

7th Day Rest E2 Final

The Significance of 7

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Jon: Hey, this is Jon Collins at The Bible Project. Last week we began a brand new series examining the theme of the seventh day in the Bible or in Hebrew, Shabbat. God created the heavens in the earth out of disorder and chaos in six days, and on the seventh day, He Shabbat. And in the same way, God's recreating the cosmos and rescuing people from chaos and disorder.

Tim: What can we say about Genesis 1? We can say that the portrait of time is that the seventh day is a culminating ideal. The seventh day also is something you have to wait for. Genesis 1 is like a template that's just going to keep replaying over and over again. It's a design pattern.

Jon: For the attentive Bible reader, the idea of resting, and the number seven are intimately connected. God stopped on the seventh day. In Hebrew, the number "seven" has the same consonants as the word for completeness or wholeness.

Tim: In Genesis 1, seven develops two key symbolic associations. One of them is that one through seven all together is a symbol of completeness. But then also the journey to get to that completeness requires you to go through 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. So then it's about a linear journey towards completeness.

Jon: And this picture in Genesis 1 of God creating gives us a way to think about how God continues to recreate the world.

Tim: Genesis 1 is not just telling you about what kind of world I'm living in; it's giving you as Israelite reader, seeing that your life of worship rhythm is woven into the fabric of the universe.

Jon: Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

All right, we're talking about the Sabbath. Not Strictly the practice of...

Tim: Yes, we made a distinction as we prepare for a theme video that we're not quite sure now what we're going to call it.

Jon: That by saying "Sabbath," we're not talking about the observance of one day, although we are talking about that...

Tim: We're not only talking about what happens in Jewish tradition and some Christian Christians on Friday night to Saturday night.

Jon: By Sabbath, we're talking about the idea that God is over all time, and time is a culminating...

Tim: Yeah, taking time in a direction that culminates in a seventh day of rest.

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Jon: This all begins in Genesis 1.

Tim: It begins in the first sentence of Genesis 1.

Jon: It begins in the beginning.

Tim: This conversation we're going to focus on page 1 of the Bible. Which actually the first creation narrative goes from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:3 is where that chapter breaks. Such a bummer. On the first page of the Bible, the chapter break kind of..

Jon: It's a literary unit is not the chapter.

Tim: Correct. And there are many clear clues as to why that's the case. However, the idea of a culminating seventh day and the symbolic importance of the number seven is introduced in the first sentence of Genesis 1, which consists of seven words in Hebrew.

Jon: Which I would never know.

Tim: Bereshit, bara, Elohim, et, Hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz. Seven words. So you think of seven, one of the great things about seven - we'll talk about more - one of the things is that the number itself gives a possibility of a perfect symmetry of three with a center and then another three. Literary structures in the Hebrew Bible is just doing stuff with sevens all over the place.

In the first sentence - people have pointed this out for a long time - of those seven words, the central word of Genesis 1:1 is actually not translated in any English translation. It's the Hebrew word "et" which is a grammar term that marks the direct object of a verb. In English, we don't have a word...

Jon: My brain begins to seize up whenever we talk about grammar, just so you know. "Direct object of a verb."

Tim: Oh, gosh. Okay. In English, "Jon, hit the ball." "Jon" is the subject. You are the subject, you're the actor of the verb. The verb is "hit."

Jon: I'm the one hitting.

Tim: The object, the thing that is hit, the object of the verb is the "ball."

Jon: Now, what's is the difference between an object and a direct object?

Tim: Oh, there isn't. Well, because you can have an indirect object.

Jon: What John hits...

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Tim: ...hit the ball into the field.

Jon: And the field is the indirect object.

Tim: Which is marked as a preposition or phrase. Anyway, the direct object "marker" is the Hebrew word. In English, we indicate objects by word order. It's the noun that comes after the verb. Jon hit the ball. Now, in English, you wouldn't say, "Jon hit..."

Jon: "...into the field the ball."

Tim: Oh, yeah, okay. Well, you could, but it's awkward.

Jon: It's awkward. It'd be like, "Why is he talking all poetically?"

Tim: Yeah, like Yoda. Yeah, totally. That's right. The reason we're having this conversation is because there is a distinct word in Hebrew that marks the object of the verb, is the Hebrew word "et." When "et" is in Hebrew, it doesn't get translated in English by an English word, it gets translated by word order. The center word, which is word number four in the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 is the word "et." And especially if you look at older Jewish commentators, they note that the word "et" consists of two letters, aleph and tav, which are the first and the last letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Jon: Tav is the last?

Tim: Tav is the last. The opening line of the Bible has seven words, and in the center is a word that contains the first and the last letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Come now. Oh, I'm just saying like it could be nothing or it could be that there's a subtle nuance being communicated there, that the opening is itself an image of completeness and wholeness. Seven, which we're going to see is a symbol of completeness and wholeness.

Jon: There's a beautiful amount of symmetry in that.

Tim: Yeah. And then the center word is about from the beginning to the end. So it's both about wholeness and the completion but moving in a direction. The beginning means you begin, then you go on a journey and then you reach the end. So there's something even an opening sentence we have our eyes that this story is about something that's going to go on and on and on and then finally reach the top.

Jon: What's the object here? Heaven...

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Tim: ...skies and the land.

Jon: There are two direct objects.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: So is there two tavs?

Tim: There's two "ets". Word number six is the word "et."

Jon: It looks different.

Tim: It has the word "and" in front of it. "Et Hashamayim" is marking the skies. Ve'et and ha'aretz, the land. In the New Testament, in Revelation 1 when Jesus appears to John, the visionary, Jesus' first words in Revelation are "I am the Alpha." So he takes the Greek letters of the alphabet, the Alpha and the Omega...

Jon: Because "the Omega" is the last in the Greek alphabet?

Tim: Correct, yeah. So he's picking up this concept "I am the beginning in the end," I am the first letter of the alphabet and the last letter. Almost certainly, he's riffing off of Genesis 1:1.

Jon: He's riffing off of the fourth word in the Bible.

Tim: The fourth Hebrew word in Genesis 1:1, which has the first and the last letter. And likely also off of passage in Isaiah 41. But that's a deeper level we are going right now. The whole point is that the first sentence puts the number seven in front of us if you're reading it in Hebrew.

The next thing - let's go back - the most obvious structure we're part of literary design for any reader, no matter what language you're reading it in translation about the structure of this first narrative...

Jon: Yeah, this literary unit.

Tim: ...literary unit is the days.

Jon: Seven days.

Tim: So you have the first sentence Genesis 1:1 has seven words. In Genesis 1:2 it says, "Now the land was wild and wastes. Darkness over the face of the deep abyss, but the ruach (the breath, spirit, wind) of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Genesis 1:2 contains 14 Hebrew words. The opening sentence contains seven words, the next sentence contains two times seven words. Then starting in verse three begins the pattern of days.

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Jon: Day one.

Tim: ...that culminates in seven days. So just think through. Seven words, two times seven words, then, out of that flows the whole narrative of seven days.

Jon: Even if this worked in English, I don't make a habit of counting how many words are in a sentence when I'm reading something.

Tim: I hear that.

Jon: It's like esoteric.

Tim: Yeah, it is. It all depends on what expectations you bring to a text. If you were brought up in the first generations of when the Hebrew Scriptures came into the Tanak collection, you would have been taught how to read it, and you would have been taught the Genesis 1 is teaching you how to read biblical literature. That's why it's probably one of the most exquisitely designed pages of the Hebrew Bible. Down to syllables and word numbers, every sentence has this exquisite design. It's a remarkable page of the Hebrew Bible. And I think it's because it's the tutorial lesson. It's the Psalm 1.

Jon: "Here are things you should pay attention to."

Tim: Yeah, you learn how to read biblical literature by spending a lot of time staring at every possible facet of Genesis 1. This is a great example.

Jon: So seven words in Genesis 1:1, 14 words in Genesis 1:2, in the third verse, we begin day one, and throughout this entire literally unit poem is seven days.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Now, let's take the next step. Remember the first sentence of Genesis 1:1, we had seven words and then the fourth word was "et" (it had the first and the last.) So now all of a sudden, I've learned from the first sentence, "Oh, when there is seven, pay attention to the middle and see what happens. Once I've learned that principle, when I look at the seven days, if I look at the middle, something happens.

Jon: That would be day four?

Tim: It would be day four. When you look at the beginning and the middle and the end of the seven days, namely days one, four, and seven, the first and the last, and the middle, you notice that all of those three days are about time. They're all about time. Day one is the darkness is interrupted by God's light, and He names that day and night. That's the order of

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time. Day four is about God appointing the sun and the moon as rulers of day and night, and also the stars. Oh, and remember in Genesis 1:14, it says, "Let the lights be for signs." We've talked a lot about that. They're symbols. And then the next word is and for moedim is the Hebrew word, but it's the word for Israel's feast days. It gets translated seasons in English, which makes English readers think of fall, winter, spring. That is not what it means.

Jon: It means when should you do these feasts.

Tim: Moedim, that word seasons and our English translations of Genesis 1:14 is the word used in the rest of the Torah for Passover for the new year, for Pentecost, for tabernacles and the Day of Atonement, and then also for the year of release and for Shabbat. I think in 23 there are seven of these moedim that Israel was to celebrate.

Jon: How convenient.

Tim: They're hyperlinked right here in this word right here.

Jon: I see.

Tim: Then you move to the seventh day, the last day of Genesis 1, which is the seventh, here we're introduced to God's Shabbat on the seventh day. And then that Shabbat, the culminating seventh day becomes the model for the seventh year of release which becomes the model for the seven times seven year of release in the Jubilee. If you think about it, this is setting up an ancient Israelite to see that all of the patterns of my building my life around patterns of honoring Yahweh, day and night, day one, I say the Shema in the beginning of the day, I say the Shema at the end of the day. That represents day one. Day four is all about the annual festivals. Day seven is all about Shabbat and the seventh year release - the seven times seven year Jubilee. So the whole of Jewish...

Jon: I only generally see the Shabbat in day seven. But you're saying day one and day four are also speaking to them.

Tim: The beginning, the middle, and the end of the seven days are all about different aspects of time that God is orchestrating and organizing. And conveniently all three of those days represent the entirety of the daily, monthly, yearly, seven times seven yearly, the whole calendar of Israel's liturgy and worship is outlined in these three days of Genesis 1. Dude, it's just like...

Jon: Stepping back, you come to Genesis 1, and the story about everything coming into existence. And so it's like, why do we exist? Why does any of this matter? And day one, light and darkness are separated.

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- Tim: And they're named day and night, which are units of time that are meaningful to humans and life - cycles of life.
- Jon: Then day four, the sun, moon, and stars that's when they show up. We've talked about these in-depth and other conversations. They're rulers of the sky - and that's a whole nother conversation - but they're also symbols and they're also helping you know when to do the feast days.
- Tim: Correct. All seven of them.
- Jon: All seven of them. And all the feast days - and I'm sure we'll get into this - they're all about...
- Tim: They're different facets of the seventh-day diamond.
- Jon: And then you get to day seven, God rests on the seventh day. And that one really stands out and...
- Tim: It's culminating.
- Jon: It's culminating. It's the one I was thinking of when I think of Sabbath.
- Tim: That's right. In other words, the seventh day is part of...think of like Lego blocks or something. Maybe think of a pyramid. Forget Lego blocks. Think of a pyramid.
- Jon: Like what kind of pyramid?
- Tim: Well, maybe a pyramid made of Legos. I don't know. But the seventh day is like the top piece. It's the most visible and prominent, but it is actually one piece of a whole superstructure of networked patterns of time. And so the smallest block is day and night. The daily repetition of the Shema, which corresponds to the daily morning and evening sacrifice in the temple, which corresponds to the daily maintenance of the lights, the candles of the menorah in the holy place.
- Jon: I don't know about that.
- Tim: We'll talk at length about it. Because there's seven of those lights in the holy place. Day one gives you the most basic little Lego block. Day four, within the scope of one year, it tells you all of the seven larger blocks that make up the whole years' worth of sacred time. Day seven points to the seventh day, which connects to the seventh year, which connects to the seventh time seventh year. And so you put day one, four, and seven together, Genesis 1 is not just telling you about what kind of world I'm living in, it's giving you as a Israelite reader seeing that your life of

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worship rhythms is woven into the fabric of the universe. I' don't know if quite said it that way before.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: What else would it mean? Because this is the first chapter of a book that's going to go on to tell you about all these things in the course of the narrative.

Jon: And likely if you're reading this chapter, you are practicing all those things.

Tim: Totally. At least when this came into existence. Nowadays, it's a much wider audience. But the awesome There's by whom these texts were written and for whom the first generations read it, they're seeing their own worship patterns reflected in the structure of Genesis. And surely that's part of what it's for.

[00:19:02]

Tim: When I come to the seventh day, I discover in Genesis 2:1 I get a little epilogue. Remember the opening line of Genesis 1?

Jon: In the beginning...

Tim: ...God created the skies and the land. Genesis 2:1, little epilogue, thus we're finished - the sky is in the land and all their host. And then what you get next is three lines of seven words about the seventh day.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: "And God completed on the seventh day the work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from His work which He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and He made it holy." Three lines of seven words. Followed by a final summary clause because on it, he rested from all his work which God created to do, which links "the create" second last word there is it back is "create" which links you all the way back up to the first line of "create." Think, in the first sentence you seven words. Genesis 1:2, you get two times seven words. Now here we are at the last little stanza, and you get three times seven words with a little ski-jump sentence that launches you with the word "create" all the way back up to the beginning again. And then you go, "Oh, I guess I'm supposed to reread the chapter." And you just do that 100 times for 10 years and you've gotten your tutorial on how to read the bible. Isn't this amazing?

Jon: Now, since you didn't mention it, that final phrase isn't seven words?

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- Tim: No, but it's the God completes His work on the seventh day, He rested on the seventh day, He blessed the seventh day. You get a little triad verb. Then you get a repetition. Why did He bless it and make it holy? Because on it, He rested. It's the only line in the conclusion that tells you why He blessed and sanctified it. So it stands out of a sequence of main sentences. Dude, we're just getting started on sevens.
- Jon: Oh, that's right because there's a whole bunch of words that appear seven times.
- Tim: Yeah, totally. People have known this for a long time. There was an Italian Jewish commentator, Umberto Cassuto, who has a majestic commentary on Genesis 1-11. He points out all these things. Here's some other ones. We've already mentioned some of these. They're seven words in Genesis 1:1. There's 2 x 7 words in Genesis 1:2. There's seven paragraphs in the seven days. The concluding seventh day has three lines that have seven words each. Each of the keywords in Genesis 1:1 are repeated in multiples of seven throughout the rest of the story. So God appears 7 x 5 number of times.
- Jon: Which is what? 35?
- Tim: 35. Land appears 7 x 3 (21 times). Skies with heavens appear 7 x 3 times. So skies and land each appear 21 times.
- Jon: Wow.
- Tim: The phrase "light and day" appear 7 times within day one. The word "light" appears 7 times within day four. The word "living creature" appears 7 times within days five and six. The phrase "and God saw that it was good" appears 7 times. This is interesting. God speaks 10 times.
- Jon: Oh, they blew that one.
- Tim: Oh, did they? Well, maybe they're introducing an important new number.
- Jon: Oh, 10.
- Tim: 10. Can I think I've got speaking, and the other times, 10 times that are going to be important? And in the book of Deuteronomy - did you know this? The phrase "ten commandments" is never used in the Hebrew Bible.
- Jon: Sure.
- Tim: The phrase is the "ten words."
- Jon: Ten words. God speaks 10 times.

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Tim: God speaks 10 times. In other words, the phrase "and God said" appears ten times, but seven of those times are commands, "let there be." Three of those times are, one, "let us make Adam," second, "be fruitful and multiply," third, "behold, I've given to you." In other words, 7 of the 10 begin with the same phrase, "let there be", the other three are different. So even within the ten, you get seven.

Cassuto concludes this: "To suppose that all these appearances of the number seven are mere coincidence is not possible. This numerical symmetry is the golden thread that binds together all the parts of the section."

Let's just pause and register that. Whoever organized this narrative wants to grind into, bur into our psyche the symbolic importance of seven as a sign of completeness and wholeness. But also of seven as the culmination of a journey of one through six building up to seven. Because think about day one, day two, it's all building towards something. The light and the waters from the waters and the land. Are we done? No, we're not done. We need to fill it with creatures. So we get the lights and we get the sky and the sea creatures. Are we done yet? No, we need the land and then humans who rule over all of it. But even the sixth day is not the culmination. It's that seventh day, which then sticks out...

Jon: It's different type of day.

Tim: It's different type of day.

Jon: No creating happening.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Seven gains two meanings here: completeness and wholeness, but then also a journey towards wholeness building up to it. That's helpful. I've never said it that way before. But I think that's right.

Jon: Say it again.

Tim: In Genesis 1, seven, develops two key symbolic associations. One of them is that the seventh, one through seven all together is a symbol of completeness. Think about how days one through seven work together as a whole.

Jon: To create the entire cosmic order?

Tim: Yeah. It's like the beautiful whole cosmos is a seven. But then also, the journey to get to that completeness requires you to go through 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. So then it's about a linear journey towards completing. Seven is the complete whole. Counting up to seven is a journey to reach the complete

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whole. In a way, we're back to creation, the wholeness of creation, and the liberation from chaos and death and slavery...

Jon: Is what we talked about in the last episode.

Tim: ...to reach that completion. There are two core ideas here.

Jon: Two core ideas with the Sabbath.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: One is that there's a sense of order and completion and God is in charge of all of the times.

Tim: He brings about harmonious wholeness and completeness.

Jon: And because of that we should remember that we're not masters of our own time. But then the other idea is that the purpose of time is to culminate and rest.

Tim: The destiny.

Jon: The destiny.

Tim: There's a journey required to reach that wholeness or complete.

Jon: The antagonist to that is death and pain...

Tim: Or in Genesis 1, darkness and disorder.

Jon: And when we're controlling our time, when we're fighting, we're using our own energy to fight against darkness and disorder. There's also the sense of Sabbath, which is God will do that for you.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. The seventh day is about the complete harmonious order of God's world, the journey to the seventh day starting from darkness and disorder journeying 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 is about the journey from darkness and disorder into that completeness and harmonious whole. And so the seventh day contains both of those nuances. It'd be good to develop a shorthand for that. Maybe one is completeness and the other one is...

Jon: Liberation.

Tim: I mean, liberation, which is importing the Exodus into it, but that's where it's all going. In retrospect, Genesis 1 is about a kind of exodus of creation out of the darkness and disorder into...

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Jon: It's a type of liberation.

Tim: Yeah. The journey towards seven is about being liberated from one,...

Jon: Liberated into completeness.

Tim: Liberated into completeness. Oh, there you go. Liberation leading to completeness. But liberation and completeness are...

Jon: Or completeness found in liberation.

Tim: That's one main thing about Genesis 1 is think of where we start. And that sets the table for clarifying what does it mean for God to Shabbat, to cease and rest?

Jon: What does it mean for God to Shabbat?

Tim: Let's talk about that now.

[00:28:54]

Jon: So we're going to talk about God resting and what does that mean. Before we get into that, why seven? Why the number seven as the number for completeness? Why not the number nine? It could have been nine or fifteen or three. Those all would create nice symmetry as well.

Tim: Yeah, three is a nice symmetry. In fact, it's simpler than seven, isn't it? Actually, I had a hard time finding resources in terms of ancient historians for any kind of consensus on the matter. However, the most repeated connection in the whole thing is actually phases of the moon. So a lunar cycle is - and here I'm quoting from an older work by a guy with a last name Farbridge wrote a classic work called Numbers Symbolism in Biblical and Semitic cultures. The lunar cycle is 29.5 days.

Jon: 29.53 days to be exact.

Tim: The biblical Hebrew word for month is "Chodesh" and its way of talking about the moon cycle - the month. So you break that number down and what you get is a lunar month is - what? 7.3-ish day cycles. A lunar month is essentially...

Jon: Four times seven is 28, so you still got one and a half days to account for.

Tim: What you often find is ancient calendars Semitic and ancient Babylonian calendars that do a number of cycles of seven and then they have different ways to make up for... they call it intercalation where they insert extra days to make up for that.

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Jon: Catch back up...

Tim: Accumulating. That's right.

Jon: We do the same thing with leap year.

Tim: Exactly. That's right. What you can also do then is instead of using the moon, do lunar cycles, which is what modern Western calendars are based off of lunar cycle.

Jon: Wait, that is the moon. solar cycle.

Tim: I'm sorry.

Jon: Solar cycles,.

Tim: Solar cycles. That's what I meant. Solar cycle...

Jon: Which is a year.

Tim: ...the 365 point something.

Jon: Point two something. It's like .24 something.

Tim: That actually gets you a little cleaner. Because essentially you can do a solar year and then every four years you just have to add one extra day.

Jon: Although because it's not exactly one, every hundred years, you skip a leap year.

Tim: Fascinating.

Jon: And then every like thousand years, you don't skip that leap year. Then because of that, we can stay on track for one year.

Tim: Well, there you go. Here's something fascinating. That's true. Ancient historians in biblical scholarship have been trying to trace back the origins of the Sabbath practice in ancient Israel. And so it's true they can spot certain cycles of time like an ancient Sumerian or Babylonian culture that use a seven structure somewhere but never as consistently as in the Jewish calendar. In the Jewish calendar, it's all about sevens.

Actually, the Sabbath cycle is independent of the moon cycle. The Sabbath doesn't follow the moon. And so then some people debate, well, did it originally follow the moon cycle and then eventually it diverged from it? But by the time you get to the shape of the Hebrew Bible, the final shape on the Second Temple period - again and always it's like a quilt - is organized way older materials. But the final shaping of the

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collection is second temple, then, even by that time, the seven-day cycle independent of the moon cycle is ancient even but for the Jewish people who are putting together the Tanak. In other words, the Sabbath cycle as a cycle of seven doesn't coincide with any natural phenomenon.

Jon: Well, except for that naturally a lunar cycle is just about four sets of seven.

Tim: About but not exactly.

Jon: But not exactly.

Tim: Nope. Which means that sometimes, there are some of Israel's feast days that connect with the first day of the month, and that stays independent. Like Rosh Hashanah is the first day of the seventh month of the religious calendar. And sometimes that's a Sabbath, sometimes it's not.

Jon: It's interesting to think about how at some point in human history, it just became a normal...you have to think about how we can organize our concept of time. We have the, you know, the sun and the moon of stars, but even so, the sun creates the days and that's really obvious. That's obvious. But then you watch us lunar cycle, why break that up into four weeks? Someone had to just decide like, "You know what, it makes the most sense for us to repeat our lives in a pattern of seven-ish?" Like at some point that became like the thing.

Tim: Well, the strict seven-day cycle is the ancient Israelite Jewish thing that passed into Western culture through Jewish Christian tradition. Babylonians used sevens partially but not consistently, not universally. Their calendar was not like the Jewish calendar. I haven't done the homework here in terms of ancient Greek and Roman calendars.

Here's something. You and I have grown up in a culture where the seven day week is taken for granted. We don't even understand this religious tradition, the Jewish-Christian tradition was a minority ethnic-religious group for most of its earliest history. The way they operated in their calendar was at odds with the world around them and their ways of accounting for calendar. And as we can't even imagine that.

Jon: If you lived around Jewish people, and you're walking around and they'd be like, "Hey, it's Sabbath." And you'd be like, "What?"

Tim: Exactly. Think of why what we're most visible to the Canaanites or Greeks and Romans that would make Israelites and Jews stick out. Kosher food loss, circumcision, especially in the Greek and Roman era where everybody hangs out at the public pass, all the men, whether you're circumcised or not. It's public knowledge. And then calendar, they

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don't work. And so especially in the Greek and Roman era, the Sabbath practice earned in propaganda or anti-Semitic propaganda, ideas that the Jews are lazy. This is where that comes from.

Jon: Because they stopped working.

Tim: Because they stopped working one day a week.

Jon: And I think they are.

Tim: Totally. Eventually, in the Roman Empire, Jews gained special exemptions for taxes and legal status as a legitimate religious group. So it was legal and acceptable that didn't work, and could pay certain taxes to Jerusalem. But it still was like in eyes of their neighbors they just are kooks.

Jon: Making up the meaning of your calendar is kind of like November. You know like where everyone just grows a mustache, and it's like, "Why are you doing that? It's November." Who said, "It's November. This is a made-up thing."

Tim: Oh, got it. Okay. Yeah, sure. Yeah, got it. Sure. And like in America anytime a new federal holiday is introduced, it's usually controversial. So yeah, the structure of time is not woven into the nature of reality.

Jon: A seven days a week.

Tim: For an ant, it's just light, dark, light, dark. Humans bring meaningful structures to time and different cultures do it differently. The biblical heritage has a structure of time that in its current shape in the Hebrew Scriptures, the seven-day cycle is not dependent on the moon or the sun or the seasons.

Jon: It's not. I mean, you can see where I would have been inspired by the lunar cycle. But then to get strict and say, well, despite what the...we're not even trying to catch back up to lunar cycles. We're sticking with seven. Something about seven

Tim: And that's going to become important. It within the narrative of the Hebrew Bible; it's God's act of creation - God's ability to create organization out of out of nothingness. The seven day pattern doesn't arise out of nature, it arises out of super nature, namely God's power to generate time and order. This is why in the Classic Jewish calendar, you can take the chronology of the Hebrew Bible all the way back to the first day of creation.

Jon: You can say it again.

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Tim: The seventh day of creation is the first Sabbath. You can work the chronology of the Hebrew Bible out...I forget. We're in year 5,700?

Jon: From day one?

Jon: From creation. Is that where the younger age comes in?

Tim: Well, this is only in Jewish tradition. There's a Christian version of this too. In Orthodox Jewish circles, you mark the date by how many days and years it is from Genesis 1:1.

Jon: And you keep this because you're counting generations?

Tim: Because you can reconstruct the chronology of the Hebrew Bible in a certain way to get you all the way back to how many cycles does it take through the story of the Hebrew Bible to get you back to Genesis 1:1. You can do it.

Jon: Crazy. You can really do that.

Tim: There's a common Ancient Near Eastern background to the meaning of seven as beginning something new. In other cultures it's tied to the lunar cycle of the seven day structure, but with a little...

[crosstalk 00:39:14]

Jon: With few days day and a half.

Tim: The biblical seven day Sabbath structure as a symbol of completeness is also connected to another factor that's unique to Hebrew, namely, that the word fullness, for something to be full or complete, the word "fullness" or "completeness" is spelled with the same three letters as the number seven. Sheva is the Hebrew word for seven, and then shaba is the Hebrew verb for to be full. That wordplay is capitalized on by the biblical authors many times.

There's also the word shevuah or to swear an oath sheva is also a wordplay made in connection with Sabbath, namely, The Feast Day called shavuot or Pentecost is about you wait seven times seven days after Passover until Pentecost. And then that's called shavuot, which can mean sevens or weeks. But it's also the same spelling is a Hebrew word for "oath." There develops a wordplay that goes on about this. The Sabbath structure of time is about God's covenantal oath to structure all of time in creation. All that to say is the three letters...

Jon: Oath. Like a commitment of sorts.

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Tim: Yeah. It's God's oath or covenant about the structuring of time. All that say seven as a symbol of completeness is rich, is deep. And this is why I find the sevens all over the Hebrew Bible because it's such a common symbol of completeness.

[00:41:35]

Jon: What does it mean for God to rest?

Tim: We talked about this earlier. In Genesis 2:1, at to the completion on the seventh day, the skies and the land are complete, what God does the Hebrew verb for God resting is the verb shabat where the word Sabbath comes from you. If you do a word study on shabat, the verb occurs a lot, and it technically means to stop, to cease from.

Here's a good example from Joshua 5. After the Israelites cross into the land, after crossing the Jordan River, in Joshua 5, the manna bread that they've been getting in the wilderness is shabat.

Jon: It's over.

Tim: It's not like, "Oh, the manor relaxes." It stops. It ceased. But here's what's interesting. The verb used in Genesis 2 is shabat. Do you remember we looked at in the Ten 10 commandments?

Jon: The other words that starts with an N or something.

Tim: Yeah, exactly.

Jon: Nuakh.

Tim: Yeah, Nuakh. Exodus 20 says, "In six days, Yahweh made the skies and the land and the sea and all that's in them and he nuakhed - he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, Yahweh blessed the shabat? In the Ten Commandments, you get both words shabat and another verb, nuakh. Nuakh - it's interesting - it is much more close to our English word rest. But actually, another nuance that we don't quite have in English. Maybe we do. Here, look at some examples.

In Exodus 10, these are uses of the word nuakh. In Exodus 10, one of the 10 plagues about the locust, Exodus 10:14, it says, "The locusts came up over the land of Egypt and nuakhed in all the land."

Jon: It's like descended.

Tim: Well, they come up over the land. "They nuakh" means they enter into and fill up." They nuakh. It's the idea of settling in.

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Jon: Settling.

Tim: This is true. When this verb is used of God, here, God nuakhed on the seventh day, in Exodus, it's of creatures, people can nuakh and it always involves settling into a place. And then often for God and people, it's settling in somewhere because it's safe and stable and secure now. So in like 2 Samuel 7:1 says, "Now when King David dwelt in his house - he's already had all this great battles - it says, 'Yahweh had given him nuakh from his enemies.'" And so he has rest. Then this is the chapter where he's going to propose to build a temple. The time of war is over, we're at rest in the land. God's given us rest, now we can attend the - what do you call that? Domestic matters?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Something like that. That's the picture.

Jon: We have the term nesting.

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: Like you get your home all in order, comfortable. just so you can kind of feel at home.

Tim: I first came across that term when we were getting ready for our first child to arrive, when Jessica was pregnant. That's when I first heard that term.

Jon: She was nesting.

Tim: Parents giving gifts for the kids. Yeah.

Jon: That makes sense for kids. Yeah.

Tim: But is it used in other ways too?

Jon: Well, maybe not. Maybe I'm just confusing. I think you could just use it for just getting your home more comfy. Those seem like two different ideas. You could separate those ideas. You can rest and you can settle in. You can't settle in without resting, but you can rest without settling in. Like if I came over to your house, and I'm just waiting for you to get ready, I might kick my feet up a little bit, but I'm going to sit there and maybe check something on my phone. I might feel like I'm resting but I'm not going to settle in. I'm not going to take off my shoes and put them on the sofa and turn the TV on.

Tim: That's right. That's nuakh.

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Jon: That's nuakh.

Tim: But when you're a nuakhing, it means that you have shabated. In other words, you've stopped doing what you're doing previously - you got off work. If you come over to my house on Friday night to nuakh and do all that stuff, what you did few hours earlier was shabat from your work week.

Jon: I understand there's a shabat and nuakh. I'm just trying to understand when I say rest or when nuakh is translated rest, should I always be thinking about settling in?

Tim: I see.

Jon: Is it always mean that or can it just mean what we mean sometimes when we just mean I just take a break for a second?

Tim: Well, that's shabat.

Jon: Taking a break is shabat?

Tim: To cease from. To nuakh is then to take a break so that I can settle in to my cessation.

Jon: And that's resting.

Tim: And that's nuakh. The challenges in our English translations we don't see a difference between Shabbat nuakh. It all gets English word "rest." And they're coordinated. I mean, the fact that Shabbat is using Genesis 1, but now we're in the 10 commandments and both words are used. Shabat and nuakh are used. And I think there's a reason. You nuakh into a place that is safe and stable and secure. In Genesis 1 we have just have the dry land and the human appointed to rule, and the whole question is, are humans going to nuakh in this place God's provided?

Jon: Are we going to settle in?

Tim: Well, let's see how the story goes. Has God settled in? Has God settled in to rest? This is interesting.

Jon: Yeah. Because God, didn't He shabat? He didn't nuakh?

Tim: He shabat but it's nuakh. In other words, in Genesis 1, you're building up. I actually haven't worked this out even with great clarity in my mind, it's kind of cloudy. The seventh day is a culmination. You go from darkness and disorder in Genesis 1 to the seventh day. In one sense, it's like, "Ah, yeah. But in another sense is just setting the stage for the eighth day when humans and God nuakh in the garden together.

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- Jon: Wait, is that word used in Genesis 2?
- Tim: No.
- Jon: But the idea is?
- Tim: It is.
- Jon: Oh, it is?
- Tim: We'll talk about that in a second.
- Jon: Cool.
- Tim: Maybe next episode or two. The seventh day on a cosmic scale of Genesis 1, the seventh day is a completion. In terms of the unfolding narrative of the Hebrew Bible, the seventh day of Genesis 1 is, okay, now, are God and human's going to nuakh together in this place that God's provided. Let the drama begin." And of course, that's not what happens.
- Jon: Now, I've heard you say God's resting his Sabbath into creation is resting and reining. You've used that phrase before: to rest and reign.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right.
- Jon: And I haven't really asked you much about it. Like where do you get the reigning thing? Is that part of settling in? Actually, I knew you got it from that if this is connected to the temple and the way of creation is a temple on the last day, on the seventh day, the king will come and he'll settle into his palace. Right?
- Tim: Yeah. Like David. We just read 2 Samuel 7, King David dwelt in his house, Yahweh gave him rest. Now, I build the temple. And it's actually his son who builds the temple. In other words, the language of God's resting place, God's nuakh, the nuakh is menuha.
- Jon: Where does that language come from?
- Tim: That's temple language. Here, this is the next example to understand the verb nuakh is Psalm 132. The whole Psalm is about how God appointed David as the Messianic line made a covenant (from your seed will come a king.) But then also closely aligned with the promise of a new David is the temple, a resting place. And so in Psalm 132, you read: "For Yahweh has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling, this is my resting place."
- Jon: My nuakh place?

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Tim: It's a noun connected to nuakh. Menuha. "Forever and ever, here I sit enthroned." That's royal King language of God. "For I've desired it." In one sense, Genesis 1 gives us a picture of the whole cosmos as the temple. The seventh day is God taking up His reign and rule and rest within His temple.

Jon: He stops from the work of creating the temple, and then his presence fills it.

Tim: His presence comes and fills it.

Jon: In a way that's like when the real work begins of a king, right?

Tim: Totally. Yeah, in terms of operating. But the point is, is I've done all the hard work to get it ready. Now, here it is, it's ready, I'm going to fill it and now oversee its operations. That's right,

Jon: Which is a type of rest.

Tim: Which is called rest - to settle in.

Jon: To settle in.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: But you could also call that work.

Tim: Well, it's a new kind of work. It's not the work that it took to get it all ready. It's now the work of enjoying the fruits of your labor. This is all going to provide the template...

Jon: Unless your kingdom stinks. You know when people are to rule and the nations are coming against you?

Tim: There are so many layers here. This is all providing a template for Israel's entry into the promised land. The promised land and the book of Deuteronomy is called Israel's nuakh. The Menuha (the place of rest). This whole thing is going to be you're going to inherit a land that you didn't work for, vineyards you didn't plant, houses you didn't build. It's all been provided for you. Just like in Genesis 1, humanity gets this place of rest given to them that they didn't make. It was already prepared for them.

The idea of inheriting the place of rest as Israel inheriting the promised land is a place of rest doesn't mean they have no farming to do. But it doesn't mean that they've inherited this great gift that they get to enjoy. And then, of course, they lose it. There's something similar. That's all set on analogy to Genesis 1. God's the one providing and working to provides

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stability. On the seventh day, He rests, fills it, rules it and wants to share it with others so that they can join this rest. That's the model. That's both ideas. The creation and completion and the journey towards the state of rest out of disorder and darkness is this liberation idea.

[00:52:53]

Tim: Genesis 1, the seventh day is both gives you a kind of the whole storyline of like, man that sounds awesome. Humanity with God shabating and nuaking in this wonderful organized creation. That sounds awesome. What other vocabulary to think about that God and human in the place of abundance and safety?

Well, another thing that God does on the Sabbath day is bless it. He blessed the Sabbath day. It's the day of blessing. It's the day of completion, the day of rest, and the day of blessing.

Jon: And that word loses its meaning for me so fast.

Jon: He blessed it.

Tim: Well, in Genesis 1, have I come across that word before?

Jon: I mean, at the end of every day He blesses the day, right?

Tim: He blesses the creatures on the fifth day. The sky fliers and the water swarmers, He blesses them - God blessed them - this is Genesis 1:22 - saying, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the waters and let birds multiply over the land."

Jon: The Blessing is the abundance.

Tim: Abundance.

Jon: Blessing is abundance?

Tim: I'm just saying the first uses in Genesis 1. And then Genesis 1:28 God blessed the human saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it."

Jon: Abundance and rule.

Tim: The third use of the word "bless" in Genesis 1 is and God blessed the seventh day. If it's the first two occurrences teach me what blessing is "be fruitful and multiply..."

Jon: Be abundant.

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Tim: Multiply. Not in terms of like more days but in terms of ...

Jon: Have baby days?

Tim: Yeah. Whatever the seventh day means may just like exponentially fullness. That is what the word "fullness" is spelled with the same letters as the word seven.

Jon: Oh, yeah. completeness.

Tim: Sheva. Some thoughts here about the blessing of the seventh day. This is Mathilde Frey. She did a really important work on The Sabbath in the Torah that I learned a lot from. She says: "Set apart from all other days, the blessing of the seventh day establishes the seventh part of created time as a day when God grants his presence in the created world. It's his then presence that provides the blessing and the sanctification. It says God blessed the seventh day and he made it holy. The seventh day is blessed and established as that part of time that assures fruitfulness, future orientation, continuity, and permanence for every aspect of life within the dimension of time. The seventh day is blessed by God's presence for the sake of the world for all nature and for all living beings."

In other words, what she's doing, she's saying we have two occurrences of the word "bless." What's that about? It's about God saying, "Hey, creatures. Go crazy. Multiply, abundance, fill." And filling takes time. Multiplication takes time. So the seventh day in Genesis 1 is like as if God is securing this as a world and as the time when abundance can live in security. It's the place of God's nuakh. He's taken up residence there, God and His creatures, creatures multiply in the presence of their generous creator. There you go. It's a beautiful image. It sounds like Eden.

Jon: Yeah. Seventh day is Eden.

Tim: What can we say about Genesis 1? We can say that the portrait of time is that the seventh day is a culminating ideal where God and His creatures live together in blessing, in abundance. The seventh day also is something you have to wait for. When you're in darkness and disorder, you're waiting for the building up. And the Sabbath day is something that only comes after a period of waiting, if you're sitting in darkness and disorder. So it's the culmination.

There are lots of people who see the seventh day in Genesis 1 not just as...like, if you look at the whole narrative time of the Hebrew Scriptures, the seventh day of Genesis 1 is followed by the eighth day and...the story keeps on going. It's cool but it's not the end of history. But because of the way Genesis 1 is designed, there are some people who say that story

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has two functions. One is to get the narrative going, but also it's a way of thinking about the storyline of the whole Bible just in one fell swoop. That the seventh day of Genesis is itself an image for the culmination of all of history, which it makes sense.

Jon: That the culmination of history is rest and completeness and fullness and abundance.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: It's the very optimistic view of history.

Tim: It is. Not based on anything that creatures do, the world's creatures too. It's something that only God does. He provides the seventh-day rest for creatures.

I've got some quotes. One by Samuel H. Balentine. Really interesting book called "The Torah's Vision of Worship." He says: "Unlike the previous days, the seventh day of Genesis 1 is simply announced. There is no mention of evening or morning. No mention of a beginning or ending up." This is significant. Every day leading up to "and God said," that's what begins each day. And then the phrase "there was evening or morning."

Jon: It ends with that.

Tim: It ends with that. The seventh day begins with "and so we completed the skies and the land." And then you get those three lines of seven words. God blessed it, He sanctified it, He rested. And then he notes, he says "There's no mention of evening or morning, no mention of a beginning or ending of the seventh day. The suggestion is that the primordial seventh day exists in perpetuity. It's a sacred day that can't be abrogated by the limitations common to the rest of the created order." He thinks it's intentional.

Jon: That there's no evening and morning?

Tim: Yeah. He thinks that the way literarily of saying everything leading up to the seventh day is under the cycle of time. But once you get to the seventh day, it explodes. It's like imprisonment to the boundaries of time.

Jon: He calls it the primordial seventh day. I had to just google search. "Existing from the beginning of time." The seventh day that existed from the beginning.

Tim: In other words, he sees Genesis 1 as a cosmic symbol - as a symbolic week that stands for all of history and all of time. He thinks, actually Genesis 1, days one through seven aren't just, "Here's some interesting

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things about the first seven days of our universe." For him, this is actually a map for all of the Bible's view of all of history. That's why he's saying the primordial seventh day isn't the day, it's like the end of the story.

Jon: So not only is it an accounting of God, dealing with darkness and disorder that turned into what we know as His creation. It is that but it's more than that. It's also a way to think about God's recreation of darkness and disorder towards an ultimate rest.

[crosstalk 01:00:54]

Tim: It both sets the story going in terms of the narrative world of the Hebrew Bible. Literarily, the sun has not yet set on God's Sabbath. I think he's onto something here. So it breaks the pattern that's noticeable to any reader. But also opens the door to saying, "Oh, there are seven days and there are seventh days. There's been a seventh day ever since the beginning of creation, and that's the Sabbath cycle, but that seventh day in Genesis 1 where the sun doesn't set on it also opens it to become a symbol for new creation where the sun never sets.

The reason why I think Lowery is right here is because... think of the depiction of the New Jerusalem in revelation 22. It's very clear to tell you that there's no sun or moon. It's just the perpetual divine glory that illuminates the new creation. Which is another way to saying God's presence fills the new creation. And so you don't need sun or moon to mark time. God's own presence and power provides the stability and whatever stability of whatever the new creation is going to be. I think he's right, the seventh day of Genesis 1 is an image of the end of the story already on page 1. And these two scholars have joined...I mean, I could read a lot more quotes.

Jon: This is all coming from the fact that evening and morning are absent?

Tim: Evening or morning or absent. But also then as you read through the narrative of the Hebrew Bible, the seventh day is going to start the ultimate Sabbath rest. The final seventh is all going to become an image for the thing that God's going to do to solve all the problems of the current world. It'll become the ultimate Jubilee, the ultimate year of release, the ultimate Passover because the Passover is a one day...You start Passover on an evening and then follow up by a seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover itself is another one of the cycles of seven liberated from death and darkness into freedom and release in the promised land.

Genesis 1 is like a template. It's just going to keep replaying over and over again - it's a design pattern - throughout the rest of the biblical

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story. Genesis 1 is like a playbook that gives you a core, I don't know, melody. And then the moment you move into the next narrative, it's going to set up the melody, but right at the point where you hope to get to this at the seventh day, something will go terribly wrong and you won't reach that seventh-day note. So you're going to go into the next cycle with Cane and then you're going to do it with the flood. It's just going to become all these narrative cycles and nobody ever fully reaches the seventh-day ideal. And then it becomes a distant future hope for anything that God has to do?

Jon: Cool. Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project. Here's a quick correction from this episode. Tim referred to two scholars. He actually said their names wrong. It is Samuel Ballantine and the other one's Richard Lowery. Both are amazing scholars. We have their names and their books in the show notes for you to check out. Today's show is produced by Dan Gummel, the theme music is by the band Tents. We're a crowdfunded nonprofit in Portland, Oregon and all of this is made possible through the generous support of many people like you. So thanks for being a part of this with us.

Scott: Hey, this is Scott.

Jody: And I'm his sister Jody.

Scott: We're from Nova Scotia, Canada. We're just here visiting The Bible Project. We just love the resources so much. Right, Jod?

Jody: Yeah, totally. We believe the Bible is a unified story and it leads to Jesus. The Bible Project is crowdfunded by people like us, and you can find free videos, study notes, and more at the bibleproject.com.

Scott: Thanks