TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING BURNOUT: A CALL FOR LEADERS TO RETURN TO PAUSING AND RESTING BY KEEPING SABBATH

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Abstract

In the ever-increasing pace of today’s 24/7 world, ecclesial leaders are continually being called upon to do more with ever-diminishing resources. Not only are resources diminishing in terms of people and funding, but also in terms of time. Despite the fact technology has made life easier, it has become an Achilles heel in that, instead of freeing up time to do more of the things one would like, the newfound time is now filled with more of the requirements because there are less people to accomplish the necessary tasks. It has indeed become a vicious cycle. As a result, ecclesial leaders at all levels are experiencing burnout, because they feel they must continually work to fulfill their calling. Yet, the concepts of selah and Sabbath are ideas that, if embraced can remedy the physical, emotional, and spiritual burnout with which so many leaders contend. This paper, therefore, sets forth a typological exegesis examining both selah and Sabbath and how a temporal embracing of both can bring forth a more sublime, eternal understanding in terms of holiness and liberation in Christ.

*Keywords:* Sabbath, selah, rest, burnout, leader, typology, exegesis
An area requiring further study within ecclesial leadership literature is that of rest—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Today’s leaders are pushing themselves more than ever. Shulevitz (2003, para. 6) writes of a time when all activity came to a halt in American society, that of the Sabbath, reminiscent of the biblical command to rest (cf. Exo 20:10).

Technology and today’s societal comforts are meant to ease people’s burdens, yet they have only made people more efficient, therefore, affording more time to do more work with less time for hiatus. The thought of taking a break (i.e., *selah* or pause) has become foreign (Snaith 1952); those who do take time to rest are often seen as non-players, slackers, lazy (Sherman 2005). This is also true in an ecclesial setting where a leader’s work is never done; for example Mother Teresa, who rarely rested (Kolodiejchuk 2009), most likely experienced the burnout we see in Christian leaders today.

Studies show the value of resting one in every seven days to provide mind and body an opportunity to regenerate (Angerer 2003; Bacchiocchi 1998; O’Connor 2006; Sherman 2005). Davis (2001) adds that, “articulating and embracing a biblical view of human work is one of the most crucial tasks for the Church in our generation” (25). Bass (2005) refines the meaning of this biblical view by stating, “The overwork that afflicts so many and the isolation or lack of work that afflicts many others are only two of the conditions that highlight the contemporary need for a renewal of Sabbath practice in some form” (32). To that end, this paper is not a theological position endorsing a particular day to observe, only to assert the *necessity* of taking time to pause (i.e., *selah*) and rest (i.e., *shabath*), which can contribute to overall physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

**Research Questions**
With respect to pausing and resting, Sherman (2005) poses several questions that form the basis of this study. What if ecclesial leaders were to order their lives such that the LORD’s time became sovereign, with all other time subordinate to it? What if Sabbath, the “LORD’s Day,” (cf. Isa 58:13, Rev 1:10) were to become the basis by which leaders governed their week, and the lens through which they perceived time and its purpose? Would such perspectives be just another set of techniques leaders used to manage their time? Or might they become the means by which a benevolent God liberates them from the tyranny of worldly endeavors and the continual wasting of time? This paper seeks to answer these questions from a typological reading and exegetical analysis of Hebrews 4:1-11.

**Methodology**

To understand insights into the contribution of rest in ecclesial leadership, it is necessary to understand the primary source considered and the approach undertaken to facilitate the discovery of a well-defined construct. For this study, a qualitative reading of the Christian sacred text of the Old and New Testaments provides the source for textual analysis. Patton (2002) describes these strategies as field-based, of which written documents are of paramount importance.

Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning…ascribe[d] to a social or human problem…[that]…honors an inductive style…and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation” (4). A means to a thorough phenomenological understanding is by hermeneutics primarily used for interpreting biblical texts (Patton 2002). Christian concepts are not only relevant, but also necessary to philosophical discourse and provide a means to dialogue between religion and science (Browning 1992). Jeanrond (2003) suggests a more direct rationale for sacred text as a source:

One of the most significant insights into the nature of biblical texts has been the discovery that biblical texts are texts. That means that they ought not to be reduced to
collections of propositions, but seen as complex linguistic entities. As such they are able both to refer back to their particular contexts and to open their semantic potential to readers from very different social, religious, and linguistic contexts. (643)

The research method proposed emerges from the theoretical approach of hermeneutics described by Patton (2002), using typological exegesis as the interpretative method on Hebrews 4:1-11.

The Typological Model

Osborne (2006) states typology indirectly predicts and analogously relates Old Testament to New Testament events. Gugliotto (2000) explains typological interpretation is when a symbol or concept “used to represent a spiritual truth to ancient, national Israel also prefigures this same truth for Messianic Israel…, it is called a type” (263) to which Osborne agrees. This “type” is the first edition of a final truth called an “anti-type”, which is a fulfilled edition, but may also incorporate a partial fulfillment.

It is important to note typology operates on the solid connection between the Old and New Testaments (Fritsch, 1947), and hermeneutic researchers use qualitative strategies to establish context and meaning. Osborne contends New Testament writers were faithful to the original text in that any new meanings were always built upon the original. The trend among Protestant interpreters has traditionally been to rely primarily upon grammatical and historical studies as the basis of interpretation (Gugliotto 2000).

However, an increasing number of scholars (e.g., Davidson 1981, LaRondelle 1987, Ribbens 2010, Steck 1970, Tishken 2009) question the benefits from intense studies limited solely to historical contexts. LaRondelle (1983) states,

The meaning of single events can often be fully understood only in the light of their consequences in later history…. Among all the nations of the Oriental world, only Israel developed an eschatology, a hope in which God gradually unfolded His promise, corrected false, nationalistic hopes, and constantly transcended Israel’s concepts of His kingdom by pointing to a future fulfillment that would exceed all Israel’s earthly expectations. (35)
God originally set up Israel to bless the nations around her through godly influence (cf. Gen 12:1-3; Matt 5:16). Yet, by the time of Christ’s first advent, Israel had wandered so far from truth it was impossible to bless anyone, even herself (cf. Matt 15:3, 23:13). Israel failed to see the greater purpose of what the LORD had typologically set before them. Gugliotto (2000) states that, “Although God had supernatural things to show Israel, He used natural ones to reveal these mysteries” (261).

The typological idea of a symbol (i.e., a sign) is it looks to the future; the things symbolized and typified, however, are not separate things. They are the same with one difference, such that the symbol comes first and the typical comes at a later time (Glenny 1997). In the case of covenant typology, it must be understood in terms of both history and prophecy.

Regarding history, a type: (a) is about something that occurred or someone who existed, (b) corresponds to a New Testament reality in terms of people or institutions, and (c) is always a shadow of a superior, more advanced reality (Gugliotto 2000, Karlberg 1988). In terms of prophecy, a type is a preview of its New Testament realization. LaRondelle (1983) asserts there is an inescapable connection between type and its New Testament reality.

LaRondelle (1983) further declares, “an Old Testament institution, event, or person only becomes a clear and understandable type in the light of Christ and His covenant people as the antitype” (37). Old Testament types focus on one or more of three time-related aspects of the post-incarnation phase of God’s gradually-being-fulfilled kingdom. Gugliotto (2000) cites these three typologies as: (a) inaugurated typology, which is Christological; (b) appropriated theology, which is ecclesiological; and (c) consummated typology, which is eschatological. It is within this context this paper examines the passage of Hebrews 4:1-11.

The Inter-texture Typology of Rest in Hebrews 4:1-11
Osborne (2006) asserts that hermeneutical principles in Hebrews must begin with typology, for it permeates the entire epistle. In particular, the typological passage on rest in Hebrews 4—not a Philonic, but rather, a mainstream Jewish pattern—exhibits *gezerah shawah* (analogy between patterns) and finds its origins in Exodus 20:8-11 (also Gen 2:2), Psalm 95:7-11, and the failure of Israel to enter into God’s rest during the Exodus (Attridge 1980). The author of Hebrews proceeds to pen a letter to help those who were struggling in their newfound faith by attempting to convince them of Christ’s superiority—who He is and what He did (Attridge 1980, Gugliotto 2000).

The author spends the first section of the letter asserting an anti-typical picture (though not in complete fulfillment) of the concept of rest. As the text progresses, he demonstrates the necessity of resting from one’s works by abiding in Christ’s fulfillment of the law. Yet to more completely understand this viewpoint, it is necessary to examine the overarching impetus for the climax of the passage, that is, Hebrews 4:9: “It is therefore the duty of the people of God to keep the Sabbath” (Lamsa).

By examining this extant, though incomplete, anti-type of rest and Sabbath, the author employs the type first given explicitly in Exodus 20:8-11 (to be discussed later). Here God gave three distinct commands to Israel: to remember, to work, and to rest. Further, God provided a reason for these commands: He ceased from His labors after six days of Creation and declared a blessing upon the seventh day and set it apart for a special purpose (cf. Gen 2:3)—“God’s people are to rest on one day because God did” (Bass 2005, 29).

Yet, because of the 24/7 social contexts of service and work in the last several decades, attempting to honor this prescription in its entirety has become a virtual impossibility (O’Flaherty, Peterson, & Norton 2010). Likewise, though the idea of keeping Sabbath via
physical rest addresses numerous issues of burnout in today’s global environment (Sherman 2005), this prescription in a multi-religious world of several “holy days” can be difficult (O’Flaherty et al. 2010). Major religious groups would no doubt contend for their day to be kept holy.

The question must, therefore, be asked, Is it even possible to honor three holy days (e.g., Muslim/Friday, Jewish/Saturday, Christian/Sunday) without some form of Sabbath keeping? In other words, selecting a particular day from which to cease one’s labors must be based upon a particular purpose, not some arbitrary reason. Attridge (1980) asserts the reason for the desire to rest can only come from a biblical source. Moreover, White (1892) declares that even without the Bible as a guide, mankind realizes its need to cease from everyday burdens--the idea of rest is programmed into mankind’s very being (Bass 2005).

Sabbath - The Call to Rest

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures speak of Sabbath as a physical rest from one’s burdens after six days’ activity (cf. Exo 20:11; Deut 5:15). Davis (2001) states that, “work is part of the original happiness of humanity; it belongs to our created nature” (27). Yet, God foresaw that people would be overworked and in need of an opportunity to decompress, so He gave provision to recuperate from the week’s activities--a breaking of an addictive cycle.

O’Connor (2006) asserts leaders in any setting (despite nationality or culture) are prone to work becoming an addiction; if they fail to rest, they will suffer similar consequences of those suffering from substance abuse. Although some make time, for example, to go to church on the weekend, it is typically a two-hour break in a hectic work schedule (Shulevitz, 2003). Yet, aside from physical rest, Sabbath goes deeper for the ecclesial leader.
The author of Hebrews states how the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, which commands a need for physical rest, is typologically using the physical act of keeping the weekly Sabbath as a reminder for the need of spiritual rest in Christ: “It is therefore the duty of the people of God to keep the Sabbath” (Heb 4:9, Lamsa). Despite this biblical duty, Shulevitz (2003) declares, “the eclipse of the Sabbath is just one small part of the larger erosion of social time” (para. 9). Thus, Sherman (2005) proposes leaders order their schedules to God’s cycle and not their own. Such careful observation would afford an opportunity to reflect upon the bigger picture, ask clarifying questions, and make positive assertions to better understand the overall concept of what it means to be in Christ (Hoppe, 2004).

Hebrews 4:9 - A Partial Anti-typical Fulfillment

The typological pattern of Hebrews 4:9 is distinctive because, although the type as it is understood is first explained in the passage in Exodus 20:8-11, it is initially mentioned both explicitly and implicitly in chapters 16 and 5 of Exodus, respectively. In chapter 16, although the focus is upon the manna the LORD rained upon Israel, there is also the explicit command of observing the Sabbath (vss. 23, 25, 26, 29). Twice as much manna was to be gathered on the day preceding the Sabbath (i.e., the Preparation Day) so that no food gathering or preparation were to be done on the day of rest (Beuken 1985, Ron 2010). Moses commanded the Israelites to rest because the LORD had given them the Sabbath (cf. Exo 16:29); there was no other explanation.

Nowhere in the pericope do we find an explicit reason for the Sabbath until Mount Sinai. Although the implication in Exodus 16 appears to be a return to a long-forgotten concept, neither God nor Moses offer a basis for the cessation of activity. There are some who contend the first giving of the Sabbath command was at Mount Sinai, yet it is important to demonstrate the experience in the Wilderness of Sin was on the fifteenth day of the second month (cf. Exo 16:1),
which was thirty days after departing Egypt (the fourteenth day of the first month, cf. Exo 12:18) and twenty days prior to the giving of the law at Sinai.

The implicit reference to the Sabbath in Exodus 5 is when Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh seeking three days’ journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to YHWH (vs. 3). The king’s response in verses 4 and 5 is of interest because he stated, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get [back] to your labor. And Pharaoh said, Look, the people of the land [are] many now, and you make them rest from their labor!” (NKJV, emphasis added). Notice the idea of the people resting from their burdens is foreign to Pharaoh, and the term he uses in verse 5 is shabath, which is the same verb used in Exo 16:30 to demonstrate the Israelites’ action in response to the command of keeping Sabbath (shabbath). It would follow, therefore, that Moses and Aaron taught the people about (i.e., reinstituted) the Sabbath because they had been taught of God’s commandments and laws beforehand, otherwise a reference to the same in Exodus 15:26 and 16:28 would have been illogical. To that end, the idea of shabath can be traced back to the beginning in Genesis 2, verses 2 and 3, where the LORD ceased from His works after the Creation.

It is in Genesis 2:2, 3 where the type expressed in Exodus 20:8-11 finds its foundation:

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. (KJV)

Bass (2005) stated, “The Exodus commandment to ‘remember’ the Sabbath day…is grounded in the first creation story in Genesis. The human pattern of six days of work and one of rest follows God’s pattern as creator; God’s people are to rest on one day because God did” (29). The notable difference between the Genesis and Exodus accounts is two-fold: (1) Unlike man, God did not need to rest, for the Scripture plainly states, “he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor
sleep” (Psa 121:4, KJV); (2) the institution of rest was set forth before sin entered the world in Genesis chapter 3. This, therefore, begs the question: “What is the central purpose behind this concept?”

Upon completion of the heaven and the earth, all of which the LORD God spoke into existence (cf. Psa 33:6, 9), YHWH is present with the man and the woman He created, both of whom at this point have no need of physical rest. Thus, it appears the first concept of Sabbath is to demonstrate an invitation to enter into God’s rest—the Sabbath here is about YHWH, nothing more or less. The man and the woman’s first complete day and experience in the new world was of “God’s free love toward humanity [taking] shape as time shared with them” (Bass 2005, 28). Barth (1960) adds, the “time of man begins…on the basis of the work God has done before his time and not with reference to any work still ahead of him” (457).

Thus, by honoring the Sabbath with their Creator, the man and woman implicitly demonstrated a significant biblical concept—faith and trust. Neither of them was there to witness all the LORD had done in preparing their Edenic home. Adam was alive during the creation of Eve, but he was asleep. Both the man and the woman had to believe the LORD God at His word. Thus, by entering into His rest literally on the first Sabbath, they entered into His rest spiritually by putting their faith and trust in Him, knowing He would commune with them and be their LORD and teacher (White 1890). White further adds:

Man was to rest upon this sacred day, that as he should look upon the heavens and the earth, he might reflect upon God’s great work of creation; and that as he should behold the evidences of God’s wisdom and goodness, his heart might be filled with love and reverence for his Maker…. God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God and meditate upon His power and goodness. He needed a Sabbath to remind him more vividly of God and to awaken gratitude because all that he enjoyed and possessed came from the beneficent hand of the Creator. (47-8)
Yet because of sin entering into the world, the original purpose of the Sabbath, where the LORD and mankind would commune face-to-face, fell into a shadowy representation of a world to come only after mankind’s complete redemption in the earth made new. After the LORD cursed the ground and its production (cf. Gen 3:17, 18), He told Adam “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (vs. 19, KJV) indicating that physical exertion, which he had not known before, would now be part of life. This modification of life would result in a necessity of the modification of Sabbath.

Where before the man and woman were to cease from their task of keeping the garden—one in which they did not plant nor concerned themselves with its decay—and commune with their Creator because of the love He had for them, the impetus for Sabbath observance shifted from purely an example to one of necessity (Bacchiocchi 1998). Human labor now requires rest to prevent burnout and the mental and physical maladies that can accompany failure to pause (Bhanugopan & Fish 2004). Therefore, the author of Hebrews’ divinely-inspired statement in 4:9 brings to the surface both a physical and theological component of Sabbath-keeping that is more precisely described in the Pentateuch in terms of re-creation (cf. Exo 20:8-11), redemption (cf. Deut 5:12-15), and identification (cf. Exo 31:13-17).

Exodus 20:8-11 - The Texture of Re-Creation and Holiness

The first explicit description of Sabbath-keeping is given in the Decalogue. As indicated above, observance of the Sabbath among the Israelites began during the captivity at the instruction of Moses and Aaron (cf. Exo 5:4, 5) and was commanded upon the giving of the manna in Exodus 16. Yet, in verses 8 through 11 of chapter 20, the LORD Himself speaks (and later writes) the commandment for the entire nation to hear:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day [is] the sabbath of the LORD thy God: [in it] thou shalt not do
any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that [is] within thy gates: For [in] six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them [is], and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. (KJV)

The express command to “remember” has far-reaching implications, not only for Israel, but also for all those who join themselves to the nation through conversion and by association (cf. Isa 56:2-7).

God gave the people a type that instructed them to remember the Creation (Bass 2005) so that they might understand His desire to commune with them in a similar manner as He did with Adam and Eve. Thus, the typological implication, because the Israelites could not look upon God’s face, must refer to a future period when all would be restored, which Isaiah portrays in 66:23. Bacchiocchi (1998) asserts “The Sabbath invites believers to renew their faith in the perfect Creator by delighting in the beauty of His creation” (286). To do so recognizes the author of Hebrews’ instruction that the “duty of the people” is to experience Christ’s rest and the divine assurance that sinful man, hidden in Christ, has value “and moves toward a glorious divine destiny” (Bacchiocchi 1998, 286).

In other words, whereas Adam and Eve’s Sabbath-keeping “in the beginning” was a demonstration of faith and trust in what God had already done, Sabbath-keeping in today’s understanding includes what God will do in restoring all things (cf. Rev 21:5). He is preparing His people unto good works (cf. Eph 2:10), such that they will be transformed into His likeness (cf. Rom 12:2, 1 Jn 3:2) in action and in character. Therefore, because the human pattern of six days of work and one day of rest follows the Divine example, and because mankind is not the Creator, but rather, the creature, they “must honor God by obeying this commandment” (Bass 2005, 29).

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 - The Texture of Redemption and Liberation
The second Decalogue account of the Sabbath in the Pentateuch is in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, nearly forty years after the first giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. This account of the Sabbath provides a different explanation and omits the term “remember” by replacing it with “observe.” The distinction between the two is Israel had been “remembering” the Sabbath for forty years (Bass 2005), and the idea of the Creation account and the call to holiness was seared into their minds (W. Veith, personal communication, Jun 9, 2012).

In the second giving of the Law, Israel was now poised to enter the Promised Land—a place they were not permitted to enter forty years prior because of unbelief (cf. Psa 95:7-11)—and the Sabbath commandment now instructs them to remember how the LORD delivered them from Egypt and liberated them from slavery.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day [is] the Sabbath of the LORD your God. [In it] you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who [is] within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut 5:12-15, NKJV)

The partial anti-typical fulfillment is expressed in a person’s deliverance from the bondage of sin (cf. Rom 6:16-18), that is redemption, and the fullness (i.e., glorification) realized when the presence of sin is destroyed forever with the earth made new (cf. Isa 66:22, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:1).

Together, the Exodus and Deuteronomy renderings of the Sabbath commandment summarize the most fundamental concept of soteriology: deliverance from sin and the call to holy living (Bacchiocchi 1998, Bass 2005). Sabbath harmonizes the Torah’s portrait first of who God is and second what human beings in Christ are most fully meant to be (Bass 2005). In other words,
Sabbath is less about looking back, notwithstanding a description of creation, and more about looking forward to re-creation and eschatological fulfillment (Sherman 2005).

Exodus 31:12-17 - The Texture of Identification and Perpetuity

This section concludes with the concept of identification. In Exodus 31:13-17, the LORD tells Moses:

Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it [is] a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that [ye] may know that I [am] the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it [is] holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth [any] work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh [is] the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth [any] work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, [for] a perpetual covenant. It [is] a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for [in] six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. (KJV)

A similar passage is recapitulated in Ezekiel 20:12, where the prophet declares: “Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I [am] the LORD that sanctify them” (KJV). In both passages, God makes the Sabbath a sign of an irrevocable covenant with Israel. The type of these passages rests in ancient Israel, yet the New Testament brings a partial fulfillment of anti-type such that the Church receives the mantle of Israel (Gugliotto 2000).

Karlberg (1988) points out that from a covenant perspective, the Church is the anti-type of Old Testament Israel, which agrees with Paul’s declaration that, “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29, NKJV). The Pauline epistle to the Romans also clarifies the typological covenant concept of what defines Israel in terms of the in Christ motif:

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they [are] not all Israel who [are] of Israel, nor [are they] all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In
Isaac your seed shall be called.” That is, those who [are] the children of the flesh, these [are] not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. (Rom 9:6-8, NKJV)

Earlier in the epistle, Paul addresses what had been the signet of Israel--circumcision--and clarifies what it truly means to be a Jew in Christ:

For he is not a Jew who [is one] outwardly, nor [is] circumcision that which [is] outward in the flesh; but [he is] a Jew who [is one] inwardly; and circumcision [is that] of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise [is] not from men but from God. (Rom 2:28, 29, NKJV).

Thus, those whose hearts are renewed as the prophet Ezekiel declared (cf. Eze 36:26) are those whom Paul calls true Jews (and therefore, Israel) and recipients of the covenant of grace (Karlberg 1988), which demonstrates deliverance from sin (i.e., redemption and liberation) and a journey toward being re-created into Christ’s image through sanctification (i.e., holiness).

Therefore, those who obey the Sabbath are those who, by faith, have been reborn (cf. Jn 3:3) and have become the Israel of God (cf. Gal 6:16) by entering into God’s rest (cf. Heb 4:9), where He has completed His work of redemption in Christ and now ministers to complete the work as high priest (cf. Heb 8) until the earth is made new.

The ideological texture demonstrates the community of God’s people around the world--“every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev 14:6, KJV)--who, despite numerous cultural differences, find common theological, ecclesiological, and cultural ground in the embodiment of Sabbath. This is summarily set forth in Revelation 14:7 at the proclamation of the first angel’s message: “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (KJV, emphasis added). The allusion to the Sabbath commandment is not lost in the text for it points to the creation (moreover, the Creator), and this Everlasting Gospel of holiness and liberation is succinctly captured in the third angel’s message: “Here is the patience of the saints: here [are]
they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev 14:12, KJV). In short the Sabbath, when embraced as the sum of the ideas above, becomes less about ritual, as Sherman (2005) asserts (although the weekly memorial is a prescribed continual reminder), and more about faith and trust in Christ and what the LORD will do in the time to come.

Selah - The Fallow Ground of Reflection

There is a great deal of confusion on the meaning of selah (Brown, Driver, & Briggs 2006) and the etymology and precise meaning are unknown (Brown et al. 2006). Some scholars believe it is either a liturgico-musical mark or instruction on the text’s reading, akin to “stop and listen” (Hobbins 2007). Others, such as scholar, author, and musical artist, Michael Card (1989), contend selah is a time to reflect upon God’s word and remain silent. A more concise meaning, however, is, “Let those with eyes see and with ears hear” (GQM 2012, n.p.).

In the Masoretic text, selah appears 71 times in Psalms, three times in Habakkuk (Briggs 1899). It is found at the end of Psalms 3, 24, and 46--and in most other cases at the end of a verse, the exceptions being Psalms 55:19, 57:3, and Hab 3:3, 9, 13--and ancient biblical commentators apparently did not know the significance of the term (Warren 2003). This can be seen by the variety of renderings given it. The LXX, Symmachus, and Theodotion translate the Hebrew term as διάψαλµα (diapsalma, or “apart from psalm”), a word as enigmatic in Greek as is selah in Hebrew. The Hexapla transliterates selah as σελ. Aquila, Jerome, and the Targum translate it as “always” (Warren 2003). According to Hippolytus, the Greek term διάψαλµα signified a change in rhythm or melody at the places marked by the term, or a change in thought and theme (“Jewish Encyclopedia,” 1906). Against this explanation Baethgen (as cited by Göttingen 1892) notes selah also occurs at the end of some psalms.
An alternate interpretation is that *selah* is from the primary Hebrew root word *calah*, which means “to hang,” and by implication to measure (i.e., weigh). This is readily understood because in biblical history, money, food, and other valuables were “weighed” by hanging or suspending them on a type of balance (the equivalent of our measuring scale) to determine their value (Warren 2003, Snaith 1952). This implies a possible meaning is an instruction to measure carefully and reflect upon the preceding statements. In other words, the LORD declares “here is some deeper wisdom, reflect on it, and understand its true meaning.” Just as the Hebrew word *amen* is an exclamation of confidence or truth and certainty of what has been said, so *selah* is an exclamation leaders should measure and reflect upon what has been said.

**Organizational and Theological Implications for Ecclesial Leaders**

Sherman (2005) considers how Americans, especially in the workplace, are burning out because of continuous work; without employee rest, workplace efficiency will suffer (Angerer 2003). Sherman further indicates that today’s ecclesial leaders are more harried and pressed for time than ever before. Buchannan (2006) echoes this sentiment based upon his role as a pastor that those in church leadership positions can become overworked, overwhelmed, unproductive, and spiritually artificial when they ignore regular quiet reflection by stating, “Busyness makes us stop caring about the things we care about” (48). (This is a sobering thought when viewed in the context of Sabbath being a symbol of rest in Christ.) Buchannan also highlights the imminent need for personal rest, play, reflection, and worship for wholeness in Christ.

The time crunch, the round-the-clock rhythms of postmodernity, and America’s growing sleep deficit are by now well documented (Schor 1991). Yet, ecclesial leaders are only beginning to understand their need for Sabbath to better grasp a living faith in today’s world (Bass 2005). As a one-time devout “Sabbath-breaker,” Buchannan emphatically declares that ecclesial leaders
are to “cease from what is necessary. Embrace that which gives life” (129). Sherman concurs stating, “Caught up in the press and clutter of daily life, of being ‘overscheduled,’ [leaders] miss the ways [they] have brought this upon [themselves] by making certain assumptions about time and its use” (39). Unfortunately for many ecclesial leaders, the real issue is less a matter of ceasing work and more a matter of perceiving time properly and using it well, especially “free” time. For some the thought process centers on “my time” and an incorrect perception of stewardship. That said, leaders indeed know time is precious and it should not be unproductive, but the real question is, Who determines whether time is well-spent or wasted?

Sherman (2005) contends, “we only begin to understand time properly, and use it well, when we acknowledge that it must be informed by, and aligned with, God’s purposes” (40). This brings into the leader’s life the aspect of pause (i.e., selah) and the need for unplugging from the world. The sanctuary in time of the Sabbath joins the intrinsic human requirement of pausing from the hectic, 24/7 world in which one lives and giving reign in one’s life to the One to whom time belongs.

The time leaders set apart for communion with the LORD and with others of like mind results in a healing both mentally and physically (White 1905). Angerer (2003) indicates that physical and mental burnout affects everyone who for long periods of time fails to break from the routine via adequate rest. Theorell and Rahe (1972) cited how failing to rest, followed by job burnout, in the long run impacted an individual’s health. Brock and Grady (2000) substantiated Theorell and Rahe’s study in that burnout resulted in higher levels of stress, higher rates of heart attack, depression, infections, insomnia, and a host of other maladies. The physical implications alone should be a clarion call to ecclesial leaders to embrace the temporal aspect of selah and Sabbath, yet the spiritual implications are far more sublime.
Moltmann (1993) sees the idea of spiritual rest as a call to holiness, “for on the Sabbath and through the Sabbath God ‘completed’ his creation, and on the Sabbath and through it, men and women perceive as God’s creation the reality in which they live and which they themselves are…. The Sabbath is itself the presence of eternity in time, and a foretaste of the world to come” (276). Thus, the spiritual rest is an act of embracing what God has done and also what He will do. It is, of necessity, a spiritual cessation from “self-righteous works of the law, because Christ has already accomplished redemption” (Gundry 2003, 464).

Yet, the closely connected warning against apostasy and the parallel between God’s resting from His very good work of creation and mankind’s resting from work both favor the typological interpretation of Hebrews 4:9, such that leaders are to enter into a heavenly rest by fidelity to their Christian profession. By all accounts, ecclesial leaders should be familiar with this understanding: Selah and shabath prescribe a remedy for the potential of physical, emotional, and spiritual burnout because they unite the leader with his Creator by faith (cf. Gal 2:20) that results in holistic transformation (cf. Rom 12:2). Therefore, a return to Sabbath as “both a day and an attitude” (Buchannan 2006, 3) is what can restore physical, emotional, and spiritual authenticity in lives burned over by busyness and the failure to selah.

As mentioned above, scholars have numerous thoughts on the selah motif (Briggs 1899), many of which are replete with wisdom for all leaders (Good 1970). Organizationally, leaders can actively observe their organizations and their people, become more self-aware, and develop better communication skills to help bridge differences and find common ground with others via relationship (Hoppe 2004). From a biblical standpoint, ecclesial leaders are to examine the Scripture, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little (cf. Isa 28:10, 13) to determine what it says, as well as what it does not say. They would be wise to carefully observe
where fallow ground may lie within their respective spheres of influence with a godly consultant’s eye.

Oftentimes, there is a failure to properly identify where strengths or weaknesses lie (Varagas-Hernandez & Noruzi 2010), just as Moses missed the reason for his overwhelmed state when ministering to Israel (cf. Exo 18). An organization’s intellectual capital can be helpful in achieving both earthly and spiritual endeavors (cf. Exo 18:21-26), but the fact is leaders often: (a) fail to understand their nature or their value (Vargas-Hernandez & Noruzi 2010); (b) fail to selah and seek godly counsel; or, (c) miss opportunities to expand their borders in both realms (cf. 1 Chr 4:9). Thus, the ground remains fallow because of lack of faith, fervency, and zeal; moreover, the leader is worn out because of a failure to shabath.

**Concluding Thoughts**

It appears many ecclesial leaders have allowed once lavish soil to become toxic with the cares of the world--they have lost their first love (Rev 2:4)--by failing to selah and shabath. Organizationally, many have reached severe burnout such that they have become ineffective administratively and relationally (Sherman 2005). Spiritually, these same leaders have become artificial and superficial--evangelism and mission have become a chore and no longer a wellspring of Christ-borne faith.

Yet, there is hope. If leaders would but understand the nature of biblical work and rest (Davis 2001); see the picture of Christ in every respect of the Sabbath, and allow Him to perform His will in them as proclaimed by Ezekiel (cf. 36:25-30) and reiterated by the author of Hebrews (cf. Ch 8); such a stance might elicit fertile ground ready to receive and proclaim the Everlasting Gospel (cf. Rev 14:6-12). It would transcend belief systems, cultures, and other barriers. It would create harmony of the soul physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The soil can indeed be
productive provided leaders take the time to *selah* and find *shabbath* in YHWH (cf. Isa 56:1-7; Isa 58:14), understanding the time belongs to Him and not them. By understanding the “duty” set forth in Hebrews 4:9, today’s ecclesial leader would indeed find the rest spoken of by Jesus: “Come to Me, all [you] who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28, NKJV).
References


