the message.”¹⁵⁶ As the final moments preceding the *shabbath* hour of Christ’s death come to pass, Jesus washes the feet of the twelve disciples, including those of Judas Iscariot.¹⁵⁷ Christ knows the betrayal of Judas is coming, and yet he does not exclude him from the foot washing. Jesus calls upon them each to move forward from this moment following his example, to do as he has done to them, to humble themselves and serve.¹⁵⁸ After washing the feet of the Twelve, Christ proclaims that he is “the Way”¹⁵⁹ to the Father. Through him, they can know the Father and they can know eternal life. Hays notes that John’s “insistent and only question” to his readers is “whether to accept Jesus as the one sent into the world by the Father to reveal the truth and to embody it definitively.”¹⁶⁰ Jesus promises that he will return, and that he will live. His resurrection will stand as a sign and a promise that those who follow him “will also live.”¹⁶¹ Jesus offers the eternal hope of the Sabbath to his disciples, but it will require following the example of Christ and submitting to the Sabbath-formed rhythms of participation that John has woven throughout his gospel.

¹⁵⁵ John 12:25-26, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁵⁶ Hays, *Echoes*, 307.

¹⁵⁷ John 13:2, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁵⁸ John 13:12-15, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁵⁹ John 14:6, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁶⁰ Hays, *Echoes*, 288.

¹⁶¹ John 14:19, *NRSVUE*.

Defying expectations, Christ embodies the Sabbath rhythms by healing the sick, offering *shalom* to the ostracized, and doing the work of a servant as he washes feet. In temporal alignment with the celebration of Passover, Jesus prepares to bring deliverance to humanity. For Hays, John's gospel "creates a paradoxical twist" as it "announces the 'hour' of Jesus's glorification is precisely the hour of his crucifixion."¹⁶² Instead of being elevated through political revolution, the "Son of man must be lifted up"¹⁶³ on a cross so that "whoever believes in him may have eternal life."¹⁶⁴ With a towel wrapped around his waist, Jesus takes a humble posture in order to act according to the time he was currently inhabiting. When Jesus begins to wash feet, he is actively accepting and submitting to the "hour" at hand, bringing *shalom* in the face of death. Christ, full of Divine authority, engages with the rhythms of time and invites his followers to participate alongside him in anticipation of the Sabbath rest to come.

John never records a command from Jesus to "observe the Sabbath," but he reconfigures its meaning to incorporate the life and example of Christ. As Hays notes, John never says that Jesus "nullifies or replaces Israel's Torah or Israel's worship life. Rather, he *assumes* and *transforms* them."¹⁶⁵ The call to Sabbath in John casts vision for a life submitted to the authority of the Divine Jesus that receives, through him, the Sabbath blessings of rest, abundance, and wholeness. Sabbath is still meant to envelop both the intellectual and spiritual life and the tangible, physical moments within time. In the intellectual and spiritual sense, this is a life that orients itself toward worship and honor of Christ. It is a life that believes in and expects the abundant provision of God. It is a life

¹⁶² Hays, *Echoes*, 334.

¹⁶³ John 3:14, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁶⁴ John 3:15, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁶⁵ Hays, "*Echoes*," 288.

that looks forward to the eternal *shalom*. But these beliefs are formed in the rhythmic connection to remembrance that comes through *shabbath*. Jesus himself participated weekly, monthly, and annually in the festivals and observances of the Jewish ritual calendar. Even where Christ's "keeping" of the Sabbath didn't fall in line with the expectations of his day, he did observe and affirm its ethical tenets. Tangible acts of *shalom* were administered on the Sabbath. In the days of preparation for each seventh day, Christ is seen teaching, serving, and providing for the needs of the community. He is actively engaged in each of the moments leading up to his final earthly day of rest, a seventh day spent in the "sleep" of death.

Having established what the Sabbath is, how Jesus embodies it, and the invitation to participate in its rhythms, we will now consider how contemporary Christianity can be formed by *shabbath* and be re-empowered to become agents of *shalom*.

Chapter IV

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the observance of the Sabbath. Books by scholars, pastors, and laymen have been written calling attention to the need for modern Christians to reject the hurried and unceasing way of life that American culture promotes. As we have seen, Sabbath certainly includes a call to cease from ordinary work on the seventh day; and it is true that, in a society that equates the individual's value with their economic productivity, taking the day off is certainly a counter-cultural and important practice. However, even more than bubble baths and affirmation of one's own self-worth outside of their personal accomplishments, the Sabbath must ultimately be a practice that empowers us to join in the work of God. Participation in the rhythms of *shabbath* forms us to understand our lives and histories as

intimately connected not only with our direct experiences but also with the life and history of the Kingdom of God. We must recognize that *shabbath* brings *shalom* in and through the journey across Days One through Six. Just as the Tabernacle brought God's presence into the midst of the Israelites as they made their way through the wilderness, Smith notes that the incarnation of Christ is the "promise of presence *through* history –not above it or in spite of it."¹⁶⁶ As Jesus embodied the Sabbath, bringing the whole-making rest of God into the wilderness, so we, too, must be reoriented to engage with our present wilderness through *shabbath*. Each seven-day cycle draws to the fore our personal and communal experiences of God's abundant provision and restoration. When we cease from ordinary work, we are meant to remember that God's kingdom is one of *shalom*, where God gives enough to all, and we are made whole. When we bind ourselves to practices of *shabbath* that challenge the Anti-Kingdom at work in the world around us, we are given a new vision for participation in our historical moment. Submitting to *shabbath* as an agent of formation, followers of Christ are empowered to be a people who both bring *shalom* and experience it as we face the wilderness of time alongside the rest of creation.

All of this being said, when we begin to consider what it looks like to live a life formed by *shabbath*, we immediately find ourselves in danger of simply practicing its observance as another ritual in the same vein of *nowhen* Christianity's "timeless" and formulaic faith practice. As we have seen, *shabbath* has a deep, underlying ethic of *shalom* that draws people to trust in the provision of God instead of living out of the fear of scarcity that has shaped much of modern American Christianity, but it still requires a habitual engagement with specific practices. We can also clearly see from the Hebrew

¹⁶⁶ Smith, *Inhabit*, 17.

prophets and Jesus himself that the rituals of *shabbath* can be practiced in such a way that the bringing of *shalom* is actually hindered by those who have followed it like a formula. How can we become participants in the rhythms of Sabbath without succumbing to the danger of simply wearing it as a self-righteous mask while we perpetuate the work of the Anti-Kingdom in God's name?

Before delving into some practical examples of *shabbath* practice, it is imperative to reiterate that Sabbath observance for the people of God is a call to remembrance. We must remember who we are before we can understand when we are or know how to act in accordance with our time. We are creatures inextricably bound to time. Our existence is borne out of the ones who have gone before, and our present lives will reverberate through the ones who come after. Remembrance of our personal histories is more than a factual recitation of information about our forebears, it is a lived-out acknowledgement of our continued participation in the story of time. For Christians, we must remember that we are a people who have been redeemed from the bonds of the Anti-Kingdom and delivered into the freedom and hope of *shalom*. We must remember the faithfulness of God to our forebears who made their pilgrimage toward the Promised Land as we take our own steps toward eternity. We must remember that we are invited to bring *shalom* alongside God's own movements in time. These are all areas of remembrance that the Hebrew Bible and the life of Christ have shown us are developed through the practice of Sabbath.

However, we are not only the inheritors of the successes of our spiritual heritage, but also inheritors of the failures of our forebears. Sabbath must be allowed to form our vision of history in full. As we began this journey, we noted that traditions can easily be

viewed as isolated truths that fail to consider the overarching history of humanity, leading to a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to live faithfully in the present and culminating in a practice of faith that is *nowhen*. When discussing the power that personal and collective histories wield over the shaping of a person, Smith comments, “No one’s history is pure; what nourishes us is also tainted. You might say that, even as we sit down to give thanks for what’s on the table, there is always a legacy to lament, too. Every ‘grace’¹⁶⁷ is a confrontation.”¹⁶⁸ Each seven-day cycle gives us the opportunity to consider where our traditions might also be tainted, to ask ourselves where the rituals of our faith practice have superseded the call to bring *shalom* into the earth. When the *nowhen* Christian touts “All Lives Matter” as the timeless truth of the faith, the rhythms of *shabbath* bring the opportunity to remember both the year of Jubilee’s admonition to set free those who have been subjugated and the ways in which God’s people have instead perpetuated the brokenness of slavery. Pointing to the devastation of the Crusades, Sobrino reminds us that to misunderstand the Kingdom of God has led Christians to see themselves as if they are a part of some geo-political entity that must defend its borders “from the infidels.”¹⁶⁹ As *nowhen* Christianity adopts this factional mindset and moves to “protect” God’s truth, every seventh day serves as a reminder that we are welcomed by God into abundant life and invited to bring *shalom* instead of digging trenches in God’s defense.

In our current cultural moment, the holistic practice of remembrance that *shabbath* embodies is vital for our ability to discern. On March 27, 2025, the President of

¹⁶⁷ Not to be confused with the Christian concept of grace as something to be spiritually received, Smith is referencing the saying of “grace” or a table blessing before a meal here.

¹⁶⁸ Smith, *Inhabit*, 37.

¹⁶⁹ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 71.

the United States issued an executive order declaring the need for “restoring truth and sanity to American history” by prohibiting programs that “degrade American values” and denying the “purportedly racist”¹⁷⁰ histories of American culture. This governmental directive encourages the forgetting of what is uncomfortable or shameful in our national history in favor of focusing on a narrative that protects the powerful. As we seek to be formed by the rhythms of *shabbath*, we must remember that the Kingdom of God is a “highly positive reality, good news, but also a reality highly critical of the bad and unjust present.”¹⁷¹ The people of God cannot wield their faith according to this selective view of history and spend their lives fighting to remember only what will maintain the status quo. Sobrino affirms “the fact that Kingdom and Anti-Kingdom are formally exclusive, antagonistic realities.”¹⁷² Sabbath remembrance can and will confront our religious and cultural expectations. To be formed by the rhythms of *shabbath* requires departure from the consumeristic, scarcity-minded, grasping *nowhen* culture that pervades the wilderness through which we journey. The temptation to use our Bibles and the comforts of what we have known before as a formula for all life, regardless of the particular needs of the moment, is immense. Instead of hope-filled action in light of an eternal *shalom*, we can easily dig our heels into the ground against the pull of the ever-changing world around us, wield the Scriptures to justify ourselves, and call it faithfulness.

Acknowledging that it can be incredibly difficult to recognize where rituals might be superseding the call of God to be bringers of *shalom* in our faith practice, submitting to the rhythms of *shabbath*, as Jesus modeled for his people, can form in us the lens we

¹⁷⁰ “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History” The White House, accessed March 26, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/restoring-truth-and-sanity-to-american-history/>

¹⁷¹ Sobrino, *Liberator*, 70.

¹⁷² Sobrino, *Liberator*, 95.

need to discern in the midst of the darkness.¹⁷³ As James Clear talks about the power that small habitual behavioral changes have in reshaping our lives in his book *Atomic Habits*, he notes three levels of the formation process.¹⁷⁴ He asserts that ritualistic behaviors shape first our outcomes, followed by the reformation of our processes; and then, ultimately, our understanding of our own identity is shifted. In other words, as we seek to be formed by *shabbath* as the people of God and to live out of our identity as those who are oriented toward an eschatological hope of *shalom*, we will need to engage with the rituals and habits of Sabbath. Like the Israelites who failed to prepare for the seventh day of the manna cycle, we will not be nourished by the abundance of the Sabbath if we do not participate in its tangible and temporal rhythms. There is no checklist for *shabbath* that tells each of us exactly what is or is not acceptable, or what is or is not properly formative. That being so, it is helpful to recognize the ways in which particular expressions of *shabbath* observance form us to be people who rest in the work of God, trust in the provision of God, and engage in the Divine work of bringing *shalom*.

Understanding Sabbath as rest is probably the most widely-discussed attribute of its observance. God ceased working on the seventh day, and so we, too, set aside our ordinary work. However, Sabbath is not simply recharging for the work week, but it is a place where the remembrance of God's gift of rest challenges the Anti-Kingdom's insistence that we must create unceasingly in order to be found valuable. From personal experience, I find that the seventh day is best practiced on the seventh day, namely, Saturdays. The practice of *shabbath* on a Saturday requires a giving up of the typical

¹⁷³ This is an area where the previously noted assumption of dependence upon the guidance and conviction of the Spirit of God is incredibly important. The ability to see where rituals might be superseding the call of God to be bringers of *shalom* is something that I believe is granted by engagement with the Holy Spirit not simply something to be reasoned out by some type of formula. Again, however, discussions of the Holy Spirit are complex and require much more nuance than can be granted here.

¹⁷⁴ James Clear, *Atomic Habits*, (Avery, 2018), 30-31.

push to get things done around the yard or run errands as we set aside a day “to the Lord”¹⁷⁵ in a way that deeply challenges our drive to be “productive.” Traditionally marked from sunset Friday evening to sunset Saturday evening, the Sabbath begins with a meal, and is followed by the physical resting of our bodies through sleep. Lighting the *shabbath* candles, blessing God who is the “King of the Universe,”¹⁷⁶ the people of God acknowledge that their own work doesn’t define them, doesn’t enslave them, and that the creation of the earth itself is in the hands of the Divine. As Heschel notes, on the Sabbath, humanity “must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man.”¹⁷⁷ The *shabbath* meal can be observed as a family unit or with others from the community of the faithful. As the candles light the table, we are drawn to remember Christ, light to the nations, and his invitation to be those who illuminate the dark, too. The prohibition to cease from ordinary work requires a setting aside of those daily cares and concerns that we carry. For me, this means my laptop, academic readings, and general theological explorations are placed in a closet and are not touched for the entirety of Sabbath. Household chores are left for the days to come.¹⁷⁸ Minimizing screen use and prioritizing time as a familial unit promotes not only rest from the hurry and the noise but also calls us into fellowship with one another.

As we practice Sabbath, we also combat the Anti-Kingdom’s message of scarcity as we call to memory God’s abundant provision. It has long been the tradition to refrain

¹⁷⁵ Exodus 20:10, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁷⁶ “Shabbat Service Liturgy,” Shores David Messianic Synagogues, accessed March 25, 2026, <https://www.shoresdavid.org/liturgy/>.

¹⁷⁷ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 13.

¹⁷⁸ Especially sweeping the floors, my personal least-favorite household chore!

from buying and selling on *shabbath*.¹⁷⁹ The Sabbath, then, offers an opportunity to evaluate the ways in which we relate to money. Within my own practice, this has led to an outright prohibition from spending money on *shabbath*. In fact, I have found that it is best to refrain from even thinking about purchases I might make or considering ways to accumulate or acquire material goods. For me, this also includes refraining from perusing any online forums where people list items they are giving away for free. In a society that often conflates want with need, setting aside the habit of online browsing allows us to recognize when we have enough. When the culture tells us that we must grasp for anything we might want or need, we can remember God has given manna from heaven to provide.¹⁸⁰ Rabbi Heschel notes that “the seventh day is an armistice in man’s cruel struggle for existence...a day on which money is considered a desecration, on which man avows his independence of that which is the world’s chief idol.”¹⁸¹ When we rest from the world of commerce, we proclaim that Jesus, the bread of heaven, knows our needs and can be entrusted to care for them, that making money is not the source of our safety, and that we need not go to war with our fellow man over the resources that sustain us.

Where the Anti-Kingdom consumes both the earth and humanity without hesitation, the Sabbath considers the entire community of creation and cultivates *shalom*. There are many Christian communities that provide space for gathering together on the seventh day to worship. Reading Scripture, singing praises, supporting one another in prayer, *shabbath* is a day for God’s people to remember who they are as they set aside

¹⁷⁹ Think back to the man carrying his mat in John. The burden-carrying prohibition developed from a larger passage in Jeremiah 17 that calls the people of God to stop participating in commerce on the Sabbath.

¹⁸⁰ However, just like the Israelites in the manna cycle, there is an element of preparation required in order to step back from buying and selling, as we ensure on Day Six that there are groceries in the pantry for the seventh day. This may or may not be real-world experience speaking...

¹⁸¹ Heschel, *Sabbath*, 29.

their ordinary responsibilities. Leading up to that final seventh day spent in the tomb, Jesus gave his body and poured out his blood to bring the eternal *shalom*. The scandal of the cross overthrows the Anti-Kingdom's insistence that to take and devour is the only path to satisfaction. Jesus offers all of himself in submission to the Divine will and it is in the giving that the "final enemy"¹⁸² of the Kingdom of God, Death, is defeated. While each of us may not have the opportunity to come to the table of Christ within the temporal confines of Sabbath, every time we are able receive of his body and blood through the Eucharist becomes a moment where we remember that we have been welcomed into the Kingdom, and we are empowered to join in the work of bringing *shalom*. I once had a pastor who would frequently say that we could only be angry with our sisters and brothers in the family of God for six days because, when we gathered on the seventh day, we would need to make peace with one another before coming to the table. I recognize that bringing *shalom* into broken relationships is a journey that must be navigated with nuance and care; but as the heart of *shabbath* is displayed on the Eucharistic table, we must recognize that we cannot enter into its gifts and then perpetuate brokenness.

In order to partake of Sabbath in a way that re-forms us according to the Divine invitation to participate in bringing *shalom*, we must take the time to evaluate what practical actions this will entail. Even as Isaiah calls for the people of God to honor the Sabbath by "not doing as you please,"¹⁸³ we are again reminded that there is no fully defined set of standards that determines what constitutes "doing as you please." Considering what "ordinary work" consists of in our lives and brainstorming what it

¹⁸² 1 Corinthians 15:12-56, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁸³ Isaiah 58:13-14, *NRSVUE*.

means to rest from such work is a great first step. A methodical walk-through of the responsibilities of a typical day in our lives can help identify specific areas where we can challenge the cultural call to unending productivity. Additionally, this could also help form our understanding of what preparations need to be made in order to be able to rest. For example, are there time-sensitive work items that will come due on *shabbath* that need to be prioritized before the Sabbath comes or are there needs that must be met on the Sabbath day, such as meals? Pondering ways that we can set aside the demands of both vocational and household work for Sabbath will help empower us to step away from the hurry of our commerce-driven world. When choosing what sort of activities we *will* engage in, it may be beneficial to ask: What does this activity reinforce or develop in me? For example: Does reading that novel serve simply to distract me from my own thoughts as I wait for the sun to set so I can get back to work, or is it helping me to recognize more fully the generosity of God? Does loading the kids up to go hiking draw us to slow down and glorify God's creative work or simply lead us to curse the ingratitude of youth?¹⁸⁴ This process of contemplation and discernment will likely be a recurrent step in our Sabbath pilgrimage. In his work on habit-building, Clear advocates for a mere 1% improvement rate in the development of new habits in order to avoid burnout.¹⁸⁵ There is space for growth in *shabbath* observance. My family currently prepares full meals on *shabbath*. I'd like to get to the point where anything we eat is already put together beforehand, but we aren't there yet. Sabbath must be practicable for us in the now. Look for one thing that can be consistently implemented and simply take that first step. As we should recognize by now, *shabbath* practices are meant to be formative not formulaic, to

¹⁸⁴ This question may or may not be the result of my family's own Sabbath journey...

¹⁸⁵ Clear, *Habits*, 17.

guide us to remember the rest, provision and hope that comes with the arrival of God's kingdom.

In the final moments with his disciples, Jesus was moving from the sixth day into the seventh by way of the crucifixion. After washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus administers a “new commandment” to his followers as he tells them to “love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”¹⁸⁶ This call is a beautiful, albeit, challenging command for the people of God to follow. Despite his attempts to prepare them, Christ's followers couldn't fully understand how to inhabit that moment. After his arrest, Peter denies Christ three times, and most of the disciples abandon him in the moment of his deepest suffering. They failed to be guided by the hope of eternal rest, and as such, were unable to participate in the work of God in that moment. It is inevitable that we, too, will have many moments where we fail to live out of a Sabbath-formed orientation to time, where we will migrate between bringing the Kingdom of God and perpetuating the Anti-Kingdom with our *nowhen* grasping. However, even in our failures, we can orient ourselves to the eschatological hope of the eternal Sabbath rest. There is a post-Eucharistic Kenyan prayer that reminds us that “the broken fragments of our history are gathered up in the redeeming act of [Christ].”¹⁸⁷ When we find ourselves living out of a *nowhen Christianity*, equating faithfulness with “sustaining a stasis,”¹⁸⁸ Christ is there washing our dirty feet and inviting us to participate in the Sabbath rhythms of time once again.

¹⁸⁶ John 13:34-35, *NRSVUE*.

¹⁸⁷ “Holy Communion (Kenyan),” Christ Church Jerusalem, Liturgies, accessed March 26, 2026. <https://christchurchjerusalem.org/wp-content/uploads/CC-Red-Kenyan-Version-II-1.pdf>.

¹⁸⁸ Smith, *Inhabit*, 19.

As we journey through time, we will always be navigating the tension between resting in God as the ultimate source of *shalom*, discerning how to act in response to God's invitation to participation in the Divine work, and the seemingly neverending cycles of "bad news." The day we inhabit is still full of complex and difficult expressions of the Anti-Kingdom at work, where oppression is rampant and the fear of scarcity darkens our sense of hope. We must allow the rhythms of *shabbath* to push against the places where the mindset of the Anti-Kingdom has infiltrated our own perceptions and expectations in order that we might discern what it looks like to "love one another" in our current moment. Practicing the Sabbath orients us to the hope of future restoration of all that has been broken while still recognizing and engaging with the needs of today.

There is a traditional greeting exchanged between the people of God on the seventh day: *Shabbat Shalom*. It is a blessing and a wish offered that the present Sabbath would bring a taste of the wholeness and peace of God to come. Each seven-day cycle invites us to light the candles and remember as we sit at the table of God in order to both receive and give *shalom*. This temporal moment is deeply in need of the good news of the Kingdom of God, and we must fight to be a people formed by the Sabbath, oriented to Christ, participating in the difficulties of Day One through Day Six, with eyes focused on the seventh day's hope. May we become who we have been called to be. In closing, I would offer this blessing: Peace be with you wherever you go. Peace be with you *whenever* you go. *Shabbat Shalom*.

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