

The Rhythms *of* Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1, Exod. 20:8–11, Exod. 16:14–31, Deut. 5:12–15, Psalm 92, Isa. 58:13.*

Memory Text: “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (*Gen. 2:3, NKJV*).

Who can imagine what the acts of Creation—light amid darkness, oceans brimming with life, birds suddenly taking flight—must have been like? And the supernatural creation of Adam and Eve? We can't even begin to grasp how God did it.

But then, after all of this active creating, God turned His attention to something else. At first glance, it did not seem as spectacular as leaping whales or dazzling feather displays. God simply made a day, the seventh day, and then He made it special. Even before humanity would dash off to our self-imposed stressful lives, God set a marker as a living memory aid. God wanted this day to be a time for us to stop and deliberately enjoy life—a day to be and not do, to celebrate the gift of grass; air; wildlife; water; people; and, most of all, the Creator of every good gift.

This invitation would continue even after the first couple was exiled from Eden. God wanted to make sure that the invitation could stand the test of time, and so, right from the beginning, He knit it into the very fabric of time itself.

During this week, we will study God's wonderful invitation to enter into a dynamic rest, again and again, with every seventh day.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 28.

Prelude to Rest

God was there at the beginning. The Lord God spoke, and it was. Light divided day from night; firmament, sky, and seas were spoken into existence on the second day; dry land and vegetation followed on the third. God formed the basic framework of time and geography, and then He filled it during the next three days. Lights governed the sky by day and by night. Different from the stories of most ancient cultures, the biblical Creation account makes it abundantly clear that the sun, the moon, and the stars are not deities. They entered into the picture only on the fourth day and are subject to the Creator's word.

Moses' description of days five and six (*Gen. 1:20–31*) is full of life and beauty. Birds, fish, land animals—they all fill the space prepared by God.

What did God's evaluation indicate about Creation? Read Genesis 1:1–31.

This was not just any space that God had created; *it was a perfect place*. Teeming creatures filled the earth. Like the refrain of a catchy tune, God kept saying that it was “good” after each day.

What was different about the creation of humanity from the rest of the world? Read Genesis 1:26, 27 and Genesis 2:7, 21–24.

God stooped and began to shape mud. Humanity's creation in God's image and likeness was an object lesson in intimacy and closeness. God bent down and breathed life into Adam's nostrils, and there was a living being. Eve's special creation from Adam's rib added another important element to Creation week. Marriage was part of God's design for humanity—a sacred trust of partnership between *'ish* and *'ishshah*, “man” and “woman.”

This time, when God looked at everything He had made on day six, the refrain sounded different: “Then God saw everything that He had made, and *indeed it was very good*” (*Gen. 1:31, NKJV; italics supplied*).

Think about how radically different the biblical Creation story is from what humanity, without the guidance of God's Word, teaches. What should this tell us about how much we need to depend on God's Word for understanding truth?

The Command to Rest

Creation may have been “very good,” but it was not yet complete. Creation ended with God’s rest and a special blessing of the seventh day, the Sabbath. “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (*Gen. 2:3, NKJV*).

The Sabbath is part and parcel of God’s creation. In fact, it is the culmination of Creation. God made rest and created a space for community where humanity (in those days the core family of Adam and Eve) could stop their day-to-day activities and rest side by side with their Creator.

Unfortunately, sin entered this world and changed everything. There was no more direct communion with God. Instead, there were painful births, hard work, fragile and dysfunctional relationships, and on and on—the litany of woes that we all know so well as life on this fallen world. And still, even amid all this, God’s Sabbath remains, an enduring symbol of our creation and also the hope and promise of our re-creation. If humanity needed the Sabbath rest before sin, how much more so after?

Many years later, when God freed His children from slavery in Egypt, He reminded them again of this special day.

Read Exodus 20:8–11. What does this teach us about the importance of the Sabbath as it relates to Creation?

With this command, God calls us to remember our origins. Contrary to what so many believe, we are not the chance products of cold, uncaring, and blind forces. On the contrary, we are beings who are created in the image of God. We were created to share fellowship with God. It did not matter that the Israelites had been treated as slaves with little worth. With each Sabbath, in a special way they were called to remember who they really were, beings made in the image of God Himself.

“And since the Sabbath is a memorial of the work of creation, it is a token of the love and power of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 281.

Think about how important the doctrine of a six-day Creation is. After all, what other teaching is so important that God commands that we devote one-seventh of our lives, every week, and without exception, to remembering it? What should this fact alone teach us about how crucial it is that we remember our true origins, as depicted in the book of Genesis?

New Circumstances

After 40 years of wandering in the desert, a new generation with vague, if any, memories of Egypt had grown up. They had a very different life experience from that of their parents. This new generation had witnessed their parents' continued lack of faith, and as a consequence, they, too, had to wander in the wilderness as their parents' generation died off.

They were privileged to have the sanctuary in the center of their camp and could see the cloud indicating God's presence hovering over the tabernacle. When it moved, they knew that it was time to pack and follow. This cloud that provided shade during the day and light and heat at night was a constant reminder of God's love and care for them.

What personalized reminder of the Sabbath rest did they have? Read Exodus 16:14–31.

Contrary to popular theology, these verses prove that the seventh-day Sabbath predated the giving of the law at Sinai.

What happened here?

The special food that God supplied was a daily reminder of the fact that the Creator sustained His creation. In a very tangible way, God was supplying their needs. Every day was a miracle with the food appearing and disappearing with the sun. Any time that anyone tried to hoard for the next day, it would rot and stink; and yet, every Friday there was enough for a double portion, and the leftover to be eaten on Sabbath remained miraculously fresh.

Israel now had the sanctuary service and all the laws and regulations recorded in Leviticus and Numbers. Still, the aged Moses summoned everyone and repeated their history and revisited the laws that God had given (*see Deut. 5:6–22*).

This new generation finally was poised to enter the Promised Land. Israel was about to undergo a change of leadership, and an aged Moses wanted to ensure that this generation would remember who they were and what their mission was. He did not want them repeating the mistakes of their parents. And so he repeated God's laws. The Ten Commandments were repeated so that this generation, poised on the brink of conquering Canaan, would not forget.

In our personal experience, the second coming of Jesus never will be more than a few moments after we die. Hence, His return is always near, perhaps even nearer than we might imagine. How does keeping the Sabbath remind us not only of what God has done for us but also of what He will do for us when He returns?

Another Reason to Rest

Israel was camped on the eastern side of the Jordan. They had taken possession of the lands of the king of Bashan and two kings of the Amorites. Once again, at this crucial moment, Moses called Israel together and reminded them that the covenant made at Sinai was not just for their parents but for them too. He then went on to repeat the Ten Commandments, again for their benefit.

Compare Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. What is the difference in the way the Sabbath commandment was expressed in them?

In Exodus 20:8, the commandment began with the word “remember.” Deuteronomy 5:12 began with the word “observe” (*NKJV*). The word “remember” came a bit later in the commandment itself (*Deut. 5:15*). In this verse, Israel was told to remember that they were slaves. Although this generation had grown up free, they would all have been born into slavery were it not for the miraculous rescue. The Sabbath commandment was to remind them that the same God who was active in the Creation story also was active in their deliverance: “the LORD, your God, brought you out from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm” (*Deut. 5:15, NABRE*).

This truth fit the then-current circumstances of the Israelites, standing for a second time at the border of the Promised Land, some forty years after the first generation failed so miserably. They were as helpless in conquering this land as their forefathers were in escaping from Egypt. They needed this God who acted with a “strong hand” and an “outstretched arm.”

The Sabbath was about to take on an added dimension. Because God was the God of liberation, Israel was to keep the Sabbath day (*Deut. 5:15*).

Of course, Creation is never far from the Sabbath commandment, even in Deuteronomy 5, despite the added reason to keep it: the liberation of Israel. In a sense, the liberation of Israel out of the land of Egypt is the starting point of a new creation, similar to the Creation story in Genesis. Israel, as a liberated people, is God’s new creation (*see also, for example, Isa. 43:15*).

And because the Exodus is seen as a symbol of freedom from sin—that is, Redemption, we can find in the Sabbath a symbol of both Creation and Redemption. Hence, in a very real way, the Sabbath points us to Jesus, our Creator and our Redeemer.

Read John 1:1–13. What do these verses teach us about Jesus as our Creator and Redeemer?

Keeping the Sabbath

God commands His people to keep the Sabbath day. Right along with not murdering and not stealing is the command to remember the Sabbath, even though the Bible doesn't give us specifics on exactly how we are to keep it.

What should be the atmosphere we create and promote on Sabbath? See Psalm 92 and Isaiah 58:13.

Because Sabbath keeping means celebrating Creation and Redemption, its atmosphere should be one of joy and delight in the Lord and not one of gloom.

Remembering the Sabbath does not begin on the seventh day. As the first Sabbath was the culmination of the Creation week, so we should “remember the Sabbath day” all week and plan ahead so that we can set aside our weekly work and thus “keep it holy” when the Sabbath comes. Intentionally preparing during the week and especially on the preparation day (*Mark 15:42*), or Friday, is key and adds to the delight as anticipation builds for this very special day.

What important aspect of Sabbath keeping does Leviticus 19:3 highlight?

Sabbath keeping also means nurturing our relationships with family and friends. God provides time for focused fellowship with the whole family, and it includes rest for even the servants and the family animals (*see Exod. 20:8–11*). Sabbath and family go together.

While rest and family time are important principles, Sabbath keeping also means participating in corporate, focused worship of God with our church family. Jesus attended and led out in worship services while on earth. (*See Lev. 23:3, Luke 4:16, and Heb. 10:25.*)

Even though our weekly routines and rhythms may be rushed, yet, deep in our hearts, there is a yearning for true Sabbath rest, true communion with our Maker. Remembering to stop all our business and planning to spend time with God and nurture our relationships, we can enter into the rhythm and rest of Sabbath.

What has been your own experience with the Sabbath and the blessings that can come from keeping the Sabbath? In what ways could you do more to make it the sacred time it is supposed to be?

Further Thought: “God gave to men the memorial of His creative power, that they might discern Him in the works of His hand. The Sabbath bids us behold in His created works the glory of the Creator. . . . On the holy rest day, above all other days, we should study the messages that God has written for us in nature. . . . As we come close to the heart of nature, Christ makes His presence real to us, and speaks to our hearts of His peace and love.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 25, 26.

“One of the important reasons why the Lord delivered Israel from slavery to Egypt was that they might keep His holy Sabbath. . . . Evidently Moses and Aaron renewed the teaching about the holiness of the Sabbath, because Pharaoh complained to them, ‘Ye make [the people] rest from their burdens.’ Exodus 5:5. This would indicate that Moses and Aaron began a Sabbath reform in Egypt.

“The observance of the Sabbath was not to be a *commemoration* of their slavery in Egypt, however. Its observance in remembrance of creation was to *include* a joyful remembrance of deliverance from religious oppression in Egypt that made Sabbath observance difficult. In the same way, their deliverance from slavery was forever to kindle in their hearts a tender regard for the poor and oppressed, the fatherless and widows.”—Appendix note in Ellen G. White, *From Eternity Past*, p. 549.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Some Christians, including even some Adventists, consider theistic evolution a viable explanation of Creation. How does the Sabbath show theistic evolution and Seventh-day Adventism to be incompatible? What purpose is there in keeping the seventh day holy in commemoration of billions of years, especially when the Word of God is explicit about its being made holy after the first six days of Creation?
- 2 What do you say to the argument that the day doesn’t matter, just as long as we have one day of rest a week? Or, on the other hand, how do we respond to the claim that Jesus is our Sabbath rest, and, therefore, there is no need to keep any day as a day of rest?
- 3 How can keeping the Sabbath holy be a reminder of freedom and liberation? How can we avoid making it restrictive and legalistic?
- 4 Some claim that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath is an attempt to work our way to heaven. What is the logic, however, in claiming that by resting on the seventh day, we are trying to work our way to heaven?

Power of a Smile

By DALE WOLCOTT

The Chinle Seventh-day Adventist Church isn't exactly located in the best neighborhood on the Navajo Reservation in the U.S. state of Arizona.

As the pastor, I live in a trailer beside the church building. Several well-respected neighbors, including a Navajo Nation police officer, live in nearby trailers. But one house is looked down on as the local "drug house." Its unkempt yard and constant stream of random foot and vehicle traffic lend credibility to its reputation as a supplier of illegal liquor and more.

The church board has discussed how to best relate to those neighbors. We have prayed for them and even visited, praying with them and sharing literature and invitations to church events. The family's children have occasionally attended children's programs. But we have not seen any breakthroughs.

Then along came the COVID-19 pandemic. The church was closed, and our public meetings moved onto the telephone. Although the church has access to the internet, many families here don't have internet at home.

One day, Catherine walked across the church yard with a big smile. She wanted to apologize for missing our call-in midweek prayer meeting because she had joined her husband and their two daughters, Katelyn, 11, and Kallie, 9, in organizing their own evening worship by a creek.

"Oh, and we took the neighbor kids with us," Catherine said.

"Which ones?" I wondered aloud.

"The ones right next door here," she replied, gesturing toward the infamous "drug house."

Surprised, I asked Catherine how she had managed to invite the children.

Catherine smiled proudly. "Their big sister noticed how happy our girls seem to be every day when they walk by their house on the way to the church to do their schoolwork," she said.

The girls usually live at Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School, located about 90 minutes away by car, but were sent home because of COVID-19. Since the family did not have internet, the girls were studying at church.

"The big sister wanted to know why Katelyn and Kallie smile instead of looking mostly sad like her own little sisters. She also wanted to know why

Katelyn and Kallie are always singing. So we invited them to evening worship," Catherine said.

"How did it go?" I asked.

"When we finished, they asked if we could do it again the next day," she said. "My children have been touched by the Lord, and they can see it."



Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help Holbrook Indian School. Thank you for planning a generous offering.