

The Bible in Context Ep 8: Rest and Numbers

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Well, welcome back to the Bible in Context. Here I am with Caleb Lewis again. I'm Nate Young, pastor at Mercy Hill. We are excited today to continue to walk through Genesis with you. Caleb, tell us where we've been and where we're at today.

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Hey guys, yeah, last time we talked about the image of God. What does it mean for us to be God's images? Ultimately, we are his royal representatives. Before that, we've looked at how God came to the the waters and the ruined land and the darkness, and he separated those things, restrained those things to make good, to make the land, to make a place that is habitable for his images. And ultimately, how he at the climax of creation created us humans to be his representation.

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So now we are on day seven where God takes a nap. Wait a second. When does God get tired? Well, I mean, it says rest though, right? That's, that's what it means. Isn't it? I think a lot of people probably believe that, but yeah, that this word rest has a little bit different meaning than taking a nap. Yeah, I actually, I think was

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taught growing up that this was more of God. He got done with a big project, so now he's just kicking back to take a look at it and relax. Which, that's a little better, but I think we can do a little better than that. Yeah, so he didn't get tired after creation. He didn't need to sit down and get a drink and just enjoy what he had done or marvel at it. There's something more going on here, isn't there? Yeah, so...

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this term to rest, especially after creation. In the Ancient Near East, again, that's where we're gonna go. The Ancient Near East, this is a pretty rich and well-worn path. After a deity gets done creating the world or building a temple or conquering an enemy, he rests. He sits down on his throne and begins to take up the rulership of the space that he has just conquered or created. And...

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that is going to be the meaning of rest here as well. Yahweh is stopping from his work and he is taking up rulership in the world that he has just made. So the picture we ought to get on the seventh day of creation is not God hanging out in a hammock, but God sitting on a throne, right? Yep, exactly, yeah. He's taking his seat on the throne. Yeah, that's significant. And what do we see after the resurrection?

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What happens with Jesus? He ascends to do what? To sit down on high, to sit on the right hand of the Father. Yeah, to sit on his throne. Taking the kingship and now he is resting in his rulership next to the Father. Yep, absolutely. And I want to show you some examples of where this occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament. But I want to point out first that this is actually not the word most often used for the word rest.

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This is actually the word Shavat, which means to stop. This is where we get our term Sabbath from. So in other places, we'll see for the word rest, the word Manuha instead of Shavat. And there may be a couple of reasons that Shavat is used here. The word Shavat is in this same idea, the same vein as resting, even though it literally means just to stop. And there's a couple of ways we know that. One is because, again,

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This is what happens after a lot of ancient Near Eastern creation stories or temple building stories or conquering stories. And where we actually see this word, Menuhah, show up is, for example, Isaiah 66 verse 1. And so I want to show you here because it's the same idea going on. It says, Thus says Yahweh, Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool for my feet. Where is the house that you would build for me? And where is this resting place for me?

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So here we see again Yahweh referring to his house, which could also mean temple. And that is the place where he is going to rest in his temple, the place where he rules from. And it's also linked directly with, I mean, the first part of that verse, it says, heaven is my throne and the earth my footstool. So this resting place is linked from the beginning with the place from where Yahweh rules, not where he goes to lounge and to take a nap.

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And the same thing is in Isaiah, or sorry, not Isaiah, Psalm 132 verse 13 and 14. It says, for Yahweh has chosen Zion. He has desired it for his habitation. Now remember, Zion is the place from where Yahweh's king rules. That's where his temple is. That's where he rules from in the Old Testament. And he says in the next verse, this is my resting place forever. Here I will dwell. I have desired it. So.

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Again, both of these places we see the word resting show up, this same idea that's in Genesis 1 and the seventh day of creation. I said Genesis 1. This is Genesis 2 now, isn't it? Yeah, we're in Genesis 2. That's right. Which, by the way, we haven't really... Do we want to back up a little bit and talk about... We'll talk about the connection between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, but I do think it's significant that the chapter break was put between Day 6 and Day 7. And... Yeah.

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I think it is interesting. Obviously those chapter breaks were not there originally. And my theory, and I don't know if this is right or wrong, but perhaps that chapter break was put there because the seventh day talks about it being holy. It's separate. And so to put that chapter break in there was kind of communicating, okay, there's something special about the seventh day. I don't know. What do you think?

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to think about where that chapter breaks. He messes up. Yeah, I was thinking like, man, you guys on the first page, you botched the job and broke up the first seven days of creation. Which is very possible, too. I don't know. Yeah, I don't know. Maybe what you're saying exactly right. That would make a lot of sense. I mean, I'm glad the chapter breaks are there. They're helpful for us to quickly identify where we're at. But we need to get used to not reading strictly according to our chapter breaks. Well, and if you look at the.

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the literary design of it, you have at the verse 3 of chapter 2, so God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it rested from all the work that he had done in creation. Oh, verse 1, yeah, thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the hosts of them. And so that creates this inclusio between verse 1, chapter 1, and verse 2, chapter 1. And so it seems that

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maybe if there was going to be a break you'd put it almost after that verse 1, but there's the word and at the very beginning of verse 2, and so yeah, I don't know what I would have done. We'll get into this actually pretty shortly, but the best place would have been at chapter 2 verse 4, and there's actually literary structures that would suggest that's the best place for it if you had to break it. Yeah, these are the generations. That would make the most sense. So it's not my fault that I said Genesis 1.

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That's, but hey, it only took us like six or seven weeks. Exactly. But we finally made it out of the first chapter. That's right. Only took us, you know, a month and a half. Yeah, that's all. So do we want to talk about the significance of seven here or any of the numbers? Well, actually, let, let me say one more thing that the number seven reminds me of. And then we'll maybe talk about the Sabbath a little bit. And so the reason that.

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the author may have chosen to use the word shabbat here instead of the word for rest used elsewhere, might be because it's on the seventh day. He shabbated on the Sheve'i day. There's some wordplay going on here, so that might have been, again, the reason. The biblical author, if you've ever done any study on biblical wordplay, it happens constantly. They like to be poetic. Very, very much. If you actually know Hebrew, it's...

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very fun to read, to see all these little connections and things. They're kind of just there as part of the structure. It's not going to change the meaning of the text necessarily, but it's really cool to get to see them and let them help you structure the text a little bit. Yeah, because don't we get that same kind of wordplay with Adam and Earth or land? Oh yeah, yeah. So the word for the ground... So Earth we've talked about is erets. The ground is adamah. So he made adam from the adamah.

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Yeah, so yeah, that kind of word plays all over the place. Yeah, and Adam literally means human, but the word play they're trying to show there is like he's made from the earth. Yeah. So there are some word plays there between the word seven and complete. There's also some word plays that happen between seven and oath, because oath is Shavah, but really the meaning of the word seven, or the number seven, I don't think we should be trying to find some strict definition

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decode the text when we see the number seven in it or assign to it a specific definitive value or meaning that changes how we read a text when it appears. I think it's more of a thematic presence in the text or a thematic tool in the text. So you see the number seven as well as some other numbers, but again you see seven a lot throughout the Ancient Near East in divination texts and other...

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narratives and mythologies. And a lot of times it has to do with deities. I think it's portraying this divine number. When it shows up a lot in the Bible, it's showing you that this is important. Whenever you start seeing multiples of seven happen in a text, it's saying this chunk of text has some special significance. And this isn't a great equation, but I think you could think of it in the same way that we think of...

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in a movie where lights come on and this like angelic choir starts to sing. That's a trope that happens all over the place. And it kind of communicates this, this is a heightened divine kind of experience or place or whatever it be. I think the number seven functions similarly. It's not there to tell us something specific. It's there to grab our attention. Yeah. Yeah, that's a good way to put it. Good deal.

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So where all do you see sevens in even the first chapter of Genesis? Yeah. So Gordon-Windem's word biblical commentary actually shows quite a bit of this in the first few chapters. We see in multiples of seven, the word God is mentioned 35 times, earth is mentioned 21 times, heaven and firmament are mentioned 21 times. And then also it was so, and God says, God said it was good occur seven times.

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and it was so seven times and this just keeps going on. There's a lot of multiples of seven going on and things that were said in Genesis one. Yeah, and surely this can't be an accident. I mean, there's obviously some intention behind these multiples of seven that are all over the place in the text. Yeah, yeah, seven occurs all over the place. Yeah, you see the number seven a lot, you see the number 10 a lot, you see the number three periodically it seems like, and then the number 40.

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comes up quite a bit also. And so, numbers are significant. I think sometimes we can, like you were saying, you can almost go too far with the numbers and look into them a little bit more than what was meant to be. But there is definitely something there. Yeah, absolutely. That's what I wanted to caution against because there's entire studies of biblical numerology that really go astray because I don't know what you think when you hear numerology.

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some people may be thinking like, you know, you're going to sit down and find all the numbers in the Bible and then, you know, find out when the Antichrist is coming or who it is or something like that and start decoding. Yeah, I've seen books on decoding scripture through counting the number of letters and words on certain books and trying to decipher what the future is going to be based on. And a lot of it seems very much like reading a horoscope or, I mean, it's... Yeah.

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almost occultish. Yeah, it really does. And there's also Bible codes where people will randomly select parts of the text and start to apply numbers or try to string different words together in certain ways and come up with all these predictions and things and it's really just a bunch of nonsense. So point of all that being, when you start seeing numbers show up in the text, you start seeing repetitions that have some kind of numerological value.

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It's not there to tell you some kind of secret meaning behind the text. It's there to tell you, hey, this is part of the literary structure. If you start seeing these groupings, it's just part of how the text is built. So, you know, um, where a section ends and begins, or it places emphasis on a certain section. Really, it functions more like a highlighter than a decoder ring. Hmm. Yeah. That's a good way to put it. I like that. Yeah. There's actually an Israeli scholar named Israel Noel who's written some really good.

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articles on how the biblical authors will use numbers or repeat words a certain number of times in order to structure certain poems or segments of text. It actually becomes really significant for textual criticism in some places. We're actually going to use one of his articles when we get to Genesis 49 to show how the text is broken up and how there's a text critical issue that the number pattern illuminates for us.

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But we'll talk about that when we get there. So we've talked about the significance of the number seven and just numbers in general throughout the Bible. Let's talk a little bit more about this idea of Sabbath because it's a very significant theme throughout scripture. We see it as one of the Ten Commandments, but it's introduced even before the Ten Commandments are introduced. It's a really big deal. And so what's so significant about the Sabbath?

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Yeah, so again, it's the day of Shabbat, the day of stopping. So here, the first instance of this, the paradigm from which we get the Sabbath, is Yahweh stopping from his work and taking up rulership and resting. So there's this idea of whenever we, Sabbath, or whenever Israel is commanded to Sabbath, they are to stop their striving and their work and to take up rulership over...

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over the good that they've worked in the week. And just us being human, a lot of that is us sitting down to enjoy it, not like Yahweh where he, you know, we sit down to take a breather and try to enjoy some of the good things we have around. But at the same time, there's validity to us ruling over the good things that we have and have created because just like Jesus says, if our family or our livestock or whatever it may be is hurt.

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on the Sabbath, it's not like we have to stop. It's that's part of the good thing that we are protecting and ruling and caring for. So those things should still be happening. So I could twist the Sabbath and on the Sabbath day, I could sit down and order my, I could rule on high and have my kids do all the work, right? That's, that's what. Absolutely. That's the perk. No, yeah, it's, it should be a reminder for us to care for the things that we have.

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And that's a lot of what biblical rulership is about, is about caring for what you have. So you know, as humans, when we stop, we stop from our work, remember that Yahweh, Jesus is the one who cares and provides for us. And we also are reminded that as we are trying to further His purpose of turning bad things into good, to stop and rule them well, to care for them well. Yeah. And so in the New Testament, when Jesus is, I guess, critiqued for breaking...

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the Sabbath, it's often because he's caring for somebody, right? He's healing somebody or allowing his disciples to eat. I mean, there's examples there where he understood the heart of the Sabbath, where the religious leaders had turned it in and twisted it into this thing that it was never meant to be. Yeah. Instead, it should be thinking more of, you know, I've spent the past six days, I mean, five in our culture, but six days working so that we can have

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food on the table and a roof over our head and that things, you know, for your family. And then on that seventh day you stop and say, okay, let me just actually spend time with my family and

hey, how are you guys doing? Shift the focus of your work. Yeah, yeah, it's good. It's good. The idea of Sabbath, I think it's, there's some who are like very, very strict about it and almost legalistic about it and turn it into kind of like the Pharisees where you have to do it a certain way in a certain time and it becomes more of a burden.

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than a blessing, but then there's others who almost dismiss it completely and feel as if, well, because Jesus is our Sabbath, then we don't need to do anything. And I don't see that that's helpful either. There's kind of a, you've got to find a middle ground in there, don't you think? Yeah, yeah. I mean, my personal take, we'd have to loop Paul into this and, you know, have a long discussion.

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Ultimately, I think, yeah, it's not something that we are commanded to do as Christians, especially as Gentile Christians. We're not supposed to take on that part of Torah, but it is a helpful reminder and something that at least we should be aware of as a theme in the Bible and how it works. I don't think, yeah, we're commanded to observe Torah, but it is something very significant that has a lot of meaning that we should be aware of because it's, you know, it's a pointer just like all of the Old Testament.

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rituals and festivals, they're pointers to what we will be doing with Christ in the end. And I think that's the culmination of the seventh day rest, right? Which we haven't really talked about, that this idea of the seventh day, there's no beginning and there's no end to the seventh day in creation. Right, we didn't even say that. Yeah, which is pretty significant, right? The seventh day is meant to be an everlasting day.

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It's a day that we'll enjoy for eternity with Christ. At the end of every single day it says, and there was evening and there was morning on this day. The seventh day you don't see it at all. So yeah, the idea is it just goes on there forever until we, unlike the, you think of the phrase from the Israelite wonderings where Yahweh says, this wicked generation, they will never enter my rest. Well, we at.

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whenever Christ comes back we'll enter his rest. We will sit on the throne with him just like he says in Revelation and rule, take up rulership with him. Amazing stuff to look forward to and gives us great hope. Yeah, in which I think that kind of turns the connotations of you will never enter my rest a little bit. You know, it's not so much God saying I don't want you guys to have a break and to get to sit down and relax with me. I don't want you guys ruling stuff.

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You guys are going to screw it up. So I'm not, we don't want these people entering Yahweh's rest. It's authority over creation and the ability to, to rule on Yahweh's behalf. Yeah, that's a

really good point. That's a really good point. Well, good stuff, man. Anything else before we break from here? I don't think so. I think that's a good spot for us to leave off and we can always come back later and talk about it more. All right, sounds good. Well, I've enjoyed it.

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and we'll see everybody next time.