

# The Significance Of The Sabbath

*Tim Smelser*

## Introduction:

- I. There are many repeated themes and recurring images, from the beginning of the Bible until the end, that tell the story of God's desires and plans for man.
  - A. Kaiser identifies seven such themes, taken from the first five books of the Bible (52):
    1. Creation
    2. Life in paradise
    3. The flood
    4. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
    5. The Egyptian bondage
    6. The Exodus
    7. The wilderness wanderings
  - B. To this list should be added our subject today: the Sabbath.
  - C. In this study we will focus on the meanings of the Sabbath, its purpose for Israel, its fulfillment in Jesus and its foreshadowing of our rest to come. I believe it is another way in which God beautifully weaves a tapestry in which we can trace the threads that tie together His grand plan for man's salvation.
- II. **Various approaches to the subject of the Sabbath**
  - A. The term "Sabbath" can refer to a day
  - B. The term "Sabbath" can refer to a year
  - C. The term "Sabbath" can refer to a system
- III. **Various definitions of terms**
  - A. Cease, or desist (*TWOT* 902; *TLOT* 1297-1298; *Vine's* 33; Leupold 102)
  - B. Rest (*TWOT* 902; *Vine's* 33; Ward 35)
  - C. Concept of fellowship (*TLOT* 1299-1301; McClister 223-224)
- IV. **Importance of the Sabbath**
  - A. There is a definite connection to the creation of the world **Exodus 20:11; 31:17**
  - B. Breaking the Sabbath carried with it a death penalty **Exodus 31:14-15; 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36**
  - C. The warnings in the "Blessings and Cursings" passages indicate that the land would observe the Sabbath with or without the people **Leviticus 26:34-43**
  - D. Ultimately, a main reason for the downfall of Israel was their failure to keep the Sabbath.
  - E. Our failure to appreciate the meaning of the Sabbath and all it represents can certainly cause us to not enter the rest that yet awaits us.

## Body:

- I. **FIVE COMMON THEORIES AS TO THE ORIGIN OF THE SABBATH**

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- A. Harold H. P. Dressler points out that recent investigations into the origin of the Sabbath continue to leave most scholars in the dark, and then briefly summarizes five commonly held theories (22-23):
1. **Babylonian Origin:**
    - a. The Canaanites received the seven-day week, and subsequently the Sabbath as a day of rest, from the Babylonians. The Hebrews, in turn, adopted this system when they got to Canaan.
  2. **Lunar Origin:**
    - a. Again pointing to a Babylonian origin, this theory suggests the Babylonian Sabbath is the day of the full moon. The last stage in the development of moon celebrations was also a celebration of the seventh-day.
  3. **Kenite Origin:**
    - a. This is based on **Exodus 35:3** and Moses' connections by marriage with the Kenites, who were forgers and smiths of the desert.
  4. **Socio-economic Origin:**
    - a. Similar to the Roman market-day, this view holds that the Sabbath was derived from the universal custom of keeping feast days, market days and days of rest at regular intervals.
  5. **Calendar Origin:**
    - a. A fifty-day scheme, based on the seven winds of the world which develops into the seven day week.
    - b. A fifth-month scheme, "which was the six-day week of ancient West Asia, to which an additional day of rest was appended in view of God's cessation of work after his six days of creation" (Dressler 23).
- B. After presenting these five views, Dressler expresses his personal conviction that "the origin of the Sabbath has not been discovered in extra biblical sources" (23).
- C. Clearly, the numerous attempts by liberal critics to find a cultural origin for the Biblical Sabbath have proven unfruitful and are strained, at best.
1. McClister adds, "The fact is that the Israelite Sabbath was truly unique in the ancient world" (213).

## II. BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE SABBATH

### A. In Creation Genesis 2:1-3

1. Scholars are divided over the question of a Sabbath creation ordinance with universal implications being found in **Genesis 2** (Dressler 27-30).
2. Though the term "Sabbath" is not used in **Genesis 2**, and though there is no direct command that the seventh day should be kept in any way, I believe the concept of the seventh day as a day of rest clearly has its origins here.
  - a. Considering the text itself we see that "completed" is used twice (**2:1** and **2:3**); "His work" is used twice (**2:2** and **2:3**); "seventh day" is found three times (**2:2** and **2:3**) and "rested" is used twice (**2:2** and **2:3**).

- 1) McClister also notes, “Even more, the completion of creation in 2:1 leads naturally to God’s rest in 2:2, which in turn naturally leads to the sanctification of the seventh day in 2:3” (214).
- b. God Himself connects the events of **Genesis 2** with the keeping of the Sabbath when He gave Moses the Law on Mt. Sinai.
  - 1) “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (**Exodus 20:8-11**).
3. In **Genesis 2** we are faced with the fact that the Biblical concept of rest is different from man’s concept of rest.
  - a. Though **Exodus 31:17** refers to God being “refreshed” on the seventh day of the creation week, it is doubtful He needed resuscitation because He was tired or that His rest involved a cessation of all activity.
  - b. “The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired” (**Isaiah 40:28**).
  - c. In **John 5:16-17**, as Jesus was being persecuted for healing *on the Sabbath* said, “My Father is working until now and I Myself am working.”
4. Two important aspects of God’s rest (Biblical rest) that I believe we see in **Genesis 2** are: **fellowship** (between God and man) and **trust** (in God, on man’s part).
  - a. Sadly, both of these things were lost in the garden due to sin and this becomes an important part of the Sabbath story.

#### B. In the Wilderness

1. Before Israel’s arrival at Mt. Sinai, we see a foreshadowing of the fourth commandment in the events of **Exodus 16** and God providing quail and manna for Israel.
2. The people were told that on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much so they would not have to gather on the seventh day. They were assured that there would be plenty and that it would not rot (**Ex. 16:12, 24**).
3. This is the first time the term “Sabbath” is used and it is referred to as a “solemn rest” and a “holy Sabbath unto the Lord” (**Ex. 16:23**).
4. Sadly again, we see man’s failure to obey God and trust Him, for on the seventh day there were those who went out to gather manna but found none (**Ex. 16:27-28**).
5. We also see in this, a foreshadowing of Israel’s disregard for God’s covenant Sabbath command and what will be a continued lack of trust in Him.

#### C. In the Law of Moses

1. **Exodus 20:8-11**: The next recorded reference to the Sabbath is in the form of a direct command: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (**Ex. 20:8**).
  - a. This was the fourth of ten specific commandments which represented the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai (**Ex. 19:4-6; 20:2-17; 24:1-8**).
    - 1) As has already been noted above, this command references and is connected to, God’s work at creation and His rest on the seventh day.

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- b. Other Sabbath day commands in Exodus:
    - 1) **Exodus 23:12**
      - a) Man and beast, slave and stranger were to rest
    - 2) **Exodus 31:12-17**
      - a) Designated as a perpetual sign
      - b) Addition of death penalty for breaking the Sabbath
    - 3) **Exodus 34:21**
      - a) Sabbath rest even to be observed during planting season and harvest season
    - 4) **Exodus 35:2-3**
      - a) Prohibition against even kindling a fire in their homes on the Sabbath day
  - 2. **Deuteronomy 5:12-15:** After the forty years of wandering and as Israel is encamped beyond the Jordan in Moab, Moses re-tells / re-commands the terms of the covenant.
    - a. In the repetition of the Decalogue, God now gives a second reason for observing the Sabbath: their redemption from slavery in Egypt. “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (**Deut. 5:15**).
    - b. This idea of redemption, and its connection to the Sabbath, is more clearly understood when we go back to Leviticus and consider the Sabbath system as a whole.
    - c. *Note:* Because the Exodus from Egypt is depicted in some passages as a new creation (**Isaiah 43:15-17; Psalm 74:12ff**; etc.), McClister argues, “Deuteronomy 5:15 is not a second reason for the Sabbath, but is actually another way of relating the Sabbath to the creation” (218-219).
    - d. While I do not disagree with this in principle, I am still inclined to believe **Deut. 5** is adding additional information to **Ex. 20**, thus connecting this second giving of the law to the ordinances outlined in Leviticus.
  - 3. **Leviticus 25:** The specific command to keep the Sabbath day is found in **Leviticus 19:3, 30; 23:3; and 26:2**, but it is the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year which constitutes the highlight of all the Sabbath regulations.
    - a. **Sabbath Year:** In similar fashion to the Sabbath day, every seven years Israel was to observe a rest. The people were not to plant crops in the seventh year (**Lev. 25:1-7**) which meant they had rest, their animals had rest, and the land had rest (**Ex. 23:10-11**).
      - 1) Interestingly, the margin of the ASV in **Ex. 23:11** reads, “...you shall *release* it and let it lie fallow.”
      - 2) The same expression is used in Deuteronomy, but the release here is the forgiveness of debts every seven years. “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor” (**Deut. 25:1-2**). The
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reason for this is given at the end of verse two; “because the Lord’s release has been proclaimed.”

- b. **Jubilee Year:** Every seventh Sabbath year (49<sup>th</sup> year), an extra year of rest was to be observed. This was called in **Lev. 25:10-13** a year of jubilee. Key features of this jubilee year are as follows:
  - 1) Rest – for the people and for the land (**25:11**). This would be just like the Sabbath year (every seventh year), except now it was to include both the 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> years.
  - 2) Forgiveness – of debts; as has already been noted from **Deut. 15:1-2**
  - 3) Redemption and restoration – of land and property (**25:10, 13**). Further details on the redemption of property are found in **25:23-34**.
  - 4) Freedom – of persons who had been forced to sell themselves into servitude (**25:35-55**; note specifically **25:40**). It is also noteworthy that **25:10** includes, as part of the consecration of the 50<sup>th</sup> year, the proclamation of liberty throughout the land.

### III. UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE OF THE SABBATH

#### A. Recognize God as Lord of All

1. The Sabbath was clearly connected to God’s creative work (**Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:11**). He is Creator and Sovereign Lord over all His work and all belongs to Him.
  - a. Edersheim appeals to **Psalm 104** and **Psalm 145** as a way to understand the Sabbath law and meaning of the Sabbatical year. “That evidently was, that the earth, and all that is upon it, belongeth to the Lord; that the eyes of all wait upon Him...” (150).
2. In **Leviticus 19:3** we see that this even includes the Sabbath. For the first time God now claims this day as His own, “You shall keep My Sabbaths” (**19:3, 30**).
3. Ward notes, “He made the Sabbath holy to celebrate His rest *from all the work of creating that he had done*. Thus, to observe the Sabbath is to confess Yahweh as Lord” (35).

#### B. Recognize God as Provider of All

1. As noted above, God’s idea of rest is different from our modern-day concept and use of that term. He continued to work, providing blessings for man’s every need. What He expected in return was trust and faithful obedience.
2. This element of faith and trust would certainly have been a key feature of the Sabbath year and the Jubilee years.
  - a. For an agricultural society it would take a great deal of trust in God as Provider to NOT plant any crops for a whole year. In the Jubilee years this would be especially crucial, where Israel would have to go about three years without a normal harvest.
  - b. God assured them, “But if you say, ‘What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?’ Then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for three years. When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating the old until the ninth year when the crops come in” (**Lev. 25:20-22**).

3. Man refused to trust in God in the Garden. Eve thought God was withholding something good and desirable from man and in trusting the serpent, she doubted God. So the Sabbath system, in part, was intended to emphasize and prove God's continued provisions for all that man needed.
4. The refusal to observe the Sabbath system was a refusal to live by faith in God.

### C. Recognize the Importance of Worship of God

1. In both Exodus and Leviticus there is a clear connection between the Sabbath day and worship to God.
  - a. "It is not without significance that the Sabbath regulations in Exodus 31 come immediately after the instructions for building the tabernacle in chapters 25-30" (McClister 217).
  - b. This connection is again seen in **Leviticus 26:2-9**. "You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary" (**26:2**).
2. In a sense, the Sabbath was one of the busiest days of the week – especially for the priests.
  - a. Additional sacrifices were required (**Numbers 28:9-10**).
  - b. A sacred assembly or "holy convocation" was prescribed in **Leviticus 23:2-3**, and the weekly renewal of the showbread (**Lev. 24:8; Num. 4:7**) took place on the Sabbath (Edersheim 138).
3. The Sabbath was closely connected to many of the feasts of the Jews.
  - a. The Feast of Weeks particularly mimicked the Jubilee cycle.
    - 1) "The fiftieth day (that is the day after seven Sabbath days) after the harvest of the firstfruits was a special day of worship on which no work was allowed and special sacrifices were offered (Lev. 23:10-21)" (McClister 220).
  - b. The Day of Atonement (which fell in the seventh month and was arguably Israel's most solemn holy day) was a day of fasting, a holy convocation, and a Sabbath rest.
    - 1) "It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath" (**Lev. 23:32**).

### D. Recognize the Importance of Fellowship with God

1. It has been previously noted that the fellowship God desired to have with man was lost when Adam and Eve sinned.
2. A covenant relationship between God and His people was entered into at Sinai and the Sabbath system was a sign of that covenant.
  - a. "You shall observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (**Ex. 31:13**).
  - b. Dressler notes, "Every celebration of the Sabbath reminded the believer that God had made a covenant with him... To break the Sabbath, the sign of the covenant, meant to violate the covenantal relationship, to reject the spiritual renewal of the covenant..." (30).

3. Even though this covenant was specifically between God and Israel, the blessings of Sabbath keeping extended even to those “on the fringe of society, namely, the eunuch and the alien” (Dressler 32).
  - a. “To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths...and hold fast My covenant...I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial...I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off” (**Isa. 56:4-5**).
  - b. “Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord...everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant...I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar” (**Isa. 56:6-7**).
4. “The Sabbath was designed to be the time when man and God enjoyed each other’s fellowship, the time when man put off physical concerns and came to God in faith, and God enjoyed the heartfelt thanks and adoration from man. It was, in a sense, the time when man and God came together” (McClister 224).

#### IV. ISRAEL’S FAILURE TO KEEP THE SABBATH

##### A. Leviticus 26:34-43

1. In **Leviticus 26** (and **Deuteronomy 28**) God clearly explains the blessings Israel would receive if they would only “walk in my statutes and keep my commandments and do them” (**26:3**).
  - a. *Note*: The enumeration of these blessings immediately follow the admonition, “You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary; I am the Lord your God” (**26:2**).
2. The curses that would come upon Israel if they did not listen to God and obey Him are explained beginning in **25:14**. The ultimate punishment for breaking this covenant with God was that Israel would be “scattered among the nations” (**26:33**).
3. God continues and explains why they would be removed to a foreign country: “Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it” (**26:34-35**).
4. It seems that God is essentially telling Israel, “The land will observe the Sabbath, with you or without you!” They had been warned.

##### B. Isaiah 58:13-14

1. As an explanation of, and a remedy for, Israel’s captivity, Isaiah pointed to their Sabbath keeping (or lack thereof). “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways or seeking your own pleasure or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (**58:13-14**).

##### C. Jeremiah 17:19-27

1. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah identified the keeping of the Sabbath as a means of preserving Israel/Judah (**17:24-26**) and the breaking of the Sabbath as a reason why Jerusalem would be destroyed. “If you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and not

to bear a burden and enter by the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched” (17:27).

#### D. 2 Chronicles 36:21

1. As the inspired historian records the fall of Jerusalem and the final deportation into Babylonian captivity, the reason given clearly points back to **Leviticus 26** (and of course **Jeremiah 29:10**, regarding the length of captivity), “...to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate, it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (36:21).
  - a. I believe the symbolism of the seventy years here is important. The use of the number 70 is another way of saying Israel would be in captivity for ten Sabbaths (10 x 7). This symbolism also helps shed light on the 490 years in **Daniel 9**. Here God seems to use the Sabbath system again and this time points to seventy Sabbaths (70 x 7) or ten Jubilees (10 x 49). (For further discussion on this subject, see Roberts 104-111).

#### E. Ezekiel 20:12; see also 22:1-31

1. Writing while a captive himself in Babylon, Ezekiel looked back to Israel’s failure to keep the Sabbath. God said:
  - a. “My Sabbaths they greatly profaned” (20:13)
  - b. “You have despised my holy things and have profaned my Sabbaths” (22:8)
  - c. “Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things...they have disregarded my Sabbaths so that I am profaned among them” (22:26).

#### F. Nehemiah 13:15-22

1. Even after the people returned from captivity and even after they vowed not to do business on the Sabbath day (**Neh. 10:31**), Nehemiah had to chastise the leaders of Judah and ask, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath” (**Neh. 13:17-18**).
2. Though Amos refers to a semblance of Sabbath keeping (8:4-6), and though we may safely assume that some form of the Sabbath may have been kept in the days of kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, it is generally agreed that Israel simply did not keep the Sabbath system as was prescribed in the Law.
  - a. “It is one thing to receive a command and quite another to obey it. In light of the prophets’ predictions of judgment for failing to keep the Sabbath, the question arises whether preexilic Israel kept the Sabbath at all” (Dressler 32).
  - b. “Unfortunately, evidence from the Old Testament seems to indicate that Israel hardly ever celebrated the sabbath year or the Year of Jubilee” (Beyer 432).
3. The Old Testament era ends with Israel still struggling to appreciate and recognize what God wanted from them and for them, in the keeping of the Sabbath laws.

### V. MESSIANIC IMPLICATIONS

#### A. Jesus and the Sabbath

1. D. A. Carson and A. T. Lincoln both argue that Jesus did nothing to break the Sabbath during His public ministry. Instead, he was simply fulfilling it.
  - a. “There is no hard evidence that Jesus Himself ever contravened any written precept of the Torah concerning the Sabbath” (Carson 84).
  - b. “The hidden and transitional aspects of Jesus’ ministry account for the fact that no definite break with the Mosaic Sabbath is clearly set out in His teaching or actions...” (Lincoln 364).
2. Luke tells us that it was the custom of Jesus to worship on the Sabbath (**4:16**). This is seen in many other gospel accounts (**Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 13:10**, etc.).
  - a. Jesus respected and observed other laws and traditions such as keeping the feasts (**John 5:1; Luke 22:7-8**) and paying the temple tax (**Matt. 17:24-27**).
3. Yet the numerous examples in the gospels of Jesus clashing with the Jewish leaders, over his actions or conduct on the Sabbath, stand out as a key point in His ministry, and our understanding of the full meaning of the Sabbath.

#### B. Sabbath Controversies

1. **Matthew 12:1-8 (Mark 2:23-28)**: The disciples are accused of doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath when they pulled ears of grain to eat (**12:2**).
2. **Matthew 12:9-14 (Mark 3:1-6)**: In the synagogue Jesus is asked, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” (**12:10**).
3. **John 5:2-18**: The Jews sought to kill Jesus because he broke the Sabbath and made himself equal with God (**5:18**).
4. **Luke 13:10-17**: The ruler of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath, and went so far as to tell the crowd they should come to be healed of Jesus any of the other six days but NOT on the Sabbath day (**13:14**).
5. **Luke 14:1-6**: In the house of a ruler of the Pharisees Jesus asked, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” (**14:3**).
6. **John 9:1-41**: In the healing of the man born blind, some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath” (**9:16**).

#### C. Sabbath Miracles

1. There are seven specific recorded miracles that Jesus performed on the Sabbath. Some are included above, but all seven (in possible chronological order) are as follows:
  - a. Demonic in the Synagogue [Capernaum] (**Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37**)
  - b. Peter’s Mother-in-Law [Capernaum] (**Mark 1:29-31; Matt. 8:14-15; Luke 4:38-39**)
  - c. Man with the Withered Hand [Capernaum] (**Mark 3:1-6; Matt. 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11**)
  - d. Man Paralyzed Thirty-Eight Years [Jerusalem] (**John 5:1-18 (7:23-24)**)
  - e. Woman with Eighteen Years Infirmity [Judea, near Jerusalem?] (**Luke 13:10-17**)

- f. Man with Dropsy (kidney disease? congestive heart failure?) [Jerusalem?] (**Luke 14:1-5**)
  - g. Man Born Blind [Jerusalem] (**John 9:1-41**)
2. Though these Sabbath miracles were a constant source of friction between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, it would seem that Jesus did not go out of His way to heal on the Sabbath.
    - a. “Provocation is scarcely the right term for describing the natural way in which Jesus conducts His ministry of healing” (Lincoln 360).
    - b. The multitudes seemed to follow Him seven days a week and some of the miracles took place in the synagogue which was a logical place for Jesus to be on the Sabbath.
  3. I do believe, however, that Jesus used most of the Sabbath opportunities to make the very important point we will consider below.

#### D. The Year of the Lord’s Favor **Luke 4 / Isaiah 61**

1. Though Luke is the only gospel writer to record this event, it is a most powerful account in connecting the threads of the story of the Sabbath.
2. The placement of this story at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry shows that Luke thought this event explained who Jesus was and what He had come to do.
  - a. The baptism of Jesus (**Luke 3:21-22**)
  - b. The genealogy of Jesus (**Luke 3:23-38**)
  - c. The temptations of Jesus (**Luke 4:1-13**)
  - d. Jesus comes “in the power of the Spirit” (**Luke 4:14-15**)
  - e. The Nazareth narrative (**Luke 4:16-30**)
3. Jesus came to Nazareth and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his custom (**4:16**). He was handed the book of Isaiah and specifically and intentionally read from **Isaiah 61:1-3**.
  - a. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” – recalls **Isaiah 42:1** and **48:16**
    - 1) Note also the connection to **Luke 4:14**
  - b. “He has anointed me” -- divine direct installation by means of anointing oil is associated with prophets, priests, and kings
  - c. “To proclaim” – common expression used of prophetic activity
  - d. “Good news to the poor” – good news, glad tidings, the gospel
  - e. “Release to the captives” – again recalls **Isaiah 42:7**
    - 1) As we have already noted, the term *release* is often used in connection with the Sabbath rest (**Ex. 23:11; Deut. 15:1-2, 9; 31:10**)
  - f. “Restore sight to the blind” – yet another connection to **Isaiah 42:7**; also seen in **Isaiah 35:5** when Zion would be filled with joy and gladness
  - g. “Set at liberty those that are oppressed” – the term *liberty* here must make one think of **Lev. 25:10**

- 1) See also **Isaiah 58:6** – “to let the oppressed go free”
- h. “To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” – I believe this is a direct reference back to **Leviticus 25** and the Jubilee Year.
  - 1) In **Isaiah 49:8** the Lord says to the servant, “In a favorable time I have answered you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”
  - 2) There was a specific time, a specific “day” in which God would help His anointed one who had come to help save His people.
  - 3) Paul says, “But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son...” (**Gal. 4:4**).
  - 4) After quoting from **Isaiah 49:8**, Paul announced to the Corinthians, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold now is the day of salvation” (**2 Cor. 6:2-3**).

#### E. Jesus is our Sabbath Rest, our Jubilee

1. In **Luke 4:21** Jesus said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”
  - a. Jesus came to fulfill all that was prophesied and all that was foreshadowed in the Old Testament (**Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:44**). The fulfillment of these things clearly pointed to His identity as the Messiah, the seed of David, the Son of God.
2. He was the Servant of **Isaiah 42 – 53** and He had come to announce the favorable year of the Lord. He had come to proclaim that the culmination of God’s plan for man’s ultimate rest, and fellowship with Him was now here.
3. Jesus referenced **Isaiah 61** again in **Luke 7:22** when John sent two disciples to inquire if Jesus was indeed the Messiah. The blind saw, the lame walked, the poor had good news preached to them. But there was something more to it than just the physical healing ...
  - a. The poor and blind were those without salvation (**Luke 1:78-79; 2:29-32**)
  - b. The oppressed and captive ones were those enslaved by sin (**Luke 13:10-17; Acts 10:38**)
    - 1) Consider especially Jesus healing the crippled woman on the Sabbath in **Luke 13**. He uses the term *loosed* or *freed* in **13:12, 15, and 16**. He makes the point that Satan had bound her (held captive) so He had freed her.
    - 2) This releasing of a captive, this freeing of one oppressed is Sabbath / Jubilee activity and terminology.
4. Recall the key futures of the Sabbath year / Jubilee year:
  - a. Rest
  - b. Forgiveness
  - c. Redemption and restoration
  - d. Freedom
5. Jesus is our Sabbath rest; our Jubilee
  - a. He alone offers us true rest (**Matt. 11:28-30**)
  - b. He alone is the means of forgiveness of sins (**Matt. 26:28; Acts 4:12**)

- c. He alone redeems and restores us to the Father (**Titus 2:12-14**)
  - d. He alone sets us free (**Galatians 5:1; Romans 6**)
6. The fellowship, blessings, rest and covenant relationship that God offers and desires to have with man are now being fulfilled in Jesus.
- a. “Thus the *messianic age* is God’s Sabbath rest realized. In the messianic age every day is a Sabbath day, every year is a Sabbath year, and the messianic age is a spiritual Jubilee to God” (McClister 230).

## VI. THE REST THAT IS TO COME

- A. Though he was writing to New Covenant Christians (and thus, to those who were enjoying rest through the blood of Jesus), the author of Hebrews says, “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (**4:9**).
- B. If we look at the Hebrew writer’s use of **Psalm 95**, we get a better understanding of this rest that remains:
  - 1. Though Israel did eventually enter Canaan, this was not the rest that God had in mind. “For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that” (**Heb. 4:8**).
  - 2. Though God had given Israel peace and rest in the latter days of David’s reign and during the reign of Solomon (**1 Chron. 22:9-10**), David did not believe this was the rest God ultimately desired, for he urged the people of his day in **Psalm 95** to hear God’s voice and not harden their hearts so they might enter His rest.
  - 3. By repeating the word “Today” (**3:7, 13, 15; 4:7**), the first century writer of Hebrews impresses upon his readers the present-day applicability of this admonition. Though they (and we) are enjoying God’s rest through the blood of Jesus, they/we must hear His voice, they/we must not harden their/our hearts, and they/we must give diligence to enter the rest that remains for the people of God.

### Conclusion:

- I. Today, we have rest and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. Yet we anxiously await the day when we will enjoy everlasting fellowship, eternal blessings and rest, worship and service to our God without end. We await a home in heaven with our Lord, our Provider, our Creator, and our Savior and King.
- II. Indeed, “let us fear” and “let us give diligence” to enter into His rest, and not come short of it (**Hebrews 4:1, 11**).

Tim Smelser  
 96 Kestrel Ct. NW  
 Kennesaw, GA 30144  
 tjsmelser@earthlink.net

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