

Equality Through the Lens of Sabbath Hermeneutics  
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Sabbath is the great equalizer and inclusionist. It is impossible to keep Sabbath and, at the same time, discriminate, marginalize, humiliate, and exclude others. Sabbath, unlike any other concept in the Bible, engages all human beings with equal concern, respect, dignity, and inclusion in ministry. While Sabbath is mostly recognized as a rest day between labor-intensive workdays, the focus on who is the reason for Sabbath as stated by Jesus—“the Sabbath was made because of the human” (Mark 2:27)—does not receive enough emphasis or is only an afterthought in commentaries.

In the context of the seventh day of creation, the sacredness of Sabbath extends to all human beings as the Creator’s accomplished and blessed master work (Gen 1:26–2:3). The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament present Sabbath as God’s favored occasion for upholding and restoring those who suffer under the discriminatory norms of patriarchal power, religious hierarchy, and social and economic status to a place of dignity and inclusion. In this way, Sabbath becomes a beacon of hope and resistance particularly for degraded and mistreated women, other outsiders, and the poor. This study offers a new reading of Sabbath texts in the Bible and attempts to show how Sabbath functions as hermeneutic lens for equality via diversity and inclusion.

## Equality and the Creation Sabbath

Genesis 1:26-2:3

The account of the sixth day of creation contains God's exceptional speech, "Let us make 'adam [human, humanity] as our image, according to our likeness" (Gen 1:26).<sup>1</sup> The entire theology of *imago Dei*<sup>2</sup> ("image of God") rests upon the divine speech and engaging with questions about resemblance and similarity between God and the human being as well as differences.<sup>3</sup> In Christian theology *imago Dei* has been defined as substantive, relational, and functional. (1) Substantive, in so far as God makes himself manifest in human beings and actualizes His salvific purposes while respecting the free will of an individual being. (2)

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<sup>1</sup> On the two terms "image" (**Mlx**) and "likeness" (**twmd**), see the 9<sup>th</sup> century B. C. E. Assyrian-Aramaic bilingual inscription from Tell Fakharyiah that describes the statue of king Haddayit'ī as an image and likeness of the god Hadad, using Aramaic equivalents of these two words interchangeably in lines 1 and 15. See Edward Lipinski, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta; Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1994), 48-49. Some note that the two nouns "image," and "likeness," seem to possess overlapping meanings emphasizing respectively the concrete and abstract aspects of the human being in relation to God. See David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17-26; Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 36; Ilona Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 61.

<sup>2</sup> On the subject of the *imago Dei*, see David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53-103; Charles L. Feinberg, "The Image of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972): 235-245; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988); and Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 203-214.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the preposition *bet* in **wnmlxb** and **wmlxb** grammarians hold that this is a *beth essentiae*, and so the two phrases in Gen 1:26, 27 should be translated "as our image" and "as his image" instead of "in our image" and "in his image." See Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 487. Cf. Eugene H. Merrill, "Image of God," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 443.

Relational, in that God establishes and maintains a relationship with humankind, and human beings have complex and intricate relationships with each other. (3) Functional, in that humanity, male and female, have dominion and rule over the earth by reflecting God's benevolent rule over the universe.<sup>4</sup>

The differences between God and the human are best seen in the Genesis text, "God created the human ('adam) as His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female created He them" (Gen 1:27).<sup>5</sup> The first part of the verse emphasizes distinctives between God and the human being; the human being is not God but God's image.<sup>6</sup> The German theologian Claus Westermann has captured this aspect of otherness in the human being well with the expression, "Gottes Gegenüber,"<sup>7</sup> God's opposite, one who is across from and facing God. The otherness and face-to-face element of *imago Dei* may be recognized as the foundation for every encounter and meeting between God and the human being.

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 33–65; Joshua R. Farris, *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans Both Creaturely and Divine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2020); John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Oberforcher holds that the clause **wta arb Myhla Mlxb wmlxb**, "in his image, as God's image he created him," in Gen 1:27 and its immediate context give the impression of a distancing or distinctiveness. Robert Oberforcher, "Biblische Lesarten zur Anthropologie des Ebenbildmotivs," in *Horizonte Biblischer Texte: Festschrift für Josef M. Oesch zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. Andreas Vonach and Georg Fischer; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003), 139.

<sup>6</sup> Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 82; Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 37, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Claus Westermann, *Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 56.

The creation act in Gen 1:27, portrays humanity (‘*adam*’) as distinct sexes, male and female, to whom “be fruitful and multiply” (v. 28) is a blessing for procreation. The task of rulership over the created world is given to humanity (‘*adam*’), not Adam, “let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth; . . . and God said to them, . . . fill the earth and subdue it; rule over the fish of the sea and over . . .” (v. 26, 28). There is no hint of any leadership function assigned to the male that would exclude the female. There is no difference in their humanity, image-bearing capacity, purpose, or blessing. Nonetheless, it is important to notice that the poetry of God’s keynote speech in Gen 1:26–30 is to evoke meanings beyond the prosaic. The binary opposition of the sexes as “male and female” is deeply embedded in the creation narrative being the tenth and last in a series of contrasts. The oppositions provide structure and order to a chaotic world<sup>8</sup> without creating hierarchy. They also indicate the breadth of divine creation and the reality of that which exists in between the opposites.<sup>9</sup>

The liturgy of creation comes to a climactic end with the seventh day, “By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He

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<sup>8</sup> Saul M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>9</sup> There are, the heavens and the earth, light and darkness, day and night, evening and morning, waters above and waters below, seas and dry land, the greater light and the lesser light, water creatures and birds, land animals and the human, and finally, male and female. In the same way as evening and morning are not the only reality of the created world, but they encompass all times of day and all shades of light, dusk and dawn, all other binaries invite us to recognize every part that exists in between opposites as God’s creation.

rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen 2:2, 3). The unique character of the seventh day text stands apart and builds the pinnacle of the creation story.<sup>10</sup> We are left with the impression of a God who, after having been intentional on binary opposition, acknowledges all that exists as his completed work, as good and whole. In the satisfaction of closure (which is signified by the Hebrew verb *shabat*, “he stopped, ceased”), God pledges his very being into a holy bond with the created beings.<sup>11</sup>

### Equality in Sabbath Laws

Exodus 20:8–11

At the foot of Mount Sinai, the Israelites, are rescued slaves standing in the presence of a God who is in the process of transforming their identity into free people (Exod 19:1–25). For

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<sup>10</sup> For literary analysis of the creation account in Gen 1:1–2:4, see my dissertation, “The Sabbath in the Pentateuch: An Exegetical and Theological Study,” 14–72; David Toshio Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, JSOT Sup 83 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 39, 40; Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 80-93; Arnold, *Two Stage Biblical Creation*, 65-83; Lee Irons and Meredith G. Kline, “The Framework View,” in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the “Days” of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux, 2001), 217-256.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Milgrom’s insight on the relational aspect of holiness applies in a special way to the sanctification of the Sabbath in relation to the human being: “Holiness means not only ‘separation from’ but ‘separation to’. It is a positive concept, an inspiration and a goal associated with God’s nature and his desire for man.” See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 731. Claus Westermann notes: “The meaning is that mankind is created so that something can happen between God and man: mankind is created to stand face to face with God.” See Westermann, *Creation*, 56. The German text in *Schöpfung* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1971), 82, reads: “Von der Menschheit wird gesagt, dass sie geschaffen ist, damit etwas geschehe zwischen Gott und Mensch: die Menschheit ist zu Gottes Gegenüber geschaffen.” Fernando Canale understands Sabbath sanctification in terms of the relational character of God who makes room for the “other.” See Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 201-202.

those who have experienced powerful hierarchical systems and coercive oppression in their bodies understand the gift coming to them from the Mountain. The proclamation of the Ten Commandments is to the individual person. Every “you” in Exod 20:2–17 is a singular personal pronoun in the Hebrew text tied to covenantal promises, “You will never . . . you will never.” At the center, is Sabbath, a remembrance, a day of rest, and a challenge for equal regard and treatment of anyone who shares life with the Israelite Sabbath keeper. To identify the day of stopping from labor (Hebrew *shabbat*) as something else than the ultimate sign of freedom would be sacrilegious, “the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work” (Exod 20:10a). It is equally harmful to misunderstand the significance of the list of beneficiaries at the heart of Sabbath, “in it you shall not do any work, you, and your son, and your daughter, your male servant, and your female servant, and your cattle, and your stranger [refugee, protected citizen] who is in your gates” (Exod 20:10b; my translation).<sup>12</sup> Take note, specifically, how many are listed, and who is noted with gender and class.

In differentiating the household members by gender and social class in the moment of Sabbath, God draws a straight line and places each member on the same level. This gender and class leveling is highly significant, because it is given to people who exist in a millennia-old

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<sup>12</sup> See the meaning of גֵּר, “ger,” in *HALOT*, 1:201, as one who is “in need of protection,” “a man who (alone or with his family) leaves village and tribe because of war 2S 4<sub>3</sub> Is 16<sub>4</sub>, famine Ru 1<sub>1</sub>, epidemic, blood guilt etc. and seeks shelter and residence at another place, where his right of landed property, marriage and taking part in jurisdiction, cult and war has been curtailed.”

world of hierarchical male dominance.<sup>13</sup> And so, Sabbath becomes a gift not only to the Israelites but to the world. Its vision and influence are to transform every notion of a power-controlled, hierarchically dominated world of thinking and bring about a community of equally free people.

Sabbath, the seventh day, has seven members who are mentioned in the commandment, to make the house complete, with five categorized by their gender. Regarding the “you,” a second masculine singular, some have wondered why the wife is not part of the list. A contextual reading of Exod 20 shows that the Ten Commandments address each individual present, including women, with a masculine singular “you.” Otherwise, it would mean that only men would have to obey the commandments. Note that, “in biblical Hebrew, masculine grammatical form does not specify social gender unless it is used to refer to a definite, particular person.”<sup>14</sup> Some argue for the inclusion of the wife also with the principle of embeddedness taken from the “one flesh” partnership between husband and wife (Gen 2:24).<sup>15</sup>

The other gender-defined members in the Sabbath commandment are “your son and your daughter” instead of children, and “your male slave and your female slave” instead of slaves or

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<sup>13</sup> See the excellent discussion on hierarchical male dominance in the ancient Near East and the Old Testament by Jean Sheldon, “Images of Power, the Image of God, and a Kingdom of Priests,” paper presented at ASRS, Chicago, 16 November 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, ed., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York: Women of Reform Judaism, 2008), 416.

<sup>15</sup> For the reason why the wife is not included in that list, see considerations on family creation order and the expression, “and they will be one flesh” (Gen 2:24), as well as the principle of embeddedness in Israelite society by Gerald A. Klingbeil, “‘Not so Happily Ever After’ . . . : Cross-Cultural Marriages in the Time of Ezra-Nehemiah,” *Maarav* 14 (2007): 74; cf. K. C. Hanson, “Sin, Purification, and Group Process,” in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. Henry T. C. Sun et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 171.

servants. To discern by class and by gender truly makes the Sabbath commandment stand out among ancient Near Eastern laws where societies are deeply shaped by the paradigms of hierarchical and patriarchal power. Sabbath comes as a revolutionary concept, a diametrically opposed model of community, to bring attention to people groups on the margins. The theologian Karl Barth has captured the core of the Sabbath commandment: “This commandment is total. It discovers and claims the human being in his depths and from his utmost bounds.”<sup>16</sup> Sabbath envisions the human being as *‘adam* in relation to God, with an identity free of categories that keep people grouped and hierarchically stacked, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

#### Exodus 23:12

Exodus 23:12 reads: “Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as the stranger, may refresh themselves” (my translation). Here, the Sabbath commandment is unique in several ways, one being that the male slave is not present here, but there is “the son of the female slave.”<sup>17</sup> Another unique feature is the encoded background story of Abraham and

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 3:4, 57.

<sup>17</sup> The Samaritan Pentateuch replaced the anomalous reading “son of your female servant” with “your male servant and your female servant.” Calum Carmichael attempts to identify the meaning of  $\hat{O}KVtDmSa\_NR;b$ , in light of comparative ancient Near Eastern studies. He assumes that the female servant’s son must be “the perpetual slave issuing from the union of a slave and the wife given him by his master,” even though the children born in slavery are defined by the biblical text as sons and daughters of the male servant and not of the female servant (Exod 21:4). According to Carmichael’s approach, the expected reading in Exod 23:12 would be “the son of the male servant.” See *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 87.



Sarah when they were casting out the slave woman Hagar (*hager* in Hebrew is literally “the stranger”) and her son. Ishmael is “the son of the female slave” (Gen 21:10, 13; Exod 23:12).<sup>18</sup>

The link between the Sabbath and the old patriarchal story truly comes alive for Israelite Sabbath keepers, because it reminds them of their time of slavery in Egypt when they were strangers and suffered afflictions similar to Hagar and Ishmael. They cried out to God, and he heard their cry (Exod 22:21-23, 27), in the same way as “He heard the voice of the lad” in the wilderness of Beersheba (Gen 21:17).

In a household where the slave mother with her child faced mistreatment and expulsion, Sabbath came to disrupt the patriarchal mindset of Abraham’s world. Sabbath urges the Sabbath keeper to distance himself from the power structure of a patriarchal society, even one that Abraham followed, and receive the slave woman with her child and the stranger (*hager*) as his own kin. In so doing the Sabbath keeper identifies with the slave woman Hagar, the archetypal outcast “stranger” (*hager*). In the visionary world of the prophet, the Sabbath keeper will bring good news to the afflicted mother, bind up her broken heart, and provide time and space for regeneration to her and the dying child (Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18).

#### Deuteronomy 5:12-15

The Sabbath’s significance on gender and class distinction for the sake of equality is even more emphasized by the Sabbath commandment in Deut 5:12–15. Here, the list is of those who should not work has nine individuals (“you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your

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<sup>18</sup> See my articles, “I Have Heard Their Cry,” *Shabbat Shalom* 51/3 (2006): 24-26; “The Sabbath Commandment in the Book of the Covenant: Ethics on Behalf of the Outcast,” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 9/1 (2006): 3-11; and my dissertation “The Sabbath in the Pentateuch,” 170-183.

female servant, your ox, your donkey, all your cattle, and your stranger”) with an emphasis by repeating the clause “your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.” The importance of this list lies in the act of remembering that Israel is a nation saved from slavery. The bonds of a world of dominance and hierarchical power are broken, and Israel is called to witness to this event with its weekly Sabbath message of equality and inclusion to all human beings and animals.

The exclusive institution of the levitical all-male priesthood did not alter the Sabbath’s enduring message of male-female and social equality. Over the course of millennia of slavery, hierarchical authority, and discrimination the Sabbath has always carried its message forward and has remained God’s standard for all cultures in all circumstances. The priesthood of Aaron, on the other hand, has been taken over by Christ’s Melchizedek-like priesthood (Heb 5:11; 6:20; 7:1-3) and not by male apostles or elders of the church. Male headship in the church has no justification under Christ’s priesthood, not least by reason of the enduring Sabbath message of male-female equality.

#### Deuteronomy 12:8–19; and 14:28–29

According to the Book of Deuteronomy, Sabbath inclusion and equality of sex, gender, and social classes is designed to radically transform the lives of the Israelites. There is an urgent call to the congregation gathered at the borders to the Promised Land to “not do at all what we are doing here today” (Deut 12:8), but to implement a regular all-embracing worship practice at the sanctuary where tithe is to be used to provide food for “you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice

before the Lord your God in all your undertakings” (Deut 12:12, 18). Sabbath language and vision permeates the lives of the people.

Another significant insight about inclusion and equality is with regard to tithe for the Levites and the powerless in Israel. Deuteronomy 14:28–29 and 26:12–13 provide regulations about a triennial tithe from the produce of the land and assigns it to the Levites, because they have no inheritance in the land, as well as to the widows, orphans, and foreigners. The Hebrew Bible often lists the triad of widow, orphan, and foreigner as the ones who represent the poor, oppressed, and disempowered in a patriarchal society.<sup>19</sup> They are most easily marginalized and have no safety net but God who cares for their needs. Tithe provided equally to the Levites and to the “disempowered triad”<sup>20</sup> is highly telling about the equality principle and justice.

#### Deuteronomy 16:9–15

Sabbath inclusion receives high emphasis at two yearly festivals, at the Feast of Weeks, celebrated seven weeks after Passover (Deut 16:9–12), and at the Feast of Booths (Deut 16:13–15). On both these feasts, “you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst” (Deut 16:11, 14) are to celebrate and rejoice before the Lord. While all Israelite feasts seem to have links to the weekly Sabbath (Lev 23:1–44), it is the Feast of Weeks that has a special connection to it by its counting of seven times seven days after Passover and

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<sup>19</sup> Deut 10:18; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19, 20, 21; 27:19; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5; Ps 94:6; 146:9.

<sup>20</sup> Randy S. Woodly, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 16.

Unleavened Bread. In addition, among the seven yearly feasts only the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths show inclusion as a highly universal quality. No people group is left out from the celebrations.

#### Leviticus 25:1–55

The Sabbath Year and the Jubilee are directly bound to the weekly Sabbath. The link is embedded in their meaning and concept of release and freedom and in the counting of years based on the number seven. Yet the equality principle is highly expressive when one looks at the detailed list of addressees identified by sex and social class: “All of you shall have the Sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat” (Lev 25:6).

In conclusion to the observations of the deuteronomic texts, the lists of participants reveal an expanding tendency from the weekly Sabbath to the yearly Feasts of Weeks and Booths to the Sabbath Year and Jubilee. The lists become more detailed and longer, with the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee conveying full inclusion and equality, likely because of the greater universal and cosmic significance of Sabbath.

#### **Equality and Sabbath in the Eschatological Community**

The universal and cosmic quality of Sabbath becomes a catalyst of hope for “new heavens and a new earth” and carries high significance in apocalyptic eschatology (Isa 65:17–25).

Isaiah 56:2–8; 66:23

“The gospel prophet Isaiah has an exceptionally rich Sabbath teaching.”<sup>21</sup> Isaiah envisions Sabbath when every human being is welcome and equal, the foreigner who usually does not belong, the eunuch who is a genderless slave often considered nonhuman, and the multitudes who were expelled and discarded from their land (Isa 56:2–8). All are gathered in God’s house, which is called “a house of prayer for all people.” The vision overwhelms human imagination and mind, for its horizon is far too limited to grasp the cosmic magnitude of the prophetic revelation: There will be an abundance of Sabbath after Sabbath—Jubilees of Sabbaths—when “all flesh (*kol basar*) will come to worship before Me,” says the Lord (Isa 66:23).

Joel 2:28–29[3:1–2]

The prophet Joel in elaborating about the Day of the Lord reveals that God will pour out His Spirit on “all flesh (*kol basar*)” (Joel 2:29[3:1]). Joel uses language borrowed from the Sabbath commandments in Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15 and identifies the ones who prophesy as “sons and daughters and male servants and female servants.” At the center of the prophetic word are the old and the young,<sup>22</sup> for they have dreams and visions. They appear in multitudes. There is no boundary to “My Spirit”—sex, gender, social class, age—“My Spirit” acts without limits “distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Cor 12:11).

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<sup>21</sup> Hasel, “The Sabbath in the Prophetic and Historical Literature of the Old Testament,” 46.

<sup>22</sup> The inclusive language of Joel suggests to read the Hebrew **NEqîz** and **r...wjD;b** as referring to both men and women (cf. Eccl 11:9; 12:1)

Acts 2:17–18

It happened seven weeks after Passover at the Feast of Weeks<sup>23</sup> that one hundred twenty men and women gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem and became witnesses of Joel's prophecy. They were united in prayer. They preached the good news, the crowds listened with amazement, and Peter cited Joel's prophecy to the mockers:

“And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth My Spirit on all flesh,  
and your sons and daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young shall see visions,  
and your old shall dream dreams;  
even on my bondslaves, both men and women.

I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17, 18).

The eschatological Spirit-community of believers is a universal community rooted in the sex and gender-inclusive, equality-based message of Sabbath. The church in the Book of Acts testifies that a Spirit-governed community of believers knows of no boundaries: Peter, while confused about the vision urging him to eat unclean animals visited Cornelius, the Roman centurion, one who the Jewish Law considered unclean and an outsider (Acts 10:28). After preaching Jesus to the gentile and baptizing his entire household, Peter acknowledged to have learned his first lesson of Sabbath inclusion: “God does not show favoritism in dealing with people” (Acts 10:34). Philip was carried away by the Spirit to preach Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40), one whom the Law explicitly excluded from the Lord's community (Deut 23:1), but is welcomed with great empathy by the inclusive message of the Sabbath (Isa

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<sup>23</sup> See Edward Chumney, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 1994), 230. “This is called the counting of the omer. On the fiftieth day following the Feast of First Fruits (Bikkurim) is the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) or Pentecost (Leviticus [Vayikra] 23:15-21).”

56:3–5).<sup>24</sup> Paul acted against the Law on his Sabbath mission in Philippi, when he, a Jewish man and rabbi, conversed with a group of women, then baptized the entire household of Lydia, the gentile businesswoman, and even resided in her house (Acts 16:13–15).<sup>25</sup>

It is truly significant that the birthing of the Spirit-led church occurred at the Festival of Weeks, Shavuot or Pentecost, a feast that according to the Talmud commemorates the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai (Shabbat 86b). It is then not without reason that the Law became the main topic in the discussions and writings of the first Spirit-led Christ-followers. How does a disciple of Christ respond to the Law in light of Joel’s fulfilled prophecy?

The gospel writers vividly remember Jesus’ conflicts with the teachers of the Law about the Sabbath<sup>26</sup> and about the status of women, sinners, and gentiles before God. Note how Jesus bypassed the argument of what is lawful to do on Sabbath but elaborated on the human-focused inclusive nature of Sabbath that exists precisely because of the human-oriented nature of Sabbath as opposed to a restricted priestly order (Matt 12:1–8; Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5). In another argument, Jesus explained the Law of circumcision versus the wholeness principle of Sabbath: While the rabbis accepted circumcision on Sabbath as lawful even though a man was only partially brought into Israel’s covenant community (John 7:21–24), they condemned healing on

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<sup>24</sup> F. Scott Spencer, “The Ethiopian Eunuch and His Bible: A Social Science Analysis,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22 (1993): 155-65.

<sup>25</sup> Richard S. Ascough, *Lydia: Paul’s Cosmopolitan Hostess* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2009), 7, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Matt 12:1-12; Mark 1:21-28; 2:23-28; 3:1-6; 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30; 6:1-5, 6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-24; John 5:1-47; 7:14-36; 9:1-41.

Sabbath, even though the whole being of a man was made well, and he could be restored into the covenant community (cf. John 5:1–47).

On numerous occasions, Jesus stepped in to defend women in front of the twelve male disciples and the most respected men of the time, the rabbis and teachers of the Law. Note how he encouraged the bleeding woman who had touched him in the middle of a crowd instead of turning away from her (Matt 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48); He defended the woman who anointed his body and prophesied that wherever the gospel will be preached her deed will be remembered (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–50); He placed a gentile woman as an example of faith when the disciples urged him to send her away (Matt 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30); He noticed the woman bent over in the Temple and healed her (Luke 13:10–17); He released the woman whom the men had accused of adultery (John 8:1–11); He discussed highly theological matters with the Samaritan woman who became the first evangelist to the men of her town (John 4:7–42). Born from a woman who had no relations with a man, preached by a woman while his male disciples' only concern was about food, anointed by a woman for his burial while his male disciples argued over money, cared for by women while his male disciples fled the cross, and proclaimed by women on the resurrection morning while his male disciples fearfully hid—Christ surely does not place women under men's authority but includes them fully into his circle of followers.

Paul, in his letters to the churches in Asia, follows Christ's example regarding women in two noticeable ways: (1) He is active in lifting the status of women in the family and the church by insisting that they be educated and use their gift of teaching; and (2), assigns to men an equal



status with women by calling husbands and wives to submit to each other and both, men and women, to submit to Christ. A reading of 1 Tim 2:12–15 in view of male supremacy in the family and church isolates Paul’s statements on women in this passage from his reasoning in the first two chapters of First Timothy and from his other writings. A contextual reading shows that in 1 Tim 1 and 2, Paul’s main theme is the good news of the sinners’ salvation through Christ the Savior of all, which some do not recognize because of their fruitless discussions about the Law. Paul then points out that salvation needs to be transparent in the lives of the faithful, especially among husbands and wives, so that they will live in peaceful harmony. Paul founds his argument about the good news of salvation in the event when transgression occurred, but God promised the birth of the Savior (Gen 3:15).

#### Book of Revelation

Hierarchical power and dominance is nowhere else more excessive than in the book of Revelation, a book saturated with the concept and language of Sabbath.<sup>27</sup> Two diametrically opposed systems, the dragon’s voracious hunger for power versus the Lamb’s self-denial and sacrifice, are juxtaposed in the imagery of two women: There is the pregnant woman, a

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<sup>27</sup> The Sabbath theme in Revelation surfaces in many ways: in the “day of the Lord” when John received the visions, in the seven scenes of the book that revolve around the seven OT festivals of the year, in the chiastic structure of the book with the language of the Sabbath commandment at the center (Rev 14:6-12), in the many usages of the number seven, and in the themes of creation, covenant, judgment, and rest. See Mathilde Frey, “The Theological Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation, in *For You Have Strengthened Me: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Martin Pröbstle, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Martin G. Klingbeil; St. Peter am Hart, Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007), 223-239; idem, “Sabbath Theology in the Book of Revelation,” in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective* (ed. Angel Manuel Rodriguez; Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 2009), 127-137.

vulnerably exposed mother, using all her life power to push the Child into the world, then she flees and becomes utterly dependent upon the earth for her survival (Rev 12). In another vision, there is the shamelessly adorned harlot sitting on top of a beast full of names, heads, and horns, exercising deadly power and authority over the kings and nations of the earth (Rev 17). Against all human reason, it is the powerless woman who will overcome, the church without a desire for top-down hierarchy. The prophet stands amazed at the innumerable myriads “from every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues . . . clothed in white robes” (Rev 7:9), “a kingdom and priests to our God” (Rev 5:10) surrounding the Lamb, slain but standing (Rev 5:6).

Victory, in the apocalyptic church is not by power but by service and self-giving (Mark 10:45). What else is the silence of the Lamb (Isa 53:7) than to echo the fateful words “It is finished!” from that sealed tomb during Sabbath rest? Powerless, intrinsically human, utter sin (2 Cor 5:21), he lay lifeless over Sabbath, the day carrying with it the divine guarantee for life on earth. In the tomb it has its ultimate reason. After his death, what else is the justification to keep Sabbath than for men and women to give up the pursuit of power over one another, to lay down their lives for each other, and to accept God’s gift of life?

Revelation’s hierarchical church has no use for a powerless Lamb; and so, it abandons the day that keeps testifying to the One who “emptied Himself and became truly a servant made in the likeness of humans” (Phil 2:7). However, the church that proclaims the message of the angel with the Sabbath’s everlasting gospel (Rev 14:6–7), will only be authentic and believable among the nations of the world when it surrenders all authority and headship to Christ, the bridegroom and only head. All others, male and female, join the marriage banquet as a bride clothed in fine

linen (Rev 19:7–8). Otherwise, the call of the Sabbath’s everlasting gospel will be unimpressive in a power-structured world, and the church is in danger of joining the seat on that beast with many heads. The Sabbath’s sacred anti-imperial mission set up in creation and fulfilled in the death of the Lamb<sup>28</sup> stands as the divine emblem that except for Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, no human being has authority over another human being.

Instituted in creation, Sabbath comes into our world with its coercive systems, into our churches with their male-dominated hierarchical power structures, and transplants all, men and women, into God’s world. When that happens, men and women alike will reflect God’s image; they will decide against all structures of dominance, lay down their lives, and seek justice for the marginalized and outcast. In the Spirit-empowered world of Sabbath there is no room for male-exclusive orders; they violate Sabbath.

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<sup>28</sup> Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2009), 452-457.