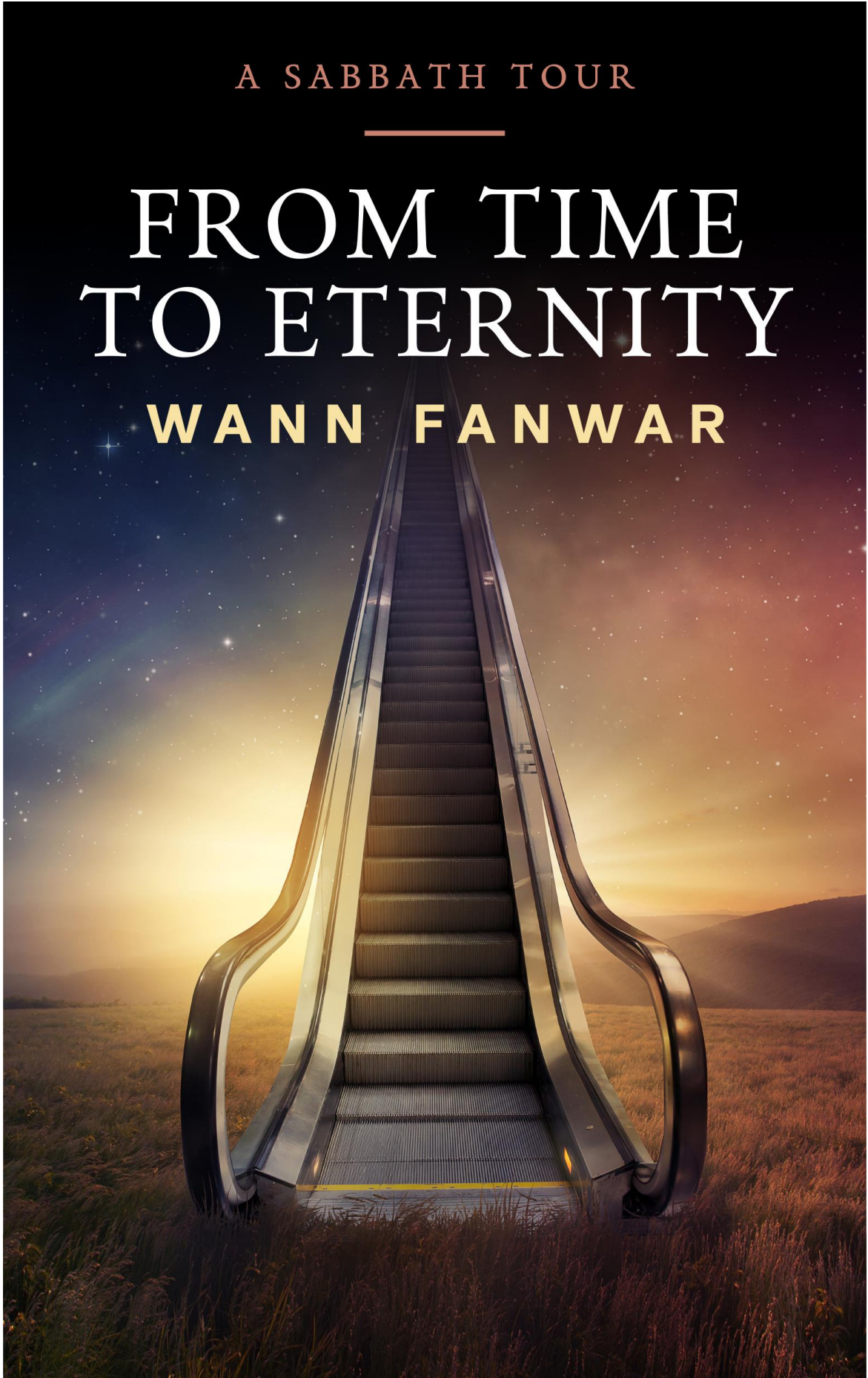


A SABBATH TOUR

FROM TIME TO ETERNITY

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FROM TIME TO ETERNITY: A SABBATH TOUR

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Getting Ready for a Trip

The summer of 2013 was special for me. After 12 years of continuous teaching, I was finally allowed to take a Sabbatical. The three months I was given were not really a time of rest because this was (strictly speaking) a research Sabbatical. In one sense it was not rest but in another sense it was. I did not do my usual job and for part of the Sabbatical I was not even at home. This was a Sabbatical precisely because it was a break from my routine so I could do something else with my life.

The Sabbatical became a major motivation for writing this book about Sabbath. I had long contemplated writing such a book but pressures of work always got the better of my good intentions. Most of my writing is academic in nature. There are a number of textbooks and journal articles with my name attached to them. But I wanted to write a book grounded on personal and pastoral reflection.

For one month I decided to leave the University campus and stay in Bangkok so I could do my writing without interruption. I chose a small but very nice service apartment to become my hideaway. With several research and writing projects in my hands, this was an opportunity that comes very rarely. Quite by accident, I discovered Benjakiti Park, just walking distance from my residence. This is one of the most beautiful parks in Bangkok. It has an elongated man-made lake and two parallel tracks (one for walking/jogging and one for cycling) which ring the lake. The rest of the park is made up of lawns and gardens. The track is 1.8 km in length (allowing for lots of exercise) and my daily walk on the Benjakiti track enabled me to crystallise the thoughts for this book.

From Time to Eternity is not an academic work but a pastor's reflection on the meaning of Sabbath. I see this as a journey and invite my readers to travel with me. For symbolic reasons, I have chosen to write about seven days of travel through a museum of biblical texts. I hope that those who join me on this trip will be blessed and their Sabbath be enriched. Come with me on this tour through the Sabbath.

~Day 1~ My Sabbath Journey (Reflection Station)

We begin our tour at Reflection Station. Since I will be your tour guide, it is helpful for you to know where I am coming from. In December 2012, I took a group of about 30 students to Myanmar for a mission trip. We visited one of Buddhism's most amazing centres, a place called Bagan. In Bagan, there are over 3000 pagodas (Buddhist temples and shrines) in a 45 square kilometre area. Our guide, Mr San, was very knowledgeable and enthralled us with his musings about Buddhism. Everyone on the trip came to realise that Mr San is a devout Buddhist; that is where he was coming from.

I was born into a Sabbath keeping family and have been a Sabbath observer all my life. For most of it, I simply accepted Sabbath as part of my faith system and way of life. It seemed so natural that it was almost spiritual reflex at work. I did not really question the validity or meaning of Sabbath. To me, Sabbath is as natural as the air we breathe. However, deep inside I sensed that what was happening may simply be part of a religious tradition that I had grown up with and one I did not see the need to question. This realisation was initially pushed to the back of my mind and it would take pastoral ministry in a Sabbath context to ignite thought and reflection. Such reflection awakened my consciousness and I became aware that while I may be observing Sabbath, I did not actually *shabat*.

What do I mean by this? I have to take you back to the Hebrew word from which our English word 'Sabbath' originated to explain my awakening. Hebrew is a consonantal language dependent on a three letter root system. The Hebrew root in question is sh-b-t (שבת) from which are derived the verb *shabat* and the noun *Shabbat* (from this point onward, I shall abstain from using the English 'Sabbath'. I will use both noun and verb forms and will call those who keep Shabbat, 'Shabbaters' [hopefully no one will confuse this with 'saboteurs']). As I studied the word more carefully, I realised that its basic meaning is 'to stop' as in 'cease what has been happening'. When I first encountered this word, I was told that *shabat* means 'to rest', by which I understood as 'to sleep' or some form of it. My discovery alarmed me because *shabat* could not be further in meaning. The whole idea of 'stop' is so that we can do something else; it is not stop for the sake of stopping. If the verb *shabat* means 'to stop', the noun *Shabbat* connotes a stoppage of sorts. Perhaps 'to cease' and 'cessation' could capture the word play of the Hebrew.

Armed with this understanding of Shabbat, I began to reflect on what had previously transpired in my life. This was a long journey and it did not come about easily. There was much agonising with old entrenched habits and a prolonged battle to learn new ones. I saw this struggle as essential if I was to attain a more complete understanding of Shabbat.

Shabbat Statutes to Shabbat Liberty (Exhibit 1)

I invite you to visit the first exhibit at Reflection Station. My first step to Shabbat reflection was to re-examine what I had learnt since childhood about Shabbat. The immediate sense was clear: Shabbat, in my context, is all about rules. Everyone who *shabat* in my world approaches the day from a legislative perspective. People in my background know which day is Shabbat; that is a non-issue. Their primary preoccupation pertains to observance of Shabbat. Their over-riding question is, 'How should we *shabat*?'

Inevitably, the answer comes in the form of regulations for Shabbat observance. This is a time tested approach to Shabbat first employed by the Jews and then by Christian Shabbaters. This always seems the path of least resistance. It is simple to learn and easy to teach. Therefore, rules are concocted to enable us to *shabat*.

I learnt that we should not cook on Shabbat or even take a bath. I was taught that on Shabbat, all the evidence of weekly life (books, magazines, CD's, DVD's) should be removed from sight and replaced by so-called 'holy' counterparts. Going to church on Shabbat was the most practised rule for *shabat*. It was not possible to be a closet Shabbater. There were other rules about conversation,

clothes and appropriate activities. As my circle expanded, I discovered that these rules varied from context to context.

This rule-approach reveals a certain inherent inconsistency that often flies in the face of pure logic. For instance, in some contexts it is inappropriate to go for a swim on Shabbat but perfectly acceptable to go 'caving'. In the western context where food is largely oven-prepared, it is easy to make food ahead of time so as to avoid cooking on Shabbat. However, in most Asian contexts, where food is open-fire based, this is not desirable. Consequently, most Asian Shabbaters do not argue about cooking on Shabbat.

The moment we discover a discrepancy or irrelevance in our rules, we speedily fashion a new rule to cover the gap. Before we realise it, Shabbat has fallen victim to our 'holy' legislative process, complete with a punitive system in place. All the while, the motive remains 'correct': to guard Shabbat from improper observance. Somewhere along the way I started to wonder whether this is what God intended Shabbat to be.

Bit by bit, it dawned on me that Shabbat is God's way of liberating us from the mundane. When God instituted Shabbat, it was not for the purpose of burdening us but liberating us. Shabbat is intended to free us from the tyranny of time and space. The rest of this book is an attempt to pull back the curtains so that we can see this ultimate divine purpose. Through Shabbat, God desires to cover us with a robe of liberty so that we can exist without being terrorised by life, time and space. Shabbat is intended to free us from these burdens. It is given to liberate us from repetition and routine. It exists to elevate us to a higher level of life, one unshackled by time and space. Shabbat is for liberty not rules.

However, we need to move past square one or else we will get bogged down by incomplete argumentation. This thought led me to another question, 'Whose day is Shabbat?'

My Shabbat to His Shabbat (Exhibit 2)

On to the second exhibit! As a child I noticed that the favoured Shabbat text went something like this: 'The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27). To many Shabbaters this means that Shabbat exists for their benefit and enjoyment. In other words, we are the ones to decide how Shabbat should be kept and what to do on that day. It did not take me long to realise that this translates into, 'God has given me Shabbat so that I can catch up on my rest (sleep) which I was not able to get during the week.' Like clockwork, many Shabbaters simply resort to long Shabbat afternoon siestas as a way of keeping Shabbat. We often joke that for most people, Shabbat was a time for 'lay activities' (more about this later). For a period of time, in my house, Shabbat afternoon activity involved an hour's silence so that the adults could get their nap. To this day, 'lay activities' is still the number one Shabbat afternoon activity (some have extended it to Shabbat morning as well by being late to church or snoozing through church).

This troubled me greatly and I could not get rid of the nagging thought that somehow such an approach betrays a misunderstanding on our part. Why did God really give us Shabbat? Is it really our day? If that is so, why is God so insistent on our observing it? If this day is for us, does it make a difference as to which day it is?

Anyone who has studied about Shabbat has been forced to recognise that the day does matter. In this book I will not even get into that discussion because I think it is one of those non-issues for those who already observe Shabbat (after all, this book targets this audience). My basic position is that the day does matter but still I was puzzled by the reason for it. There are those who keep the idea of Shabbat and those who keep the actual Shabbat day and yet both groups suffer from the same syndrome: they see Shabbat as belonging to them.

Two things happened that tilted my understanding in another direction. First, I decided to return to the Bible, simply read the Shabbat texts closely and allow the passages to speak for themselves. Soon an absorbing pattern began to emerge. Every single Shabbat text uses the language of ownership and possession to refer to Shabbat and, to my surprise, this ownership is

God's. The listing below is by no means comprehensive, but it targets the primary passages (translations mine).

- Gen 2:3 reads, '**God blessed the seventh-day and made it holy, for in it he *shabat* from all his works which God created and made.**' What God did indicates the prerogatives of ownership; Shabbat belongs to Yahweh.
- Exod 20:10-11b states, '**but the seventh-day is a Shabbat to Yahweh your God . . . Yahweh blessed the seventh-day and made it holy.**' The creation prerogative of God is repeated in the fourth commandment but a new element is added, 'Shabbat to Yahweh'. The Hebrew 'to' is a possessive preposition indicating ownership. Shabbat belongs to Yahweh.
- In Exod 31:13, 15 God says, '**you must keep my Shabbat . . . the seventh-day is to be Shabbat of Shabbats, holy to Yahweh.**' There are two possession indicators in these verses, the possessive pronoun suffix 'my' (attached to Shabbat) and the possessive preposition 'to' (affixed to Yahweh). Shabbat belongs to Yahweh.
- In Lev 23:3 God again says, '**. . . it is a Shabbat to Yahweh . . .**' The possessive preposition is utilised here also. Shabbat belongs to Yahweh.
- Ezek 20:10-26. In this lengthy diatribe against the ritualistic abuses of Israel, God uses the expression '**my Shabbats**' six times (in vv. 12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 24). The Hebrew possessive pronoun suffix 'my' is used to show ownership. The pronoun suffix is also plural, 'my Shabbats', augmenting the ownership element. Every Shabbat belongs to Yahweh.
- Isa 56:4 uses the same expression, '**my Shabbats**', as Ezekiel does and with the same construction. Shabbat belongs to Yahweh.
- Isa 58:13 employs two expressions to encapsulate the essence of ownership. God calls Shabbat '**my holy day**' and he urges the people to call Shabbat, '**holy of Yahweh**'. The first expression uses the possessive pronoun suffix 'my', while the second utilises the genitive (possession) construction 'of'. Shabbat truly belongs to Yahweh.
- Matt 12:8 and Mark 2:28 say the same thing. '**The Son of man is Lord of Shabbat.**' In both verses, the Greek term for Lord is *kurios* which serves as the NT counterpart of the Hebrew '*adonai*'. Both words have the same basic semantic range; they mean 'lord', 'master' and 'owner'. The NT also maintains that Shabbat belongs to God, to Christ.

The use of ownership language is difficult to ignore and like clockwork God is depicted as the owner of Shabbat. It strikes me that the idea of a day that belongs to someone is part and parcel of our lives. Each one of us has a birthday and those of us who are married have a day we call our own, an anniversary. When God invites us to *shabat* on his Shabbat, he is doing the same thing we do when we invite people to a birthday or anniversary party.

Second, I moved to Thailand and have lived here now for over a decade. What is unique about Thailand is that it still has a functional monarchy. The country is still officially known as the Kingdom of Thailand. Most ordinary people do not get to have an audience with the king of Thailand. But those of us who have lived in this country for an extended period have become highly cognizant of the presence of the monarchy. It has an immediate effect on the simple things of life. Most of Thailand's highways have an annex highway called frontage road. I could not figure this out until one day I was driving down Highway 1, when all of a sudden, all the traffic was shunted to this frontage road. Both carriageways were cleared of traffic and I sat in my car bemused. I had never seen this in other countries. I guessed that some dignitaries were about to pass by. After being stuck for nearly an hour and a half in the frontage road, a convoy of beige coloured cars, accompanied by many police cars, went flying by. I knew that someone from the royal family (maybe the king or crown prince) had just sped past. The road belongs to the royals. This has happened to me several times now and each time the result is the same; everything has to stop for the royal family to travel through. One time it was the queen returning home; another time it was the king on his way to a hospital. During a two-year drought in Thailand, the king suggested to the scientific community to

find a way of seeding the clouds so as to bring down some rain. The entire scientific community rallied to fulfil the wish of the king and succeeded in bringing some rain. The rain was called 'the king's rain'. In Thailand, father's day is different from the rest of the world. Father's day is celebrated on the king's birthday. The concept of ownership attached to monarchy is inescapable.

It suddenly struck me that these Bible verses speak of God's ownership because he is the King of kings. The world and everything in it belongs to him, as do all those who live in it (Ps 24:1). Time belongs to him as well, and Shabbat is his time, the percentage of time we must observe as acknowledgement of his ownership. Shabbat does not belong to me but to God. Shabbat is his day!

Next stop, Torah Station!

~Day 2~ A Trip to Time Temple (Torah Station)

The first significant stop of our tour ushers us into the presence of the most revered portion of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah. This is the start of our tour proper and what we learn here, at Torah Station, will affect us for the rest of the trip. Pause with me for a while as we consider the lessons of Torah. This station has much to offer but we shall only examine the most salient exhibits so that we may keep moving forward.

Rabbi Heschel once called Shabbat a ‘castle in time’. Others have used the phrase ‘time temple’ to refer to Shabbat. It took me a while to really appreciate this particular designation of Shabbat, but as I grow older in life and faith, I find this concept more meaningful. I am convinced that when we explore the teachings of the Torah, the idea that Shabbat as a temple in time becomes quite significant. Therefore, I would like to invite you on a journey through the first section of the Bible, the place known to so many as Torah.

While the term Torah may be somewhat familiar fare to most Christians, its precise meaning is less understood. This is a term used in the Hebrew Bible as a label for the five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Septuagint (the Greek OT) Bible labelled this section as Pentateuch (the five books) and for many Christians that is the more familiar term. Very often, the word Torah is translated as ‘law’ but this is a somewhat misleading label. The word is derived from the Hebrew verb *yarah* which means ‘to teach or instruct’. It is better to think of the Torah as ‘instruction/teaching’. The instructional value of the Torah is evidenced in the collection of materials found in these books. There are narratives, genealogies, songs, legal materials, and even sermons. It is stretching the imagination a bit to refer to all these materials as ‘law’. It may be simpler to stick to the Hebrew term Torah (which I will do in this book). Of great significance to Christian readers is that whenever we encounter the word ‘law’ in the NT, particularly in constructions such as ‘law and prophets’, the reference is not to any legal material but to the Torah. Of course context is the best determinant of the exact meaning, but a general rule of thumb is that ‘law’ in the NT frequently is code for the Hebrew Torah. So what can we learn about Shabbat from the Torah?

At the time of Jesus a phrase, ‘a Sabbath day’s journey’ was used to indicate the distance a person could travel on Shabbat. In a sense we need to take our journey one step at a time. Torah is our first destination. I believe that every study of Shabbat should commence here.

Shabbat in the ANE Exhibit

Before we look at the Torah display, it helps to see it in its milieu because this will provide some backdrop to the exhibit. The idea of divine rest was not unique to biblical thought and there is sufficient information to tell us that many of Israel’s neighbours also spoke of their gods resting. There are six ideas that relate to the rest of the gods in Ancient Near East (ANE) texts. First, the gods may rest after they had put down a rebellion by other gods or humans. The effort of such combat was followed by a period of rest. This idea is foreign to the Bible. Second, the gods may also rest because some conflict is over. This idea complements the first and suggests that rest means conflict is over. This idea is also absent in biblical thought. Third, in some ANE literature, the gods created humans to do their work and once humans had been made, the gods could rest. The Bible does not have such a dehumanised view of human life.

The next three ideas from ANE literature do bear resemblance to biblical thought. Fourth, the gods rest because creation is completed. This is an idea that plays a major role in Gen 2:1-4 and serves as the climax to the creation narrative. Fifth, the gods rest in the temple so that their devotees could come to pay homage to them. The Bible does not speak of a spatial temple to which we are called to pay homage to God. Rather, God lives in a ‘time temple’ and there we offer him our tributes (more on this later). Last, divine rest is a symbol of the control that the gods have over the

cosmos and human world. Clearly this is a concept that resonates with the biblical concept. God is the one who controls the universe, the world and our lives.

Shabbat in the Torah Exhibit

This is the most exciting exhibit for me. As we read the Torah, three principal ideas emerge concerning Shabbat. The first idea connects Shabbat with creation. To Moses, author of the Torah, Shabbat is the climax of creation (Gen 2:1-4). A careful examination of the first reference to Shabbat draws attention to the intricate connection between Shabbat and creation. The structure of this passage is quite informative:

- Gen 2:1 tells us that *'the heavens and the earth'* (code for cosmos) were 'completed'
- Gen 2:4 repeats the thought and reminds us of the creation of *'the heavens and the earth'*
- In Gen 2-3 we read that the seventh-day signifies two things: that God had completed the work of creation and that he *shabat* ('stopped work') on that day. The expression used is God *'shabat* from all his work of creation.'

This connection between Shabbat and creation reappears in other Torah texts. In the fourth commandment we encounter the same thought. The command to stop working on Shabbat is provided a rationale based on divine modelling. *'For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and earth, . . . then he shabat on the seventh-day'* (Exod 20:11). Shabbat becomes holy by virtue of this modelling of God. Through creation narrative and rationale, God provides a paradigm for which all Shabbats are to be understood. Exod 31:17 adds to this by saying Shabbat is a sign that God has created the heavens and earth and as such is his time signature validating what he had made.

We are all familiar with the significance of signature and seal. If we enter into a business partnership, the contract is void until the appropriate signatures are put to paper. As a pastor, I have the privilege of performing many weddings. The wedding certificate issued by the Church at such ceremonies is useless unless the parties involved have signed. Conversely, divorces are also not recognised until the parties sign. As a teacher, I have participated in many graduation ceremonies and each time the students receive a diploma signed by the relevant authorities and embossed with the University seal. These signatures and seals validate the paper without which the document is only paper.

The principle is carried into other areas of life, say for example currency. Thai currency notes have two hidden indicators that differentiate the genuine from the counterfeit. There is a magnetic strip visible only under UV light. There is also an image of the king of Thailand, also invisible at first glance. However, if you hold the note to light you will see the image of the king and, regardless which way you turn the note, the king is always looking at you. In our world we fully understand this concept of validation with every facet of life. We cannot get passports, buy a car, or obtain a credit card or ATM card without such validation.

With Shabbat as divine time signature, we encounter a couple of intriguing truths. Because God has signed himself in time, this act validates our existence. We are not products of chance or accident; we are beings designed by God himself and everything that such creation entails. To ignore Shabbat is tantamount to trying to obtain a passport without the seal of the relevant embassy and the signature of the consular officer. Life without Shabbat is not truly living. It may be existence but it not validated existence.

Along the border between Thailand and Myanmar, there are several refugee camps. The occupants of these camps are persons without a homeland and largely rejected by both countries. They are not able to move far beyond the boundaries of the camps. The reason for this is because they do not have valid passports or identity papers. In order to get out of the camps, these people have to be repatriated to another country. What this means is that some other nation is willing to grant them identity papers so that they may start a new life. Shabbat not only validates creation and

human existence, it also provides identity to who we really are. There is so much uncertainty in our world regarding questions of origins and far too many people are stuck in refugee camp status because they do not know who they are. My passport identifies me as an Indian; this is my identity. As I travel through Southeast Asia (through Malaysia or Thailand or Cambodia) I am often confused as a local. This sometimes creates hilarious situations as I travel around. One student questioned the fact that I am Indian and I had to show my passport before she would accept it. Shabbat is more than just a day of worship and that it certainly is! First and foremost, Shabbat is what determines our existence and provides believers with the proper identity papers. Keeping Shabbat tells the world whose we are and where we belong.

The second primary idea to emerge from the Torah is that Shabbat is enacted in the temple. In Lev 23, Shabbat is located in a festal context. First, it should be noted that there is a call to gather for '*sacred assembly*' on Shabbat. The Hebrew word used for 'assembly' implies a coming together for worship and is attached to the word 'holy'. Verse 3 says that Israel should proclaim a '*Shabbat of Shabbats*' (usually translated as 'Sabbath of complete rest') and modifies this with '*calling of holiness*' (a literal rendering). The holy and superlative nature of Shabbat are emphasised in these words. Therefore, Shabbat is a special time of worship; it is a temple in time.

In addition to this, the rest of the chapter describes the various festivals that God gave to Israel. The language of Shabbat is applied to all the high days of festivals (cf. 23:7-8, 24, 32, 36, etc.). There is an intricate connection between Shabbat and festal occasions. This is a clue for one of the truly significant meanings of Shabbat. This is a day of celebration, of festivities, of holiness. In my world, we disassociate holiness from festivities and frequently associate solemnity with holiness. This is not the view of Scripture. The 'food' motif appears in some intriguing places in the Bible. Many fail to notice that food was present in every compartment of the Sanctuary. Jesus tells several parables about food and feasting. Revelation speaks of the marriage banquet of the Lamb (ch. 19). Feasting was involved in all of Israel's festivals apart from Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Festal celebration accompanied some of the most important worship services in the Bible: the Exodus story (Exod 15), the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chron 6), and the revivals of Hezekiah (2 Chron 30) and Josiah (2 Chron 35). Two things make Shabbat special, its holiness and its festal nature. These ideas are not mutually exclusive; they underscore the very nature of Shabbat. All this happens in the temple, in Shabbat.

The final principal concept of the Torah is that Shabbat is a sign of God's control and commitment. In giving the 10 words (commandments) to Israel, God prefaces the words with these thoughts, '*I am the Yahweh your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of servitude*' (Exod 20:2). In this claim, God establishes two relevant things. He is the God of Israel; he is not the God of Egypt or Babylon or any other nation. This expression, 'God of Israel', would echo time and time again through the pages of the Bible. Isaiah would call him the 'Holy One of Israel'. The prophets would refer to him as 'Yahweh our God.' There are strong covenantal overtones in Shabbat that compel us to acknowledge this special relationship we have with God.

There is another issue at stake here. This God of Israel is responsible for its deliverance. The Exodus is the paradigmatic model of salvation in the OT and God asserts his claim over Israel via this act of deliverance. God's commitment to his people and control over their destiny is repeated in Exod 31:13 where God reminds Israel that Shabbat is a perpetual sign of this special relationship. Shabbat is a relational term and it tells us that Yahweh is our God and he takes charge of our destinies. The observance of Shabbat is not simply an act of obedience to a rule. More importantly, it is acceptance of a guarantee of what God does for us. Shabbat is his time-honoured signature on a contract which ensures our well-being and safety. Shabbat is the most comforting device to aid us in our struggles of life. It is not merely a day, but a day of deliverance always. The Hebrew greeting 'Shabbat shalom' is quite appropo; Shabbat is a time of wholeness and peace.

Whenever we enter God's 'time temple' we are reminded of this double truth: whose we are and who is for us. Casting Crowns sing a song entitled 'Who am I?' 'Who am I that the Lord of all the earth would care to know my name, would care to feel my hurt?' The song reminds us that we are

like flowers fading, here today and gone tomorrow. Yet, we mean everything to God and Shabbat reminds us weekly of this reality.

In Torah terms, we keep Shabbat to recognise God's creation, acknowledge the special covenant relationship we have with him with the deliverance it brings and portray our desire to honour him who is our God. All these things are enacted in Shabbat, God's throne room, his 'time temple.'

Join me tomorrow for another day of tour at the Prophets Station.

~Day 3~ Practising Eternity (Prophets Station)

At Torah Station, we had paused to view the most important exhibits on display in that place. But we need to continue our tour and today we come to our next stop, Prophets Station. There are some intriguing exhibits here which I am sure will peak your interest. If Torah provides raw Shabbat data, the prophets target the implications of Shabbat to life and faith as well as the consequences of breaking Shabbat. We may not have the time to view all the displays but we shall pay special attention to two very notable exhibits

Shabbat in the Ezekiel Exhibit

One of my favourite past-times is watching football (soccer for Americans) games on television. My chosen football team is Liverpool Football Club (LFC). I love their song, 'You'll never walk alone'. I have been a LFC fan for over 30 years. My love of Liverpool is so well-known among my students that some of them will 'pray' that Liverpool wins its match because they think it will put me in a better mood the following day. Funny as this may sound, it illustrates what my students know—'Fanwar is a die-hard Liverpool fan'. I own Liverpool kits and other memorabilia. I even have a Liverpool sticker and band in my car. I carry a key holder with a LFC insignia. The team has not been at the top of English football for many years but it is still *my* team. This is a question of loyalty. We find this idea in sports, politics, immigration, military, uniformed clubs and many other situations. Every country demands loyalty from its citizens whether it comes in the form of a pledge or a salute to the flag. If you live in Bangkok, every evening at 6 pm, the country's anthem is played over loudspeakers all over the city and in every mall. It is quite a sight to see thousands of people actually stop to pay their respects while the anthem is played. One evening, I was out walking in Benjakiti Park at 6 pm when the anthem comes over the loudspeakers. Every person exercising in the park stopped to pay their respects to Thailand (even the foreigners like me).

The prophet Ezekiel (I am inverting the order here deliberately) paints Shabbat on a canvass of human loyalty. For the prophets, the day of Shabbat is never mentioned; it is an assumed fact. The prophets are more concerned with Shabbat theology. For Ezekiel, the big question concerns loyalty. No passage of Scripture hammers home this point quite like Ezek 20. The chapter is full of dark overtones as God launches a stinging rebuke against the rebellion of Israel and their manipulated ritualism. Ezekiel is not alone in this endeavour. If we read Isa 1 and Mic 6 we hear about the same sins and the same level of divine displeasure. In the writings of the prophets, nothing irks God more than an empty ritualism that is passed off for loyalty when in fact it is the very opposite. Condemning this approach to life is a major preoccupation of prophetic preaching. For the prophets, to be called Yahweh's people or to call Yahweh 'our God' has to stand for something.

Ezekiel drills home this point in a very special way. Six times in chapter 20, he parallels disobedience to God's law (rules) with breaking Shabbat. The two experiences are one and the same. The verses involved make for very absorbing and tragic reading. I have chosen to supply a literal translation of the verses in question and provide annotation to aid the reading.

- Ezek 20:11-12 God reminds the people with these words:
I gave them my statutes (the Hebrew word *khuqot*, 'statutes', refers to rules and laws)
I explained my rulings to them ('rulings' is from the Hebrew *mishpat* which can also be translated 'justice' but clearly parallels *khuqot* in all these verses)
I gave them my Shabbats (Shabbat is plural throughout this reading)
- Ezek 20:13 God's anguish is encapsulated in these words:
They did not walk in my statutes (Hebrew for 'walk' is *halak* and is used in Gen 17:1 when God made a covenant with Abraham; it has strong covenantal connotations)

They rejected my rulings ('reject' in these verses is the Hebrew *ma'as* which also means 'to refuse')

They profaned my Shabbats (in all these verses 'profane' comes from the Hebrew word *khalal*; the basic idea of this word is to make something common or of no value)

- Ezek 20:16 follows in the same vein as the previous verse:
They rejected my rulings
They profaned my Shabbats
- Ezek 20:19 God again reminds them of his wish for them to:
Follow my statutes
Keep my rulings (the Hebrew word *shamar* means 'to keep' and 'to obey')
Keep my Shabbats (notice that 'to keep' Shabbat is the same as 'to keep' God's rulings)
- Ezek 20:21 resumes the negative assessment of Israel's life:
They did not walk in my statutes
They did not keep my rulings
They profaned my Shabbats
- Ezek 20:24 is the final indictment in the series:
They did not practise my ordinances ('practise' is from the Hebrew *'asah* which usually means 'to do/make'; the word has a wide semantic range but 'practise' fits this verse best)
They rejected my rulings
They profaned my Shabbats

The parallelisms in all these verses have the effect of a bell striking the same note over and over and no one can really ignore the force of their words. I see two important lessons embedded in these verses. The first lesson pertains to the relationship between God, Shabbat and law. We cannot ignore the language of possession that is used again and again. God's rulings are his rulings and Shabbats are his as well. Both are belongings of God and he is their rightful owner. To reject and nullify them is tantamount to a personal affront against God himself.

In Thailand, the 5th of December is the day of the king's birthday. People are expected to keep this day as a national holiday. On this day the government shuts down, educational institutions are closed, banks declare a bank holiday and many people take leave to celebrate the king's birthday. While most commercial enterprises remain open, an unusual sight to see at the malls is the presence of constant reminders of what the day is. All of this happens because the people of Thailand keep this day as an expression of their devotion and loyalty to HM the king. Those who choose not to honour the day are essentially dishonouring the king himself.

It is for this reason that many countries have laws forbidding citizens to burn the national flag. The flag is the symbol of the nation and to burn it down or trample on it is symbolic of grave disloyalty to that nation and what it stands for. Even in sports this relational concept is well-understood. One of my friends is an ardent fan of the English Premier League (EPL) but if you ask him which team he supports, his answer is always, 'Whichever wins.' Obviously there is no loyalty involved for him, only the pleasure of winning.

That brings us to the second lesson to be gleaned from Ezekiel. There are far too many people in the world who live by the pleasure of winning. To them loyalty issues are passé and they demonstrate no real commitment to things in their life. This is a major reason behind the breakdown of marriage and the constantly shifting geo-political alliances. Sports suffer from the same syndrome because many players do not commit to a team but to their salaries. My favourite LFC player of all time is Steven Gerard. The reason I admire this footballer is his commitment to Liverpool. He has

stuck with the club through thick and thin and will end his career with the club. Bigger salaries, greater enticements, could not pry him away from Liverpool.

Ezekiel says that the people of Israel were profaning Shabbat and they did this while also rejecting God's rulings. The idea of profaning in these verses is not what most English readers would have guessed. I suggest that the primary connotation of *khalal* ('to profane') in these verses is that Israel had reduced Shabbat to the level of the common. They had demeaned and cheapened Shabbat. They did not treat it as something special but rather as ordinary. To them the King's day is just another day. The big question is, 'How did they do this?' I think that we can surmise certain possibilities. One way to make something common is to lose the sense of purpose associated with that thing. When I first decided to learn how to play the guitar (I was 12 years old), I made a promise to God that I will only use my instrument and gift to serve his church. People often did not understand my refusal to play at socials or concerts. To them the guitar was just an instrument but to me it was a symbol of the special commitment I had made with God. Shabbat was special to Israel because of its covenantal connotation and to lose the sense of the covenant is to make Shabbat common.

Another way to make Shabbat common is through mindless ritualism. We will see more of this when we visit Isaiah Exhibit. When something is done over and over and over and yet the performance is viewed as merely a necessary ritual, the meaning is easily lost. Any sense of specialness quickly dissipates in the mist of overuse. I can still remember the experience my wife and I had when we purchased our first mobile phone. These gadgets had just entered the market and, compared to today's equipment, they were large and had limited functions. However, that first mobile phone was special to us. Right now, mobile phones are a dime a dozen. They have become so common that some people own more than one, while others change phones regularly. Presently, the tablet computer is slowly revolutionising the mobile phone industry. As I walk along the streets of Bangkok, I am often amazed that even street vendors possess tablet computers. I see them playing video games in-between sales. When we treat Shabbat as something common, we lose the sense of its value.

Because of all these things, God expresses his extreme unhappiness at Israel. There is a warning here for us. Being a Shabbater without genuine love for its Lord is like visiting a castle without deference to the lord of the manor. I invite the readers to spend some time reading slowly through Ezek 20 to grasp a sense of the depth of God's displeasure at the manner in which his Shabbat is treated. Tempting as it may be to believe that we are not repeating the experience of Israel, it is important for us to recall an old adage, 'history repeats itself.' The format changes but the tendencies remain. Contemporary Shabbaters may unwittingly profane Shabbat and not even be aware of it. We may go to church, keep Shabbat, and do all the right things but if we do not acknowledge the Lord of Shabbat and live within the boundaries of covenant with him, we *khalal* Shabbat. If we reduce Shabbat to personal enjoyment and do not recognise its specialness, we *khalal* Shabbat. If we *shabat* but do not live by the rulings of God, we *khalal* Shabbat.

Shabbat in the Isaiah Exhibit

Having examined the diatribe in Ezekiel, we are ready to move on to the next exhibit in our tour. If Ezekiel has shocked us, Isaiah will leave us dumbfounded. This prophet, more than any other biblical writer, provides a *tour de force* for Shabbat and we turn our attention to Isaiah, the prince of prophets.

There are four Shabbat passages in Isaiah located in chapters 1, 56, 58 and 66. Three of these passages appear in the final segment of the book, a segment packed with eschatological (pertaining to end of the world) underpinnings. Chapters 56, 58 and 66 belong to the section of Isaiah that speaks of new realities which God will create as replacement for the old, failed realities. There is a crescendo in the book that climaxes with statements about '*new heavens and new earth*'. But, we need to step back a bit.

Isaiah is one of the longest and most complex books of the Bible. Consequently, it has generated far more research and study than just about any other biblical material. The book has challenged scholars and lay readers equally and yet holds pride of place in the annals of Christian history with its impact on music, art, worship and biblical interpretation. The best way to view the book is as a great symphony with four movements. The first movement comprises chapters 1-35 and is marked by a pendulum swing between doom and gloom passages (e.g., ch 1) and hope passages (e.g., ch 2). The second movement (chs 36-39) is a historical interlude with a completely different format of writing (prose as opposed to the poetry of the rest of the book). The third movement runs from chapter 40 to 55 and furnishes a sustained treatment of the redemptive hope of the book. Movements 1 and 3 both end in great songs of the redeemed (chs 35 and 55 respectively). The final movement (chs 56-66) weaves together judgement and redemption until the book reaches its finale in the announcement about *'new heavens and new earth.'*

Armed with this sidebar, we can now decipher the Shabbat passages of Isaiah. The first chapter of the book is a lengthy diatribe of God against the sinfulness and manipulative religiosity of his people. The perversion of covenantal religion is symbolised by new moon, Shabbat and sacred assembly. This is a complete reversal of what we learnt in Torah Station. Shabbat becomes a symbol of God's repulsion, his disgust at the failure of his people. The words used are a stinging attack on their worship and life. God says,

'When you come to appear before Me, who requires this from you—this trampling of My courts? Stop bringing useless offerings. I despise your incense, New Moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of solemn assemblies—I cannot stand iniquity with a festival' (Isa 1:12-13 HCSB).

God's exasperation drives him to declare that his people are dumber than dumb animals (1:4). If this is frightening, there is more to come. God even goes so far as to say,

'When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen' (Isa 1:15 HCSB).

What could be worse than this?

Clearly, the people of God had not entered his 'time temple'. They had not learnt to recognise God's control over the universe and world; they had not fully acknowledged the covenant; they did not honour God. In Isa 1, God's people had truly hit a new low and common sense would dictate that there is no recovery from this. The book of Isaiah is just full of surprises because recovery is what Isaiah is all about. The *'Ah! Sinful nation'* of 1:4 is first replaced with *'Comfort, comfort my people'* (40:1) and then by *'Arise, shine, for your light has come, for the glory of Yahweh shines over you'* (60:1). This movement is what Isaiah is all about. Somewhere amid these shifting motifs Shabbat would play a significant role.

The second Isaianic reference to Shabbat is found at the very onset (56:1-6) of the final movement of the book, the segment dealing with new realities. If we pause to listen to the second song of the redeemed recorded in chapter 55, we can hear the invitation, *'Come, everyone who is thirsty'* (55:1). In direct response to this, God unveils a new world where those who previously had been excluded from covenant are now included.

This is what Yahweh says:

To the Eunuchs

*who keep my Shabbat,
who choose the things that please me,
and hold fast my covenant . . .*

and the foreigners

who join themselves to Yahweh,

*to minister to him,
to love Yahweh's name,
and be his servants;*

Everyone

*who keeps Shabbat and does not profane it,
and holds fast my covenant;*

These I will bring to my holy mountain. (56:4, 5, 6)

What we find here is God promising a new start. In this brave new world there will be new Shabbat celebrants, people who had not been allowed to do so before. Shabbat becomes the fulcrum of these new realities. The opening of Shabbat to everyone anticipates an order of life not yet available. Isaiah is propelling us forward in these texts.

We need to jump over to the final reference to Shabbat in Isaiah, 66:23. Despite the dilemma created by verse 24 (that is a subject for another tour), Shabbat in 66:23 is clearly central to the 'new heavens and new earth.' In this verse, Shabbat accomplishes a couple of things. First, this Shabbat is a total reversal of the diatribe of Isa 1. In the 'new heavens and new earth' the symbols of God's repulsion in chapter 1 (new moon and Shabbat) become the symbols of the new religion in this new world. Second, Shabbat connects God's people to eternity and when we keep Shabbat in this 'new heavens and new earth' we are no longer in 'time temple', we have moved into the streets of eternity. In the Torah we discover that Shabbat is stitched into the seams of time, but in Isaiah we learn that Shabbat is knitted into the very fabric of eternity.

Now we are left with one more question to ponder, 'Why should we observe Shabbat in time?' To answer this question, we have to look at the most significant reference to Shabbat in Isaiah (58:13-14). The text employs a cause-effect ('if . . . then') construction which carries a definite tone: blessing is a consequence of observing Shabbat. Isaiah gets to this lesson in a somewhat round-about way. He tells us that Shabbat is celebration of God's presence (a lesson already observed at Torah Station). God says,

If you turn your foot from Shabbat, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call Shabbat, 'Delight,' and Yahweh's holy day, 'Honourable,' . . . (58:13a)

God anticipates that true Shabbaters will experience the pleasure of his company. His day should be called 'Delight'. This is an intentional act and the new name for Shabbat underscores the pleasure principle. Those who view Shabbat in drab terms and look at the day as some kind of spiritual chore, miss the point of Shabbat entirely. This idea of Isaiah is similar to what we see in Lev 23. We also should take note of how this works. It is the pleasure of God that is the object of *shabat*. It is not about our pleasure but God's.

My wife and I have only one child and when our daughter was young her birthday was a big occasion. Both of us would go out of our way to make each birthday a memorable event. If necessary, I would even take off from work so we could celebrate her birthday. We put together a grand party with chocolate cake (always chocolate). All the nearby relatives were invited. We bought presents for our child. We expended much time and energy preparing the meal for the party. We did all of these things for her, to bring her pleasure because it was her birthday. This is how Shabbat should be treated.

Isaiah is also trying to teach us that Shabbat is about experiencing silence before God.

If you honour Shabbat

*by not going your own way
by not seeking your own pleasure
by not talking talk . . . (58:13b)*

The first sentence refers not so much to the act of walking *per se* but to the movement that benefits the person, such as walking to work or market. It is not a prohibition of 'walking to church'. The second sentence is repeated twice in this verse and evidently targets the self-absorption that characterises so much of human life. These two lines tell us that God should be the focus of Shabbat and we are expected to put our own self-interests aside in order to bring joy to God.

The third sentence in this triad, '*not talking talk*', is one of the most intriguing phrases in the book. The Hebrew *dabber dabar* may be roughly translated as 'speak a word/speech', therefore 'talk talk'. Both the verb and the noun come from the same Hebrew root d-b-r which can refer to 'words' or 'things'. In this verse the obvious intent concerns speech. The English 'talk talk' offers a fairly close way of capturing the Hebrew syntax. But what does 'talk talk' really involve? This phrase is not confined to Isaiah and when we look at how it is used in the Hebrew Bible we discover certain basic connotations of 'talk talk'. These are: to chit-chat; to gossip; to talk too much; and to talk business.

I was in Jerusalem in June 2012 and had the most silent Shabbat I have ever experienced. Our group stayed in the orthodox quarters of the city and Shabbat observance came with certain stipulations. No machines such as mobile phones or cameras. No sound systems or instruments. No traffic. The list goes on and on. At first this seemed like a preposterous idea. I am more accustomed to lots and lots of sounds during Shabbat. However, the Shabbat I experienced, silent as it was, turned out to be one of the best in my life. I now realise that Isaiah's cryptic 'talk talk' phrase is a reminder that in the presence of the King silence is golden. This is a lesson that I have also learnt in Thailand. When we are in the presence of the royals, we only speak if we are spoken to. When the princess comes to AIU during graduation to hand out the diplomas, we applaud only if she does. When she delivers her graduation speech, the only sound in the room is her voice. Any gadget that could potentially make sound (mobile phones, laptops, even books) is not permitted in the auditorium. Silence is the most appropriate etiquette in the presence of royalty. Similarly, Shabbat is about silence before God.

Further, Isaiah wants us to discover that through Shabbat we can encounter eternity. There are three blessings attached to Shabbat observance in verse 14.

*Then you shall take delight in Yahweh
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth,
I will feed you with the inheritance of your father Jacob. (58:14)*

These promises are eschatological in nature; they await a fulfilment that transcends time itself. Such promises are not for this earth but for the '*new heavens and new earth*'. Heb 11:1 and 39-40 amply demonstrate that God's best promises are fulfilled in eternity. It is not what we receive now that matters but what we are given then that counts. This is why Jesus urges his disciples not '*to store treasure*' on earth but in heaven (Matt 6:19-21).

When I was younger, I could not wait to grow up and reach adulthood. I did not fully understand why at that time. Now that I am much older, I have learnt a simple truth about life. The best blessings come later rather than sooner. Maybe this is the reason for Isaiah's promise:

*Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall ride up on wings like eagles.
They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isa 40:31)*

I believe that Isaiah is teaching us that Shabbat is really about practising eternity. In time we learn to celebrate the presence of God so that one day we can do that forever. In time we learn the silence of God so that in eternity we may stand before his presence in awe. In time we encounter eternity and learn that our destiny transcends time itself. At the Prophets Station, Shabbat becomes our lenses into forever. To paraphrase Paul's immortal words, 'now we may look through a tinted glass but then we shall see for real'. Shabbat connects time and eternity and we get to practise eternity here and now.

But it is time for the next phase of our tour, so come with me to Gospels Station.

~Day 4~ Serving the Unserved (Gospels Station)

By the time we reach our third main stop, Gospels Station, Shabbat has become such an entrenched idea that there are no more debates about its origin or history. The dominant question is now about methodology. What am I talking about? By the time Jesus appears on the scene, the Jews had been observing Shabbat for millennia. During the period that followed the Exile (586 B.C.), Jewish worship moved increasingly away from the temple. While, they still visited the temple during the great festivals, their primary worship was at the Synagogues. At the Synagogue, reading of Torah took pride of place in worship. Alongside this development came the urge to define how Shabbat should be observed. Every Jewish group had its own understanding of how to keep Shabbat. The group we know of as Pharisees were prominent in this debate. Their specialty was in drawing up Shabbat legislation. To the Pharisees, the only way to safeguard Shabbat was by surrounding it with a wall of rules. Jesus ran up to this wall and sometimes knocked it down. He and the Pharisees would get into several altercations over their legal approach to Shabbat.

Today we have time to look at two principal exhibits from this period. When we consider the two exhibits, we can almost hear the rancour of the Pharisees as they challenged Jesus' more user-friendly understanding of Shabbat.

Shabbat in the Matthew Exhibit

A highly provocative encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees is depicted in the Matthew Exhibit. We need to look closely at what actually took place. The setting was Jesus and his disciples walking through a cornfield (12:1). Evidently the disciples, like my students, were hungry. Was this breakfast time? Were they on their way to Synagogue? I have learnt over the years of pastoring, that many Shabbaters find themselves in the unusual situation of eating while on the way to church. Maybe they wake up late and are in a hurry to get to church. Maybe Jesus was deliberately provoking the Pharisees who shadowed his every move.

The immediate response of the Pharisees was, '*Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful on Shabbat!*' (12:2). The Greek expression 'not lawful' means what is 'not permissible' or even what is 'not possible'. If we search the Torah, we find no specific law that says we cannot pluck grain and eat breakfast on Shabbat (though the idea may be implied in some rules). However, the Pharisees had this rule and propagated it through their rabbinic system.

What do you do when people challenge you about your faith practice? A former colleague of mine had a humorous response whenever people asked him if it was alright to do something on Shabbat. He would say, 'If you do not enjoy it, then it is alright.' I am certain that the Pharisees were not so easily deterred. Therefore, Jesus gave them an extended answer (12:3-7) and by the time he was done, they had already reached the local Synagogue (12:9). At the Synagogue another event unfolded to really get these Pharisees going (to the point that they wanted Jesus out of the way; see 12:9-14). Nothing stirs up religious prejudice more than theological difference and even Shabbaters can completely lose their cool when one of their pet rules is challenged. Jesus was not done! To their horror, Jesus had the audacity to heal a man. This led to a second question, '*Is it lawful to heal on Shabbat?*' Is it permitted? Is it possible? I find that most of the Shabbat questions I have had to answer boil down to these two ideas—permissible and possible.

To answer these two questions, Jesus made a few controversial remarks. First, we need to acquaint ourselves with what he actually said; then, we will try to understand them.

- *Have you not read how David ate forbidden bread when he was hungry? (12:5)*
- *Have you not read in Torah that the priests violate Shabbat but remain innocent? (12:5)*
- *Someone greater than the Temple is here (12:6)*
- *I desire mercy and not sacrifice (Jesus quotes Hos 6:6)*

- *The Son of Man is Lord of Shabbat* (12:8)
- *A person is worth far more than an animal* (12:12)
- *It is lawful to do good during Shabbat* (12:12)

The first two statements are rhetorical questions that every Bible-toting Pharisee knew the answer to. Perhaps with a wink in his eye and a touch of irony, Jesus put them in their place. Basically he was telling them that there are things far more important to God, such as the hunger of a fugitive David and the service of the priests. The second example is especially helpful for me because of my profession. If the Pharisee position is correct, no pastor can work on Shabbat. What would happen to the worship of the church? The question answers itself, I think.

In the next two statements, Jesus establishes an important principle: when the King is in the house, the rules change! We shall have more to say about this in our final stop. Since Shabbat is a symbolic reminder of the King, his presence actually changes how things should be done. What this King desires more than anything else is mercy (see also Isa 1; Mic 6; Amos 9; Jas 2). His first interest pertains to the quality of human life. Rules exist to improve life but not in and of themselves. Even Shabbat rules should bear this in mind.

The most important reason why the Thai people love their king is his care for the common folk. He has been at the heart of every initiative, agricultural or technological, to make life better for the common Thai. There are many things that have been done as a direct result of this kingly initiative. When Jesus came to our planet, he came to show how much God really cares about us (John 3:16). God is far more concerned with our quality of life than the perfection of our rules. Jesus was not encouraging Shabbat breaking as the Pharisees thought. Instead, he was encouraging his audience to discover a higher reason for Shabbat than the rules.

'The Son of Man is Lord of Shabbat' simply restates the truth we had already learnt in the other stations. After all, as creator of the universe (John 1:1-3), Jesus also owns Shabbat. It is his day; his birthday or anniversary (so to speak). Keeping Shabbat is about acknowledging him as lord of our lives. Someone once said, 'Jesus must be lord of all, or he will not be lord at all.' Shabbat is our pledge of loyalty to our creator, king and redeemer. My students (former and current) call me 'rabbi'. This title keeps them close to me but also helps them to recognise who I am, their 'Sir'. All my students call my wife 'Auntie' but I am always 'Sir/Rabbi'. Yet those who know me cannot avoid noticing that many of my students treat me like a father. They are close yet always show deference. This statement of Jesus helps us to develop this double sense in dealing with God. This is what Shabbat can do for us, draw us close to God as to a father and yet enable us always to defer to him.

The remaining statements of Jesus highlight the value of human life. Even the Pharisees valued their domestic flocks enough to set aside some Shabbat rules if necessary (see 12:11). Jesus drives home a principle here that has eternal repercussions. The Casting Crowns song and a psalm of David (Ps 8:4) ask the same question, *'What is man that God should care about?'* 'Who am I that the Lord of all the earth should care to know my name and hurt?' David's answer is unequivocal, *'You have created him lower than God and crowned him with glory and honour'* (Ps 8:5). Despite our sins, we are still God's 'special treasure' (Exod 19:4-6). Shabbat is a symbol of that relationship. 'A man is worth far more than a sheep.' Therefore, it is *lawful* (permissible and possible) to do good on Shabbat. To punctuate his remarks, Jesus cured the paralysed arm. Through his act and words Jesus is clearly referring to the service we can provide to help people maintain the quality of life.

It seems to me that the principal question of Shabbat observance should not be, 'What should I do during Shabbat?' The real question is, 'How do I maintain the quality of life by the way I *shabat*?'

Shabbat in the Mark Exhibit

Now that we have examined the Matthew Exhibit, we move on to the Mark Exhibit. At first glance, the two exhibits look so much alike. The setting is the same. The questions are the same. The

Synagogue scene is the same. But a careful observer notices three important details not present in the Matthew Exhibit.

When Jesus pronounced his ownership of Shabbat, he prefaced it with this: *'Shabbat was made for man and not man for Shabbat'* (2:27). The Greek preposition 'for', is constructed in such a way as to indicate the reason for something and could be translated as 'because of' or 'for the sake of'. The second idea is the most fitting one for this verse. The service component of this assertion is difficult to dodge. Jesus is saying that Shabbat was established to benefit humanity, to provide us an essential service. However, in coupling v. 27 with v. 28, Jesus is also showing us that the benefit comes through knowing the Lord of Shabbat.

Every Wednesday evening during the academic year 2012-2013, my wife and I hosted a group of students at our house, a family care group. The group is rather large, averaging about 30 students each week. We do two things as a 'family', eat and worship. Every week I cook for these students. They come because our house makes them feel at home. They also love to sing and eat together (and they can eat). Our home is there for their benefit but it is not their home. Similarly, Shabbat is the 'time temple' of our Lord but it exists for our benefit.

Both questions about Shabbat in Matthew come from the Pharisees. However, in Mark the second question comes from Jesus: *'Is it lawful on Shabbat to do good or evil, to save life or kill?'* (3:4). Notice the way Jesus expands the question—do good or evil, save life or kill. He is offering them two contrasting options. As expected they were not able to answer (or chose not to answer). Jesus is redefining Shabbat—not as a time for rules and negative observance but as time for positive action in service of humanity.

As a teacher, I have discovered that students respond badly to being told they cannot do something. This is why some students do not ask questions in class because they are afraid they will be told off. This is also why some teachers find it hard to manage their classrooms. I am convinced it more productive not to say 'No' but rather to process things with my students. I let them know they will be challenged but in a positive way. My interest is to help them find their faith (and answers). Jesus wants us to shift gear in relationship to Shabbat; not to view it through the negative film of rules but the clear lenses of freedom and service. I believe Shabbat is for service, not the practice of religious ritual. In recognising this we truly come to know the Lord of Shabbat.

The final difference between the two exhibits is Marks' observation that Jesus was visibly upset with their silence (3:5). What upset him so much? Was it their unwillingness to learn? Was it their unwillingness to change? The only clue we are provided is this, *'the hardness of their hearts'* (3:5). What a tribute to human obstinacy. Here were a people so intent on preserving the sanctity of Shabbat that they were not prepared to listen or pay attention to the Lord of Shabbat and the needs of his people. When we re-examine passages like Isa 1 and Mic 6, we discover the same stubborn attitude. So many of God's people meticulously perform their acts of religiosity, while having no heart for God or his people. This is the main sin that raises the ire of God every single time. It is not empty religiosity that God is looking for but a heart-felt response to him.

By coupling service for humanity with commitment to God, Jesus has come full circle to the very core of Shabbat. This is a day of worship, gathering, service and commitment. Observing Shabbat is the divinely appointed way of showing how these elements work in our lives. This is how we should live with God in 'time temple'; it is also how we will live with him in eternity. Serving the unserved is our best way to please God (Matt 25:31-46) and the most desirable way to keep Shabbat.

That is all for the Gospels Station. Next stop, Letters Station.

~Day 5~ Seeking Shabbat (Letters Station)

At Letters Station we will consider just one Exhibit. Today we look at the one exhibit which seems to suggest that Shabbat is an on-going process. This may come as a surprise to many Shabbaters. I grew up with the idea of Shabbat as destination. This is where we go to each week. This is the end of the week. From here everything starts all over again. This way of life created a dichotomy between Shabbat and life and was reflected in the sharp separation of activities between Shabbat and the week days. I would like to interject a thought from Rabbi Heschel at this point. He suggests that anything which does not belong to Shabbat may not belong to life. Bear with me for a while and I think you will see what I mean.

Our exhibit today is Heb 4:1-11. In this text we encounter three principal ideas: Shabbat without 'rest', Shabbat with 'rest' and Shabbat as 'seeking rest'. First, Shabbat without 'rest'. Paul argues that ancient Israel did not enter the rest God intended for them (he is clearly playing with words here). He cites an OT verse, Ps 95:11 (twice in 4:3 and 5), to demonstrate that Israel did not enter 'rest'. Further, he asserts that even the great Joshua was not able to help Israel to enter 'rest'. The reason for this failure is simple: *'they did not enter because of disobedience'* (11:6). Paul does not elaborate on this but our tour through the Prophets Station has provided many clues to this failure.

Have you ever gone to sleep and then wakened in the morning and felt as if you had not slept? As I get older, this seems to happen more often. Maybe it is age or maybe it is the increase in stress levels. In English, we have an idiom—'to sleep like a baby.' Infants have the ability to sleep deeply and brain research has shown that unless we experience what is called REM (rapid eye movement) sleep we do not actually rest. Ps 127:2 gives a different reason for 'rest'—it is God who *'gives sleep to the one he loves.'* True rest comes from a relationship with God and Shabbat is a symbol, a weekly reminder, of that relationship. In this sense, Shabbat becomes a barometer to measure the state of our relationship with God. No wonder, disobedience results in Shabbat without rest.

Next, Shabbat with 'rest'. There are those who have entered the rest symbolised by Shabbat. Those who believe, that is, have faith, enter the rest (4:3). For Paul, faith is not an abstract term about conviction or mere belief. Paul labelled himself as a Pharisee of the Pharisees. This tells us he was steeped in Torah and knew the Hebrew Bible intimately. The word faith in Hebrew comes from the root '-m-n, from which we get our English word 'Amen'. The basic meaning of the Hebrew verb *'aman* is 'to be firm'. From this base idea are derived 'firmness', 'faith' and 'loyalty'. When we use 'Amen' in our prayers, we are really making a pledge of loyalty to God. For Paul, 'faith' is a loyalty issue. Having 'faith' in Christ is about being loyal to him.

Most church members I meet see faith as an expression of belief. However, if the biblical idea of faith—as a pledge of loyalty—is essentially correct, then we get a very different spin on what Paul is talking about. This year (2013) my wife and I completed 32 years of marriage. I used to wonder what enables a couple to stay together for decades. Now I am beginning to understand. When the emotions change with time, when the hormones die down, when the body starts to wrinkle, only our commitment to each other will survive time and old age. Many of my friends do not understand my loyalty of LFC. But to me this most mundane of life's experiences is a lesson for how faith works. In God's scheme of life, not everything is pleasant. There are dark days and sad ones. There is tragedy and pain. Ultimately, there is death. God does not attempt to answer every question of faith. There are times when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. At such moments, only our sense of loyalty holds us to God. This is no more than what he requires from us. This is Shabbat 'rest'.

Last, Paul speaks about Shabbat as 'seeking rest'. He reminds us of the promise available but warns us of the danger of missing out on the 'rest' (4:1). He opens the possibility of entering the 'rest' that so many before have missed (4:7). He wants us to know that a 'Shabbat rest' still remains

for God's people (4:9). He then urges us to '*make every effort to enter the rest*' (4:11). Shabbat is depicted as a process, not a destination.

The question at this point is, 'What is this rest?' I think that the 'Shabbat rest' Paul is referring to is *shalom*, the wholeness of life that comes to us through a relationship with God. Shabbat connects us to God and through this conduit the Lord can pour out his blessings. Every year I have to write recommendation letters for some of my graduating seniors. Some of these letters are easy to write because of the special relationship the students have with me. Every now and then a student will ask for a recommendation and I have to struggle with what to write. Some students have been the black sheep or the bad apple and even a big-hearted teacher struggles to say something nice. Inevitably, such students have made no effort to get close to their 'rabbi' and no real relationship has developed. When we observe Shabbat we show God that we are prepared to stay in relationship with him and because of that commitment, God is able to bless us beyond measure.

I say 'Shabbat shalom' until our next stop.

~Day 6~ To Shabbat or Not To Shabbat (Decision Station)

At this stop we need to pause and make some decisions. There are issues to be sorted out. We may have discovered the biblical underpinnings of Shabbat but we still have to translate them into daily life. One of my graduates, a pastor whom I work with regularly, has a habit of saying to me, 'Sir, can you bring it down to earth?' Prepare yourself for some ground level reflection. We will explore three exciting exhibits at Decision Station.

Shabbat Work Exhibit

We begin with the Shabbat Work Exhibit. All Shabbaters are aware of the wording of the fourth commandment: '*You shall not do any work.*' Nevertheless, life teaches us that to refrain 100% from work is impractical. What about church work? What about the sick? What about babies? Isn't work involved in taking care of these? This is why we all wonder about Shabbat observance. Where do we go from here?

I think Jesus provides the major clues to answer these questions. There are different types of 'work' and the Torah commandment is not a *carte blanche* rule against all 'work' (physical or otherwise). When I was a full-time pastor, Shabbat was often the busiest day of the week and (as odd as it may sound) I got my 'rest' (physically at least) the following day. If we could travel back in time we would see a similar picture at the temple or synagogue. After all, it was God himself who ordained Shabbat as a day of worship. Ministry has taught me a valuable lesson: wherever worship occurs, 'work' has to be done. This is valid 'work' even though sometimes it involves physical labour. When we gather to worship God and offer him a sacrifice of praise, we are performing a task that is a sweet aroma to the King. Such 'work' is acceptable to and expected by him.

At the Gospels Station we also encountered another form of 'work' that is pleasing to the King, serving the unserved. When we do things to improve the quality of human life, such as caring for the sick and needy, we bring joy to the King's heart. Surely such 'work' is not only acceptable but desirable. Those who God has called to help others, doctors, nurses, pastors and other care-givers, should continue their tasks during Shabbat because to literally stop would be unacceptable to the King.

It seems the 'work' that is appropriate for Shabbat is made up of two components, worship and service. This is the day when the church can come together to worship God. This is the day for entering his 'time temple' to offer him homage. This is the day to enthrone him in our hearts and minds. But this is also the day for paying special attention to the needs of others around us. During Shabbat, effort can be made to visit the sick, bring help to the needy, look after the widows and orphans (to use prophetic language). During the six days of the week, we may not always be able to do these things for God himself has designed the week days so that we may do all our work. Shabbat becomes a perfect opportunity to serve others in ways not possible during the week.

This is an important exhibit to remember. There are no formulas to follow. Culture and context may differ. Situations of life change. People have different needs at different times. As long as we keep the two principles of worship and service clear in our thinking, we can find the type of Shabbat 'work' that the King can be truly proud of.

Shabbat Abuses Exhibit

The second display to look at is Shabbat Abuses Exhibit. For all the possibilities Shabbat offers, each one of them is prone to misuse or even abuse. Many Shabbaters take advantage of God's special gift to us. This may happen because we do not understand whose day it is or because we convince ourselves that the day really is ours. Sometimes our actions are inadvertent, while at other times they are intentional. This is when we should be honest with ourselves and carefully guard what we do.

One of the most common ways of abusing Shabbat is by legislating what should be done or not done on Shabbat. We have already looked at this problem earlier in our tour. We understand why it happens but seem unable to avoid it. There are some rules that may be necessary so as to avoid dilemmas in life. However, most of the Shabbat rules are made to create walls around Shabbat. Such rules arise from our innate fear of displeasing God. Deep in our subconscious there is the fear that God is full of demands and the last thing we want is to make the King angry. We are not as trusting of the Bible image of a doting Father who loves us unconditionally and wants us to have the best in life. Jesus makes this incredible promise, *'I have come that you may have life and have it to its fullest'* (John 10:10). Our finite minds tell us that there must be some heavy ropes attached to the promise. Legislating Shabbat is like trying to discover what ropes God is pulling on. That way we can avoid being yanked off our feet.

This is not a cynical view of Shabbat, only a fearful one. When we are afraid of something, we tend to make rules about how to deal with it. When my daughter was about two years old, she was fascinated with the blue flames of a gas stove. We were very afraid that she would burn herself. In response, we made rules to prevent her getting burnt. For a time, the rules worked, but then one day, quicker than a flash, her little hands went into the blue flames. She was burnt but she has never made the same mistake again. This was an important lesson for me and so I decided to follow a different tack with other objects in the house that might be harmful to her or which she could damage. Instead of making rules, I started teaching her how to use things (the hifi, the camera, the television) and she grew up safer and more respectful of such objects. To me this is how we should treat Shabbat. While it is not helpful to make many rules, we should learn to process its observance.

Another way of abusing Shabbat is by turning Shabbat into another day of work, but with a different format. Many churches do all their church work on Shabbat, everything from worship to fellowship to committee meetings to ministry tasks. The church board or board of elders meets on Shabbat to deliberate issues. The church choir meets on Shabbat to practise their songs. Training and special seminars are often conducted on Shabbat. Church fellowship lunch occurs only on Shabbat. Even uniform groups use Shabbat to ply their trade and earn their honours. There seems to be no limit to the number of things we find to do on Shabbat. For many church leaders, Shabbat can be very tiring. In the rush of doing all these things, they do not find the time to *shabat* and when the day is over, they have not found the 'rest' Shabbat offers. They have spent their Shabbat running and doing, with no time to 'stop'.

I still remember a particular church I pastored. Things started at about 8 am on Shabbat morning and did not stop until after sundown. Every Shabbat was hectic; it was truly a chasing after wind. One thing after another' one thing after another. No time to breathe until Shabbat was over. No time for contemplation. No time for God. It took me some time to figure out that we can be so busy doing things for God on Shabbat that we have no time for him at all. Does this really please the King? If I take my wife for a romantic dinner at a restaurant but then spend the whole evening on my mobile phone, would it make her happy? What does this action really say about me as a husband? If we spend Shabbat running between tasks, what is that saying about the kind of Shabbaters we are? This awakening compelled me to change the way I keep Shabbat. There is some work to be done during Shabbat but I must endeavour not to turn it into another work day.

The most amusing form of Shabbat abuse is what we fondly call 'lay activities'. In and of itself, this is not a problem. However, the unspoken attitude seems always to be about us. I have a colleague who has the habit of dozing off during a worship service. He does not do that when he is preaching, but if someone else is preaching, there is a good chance he will sleep. It is embarrassing enough to do this sitting in the pew (we all do that from time to time), how much more when it is done on stage. One time we attended a district camp meeting. A few of us ministers were seated in the rostrum and like clockwork my friend dozed off during the sermon. This was real sleep, with nodding head and lurching close to falling off the chair. Most of the members could barely contain their laughter and the whole sermon was undermined by his sleep. He and I were part of a quarter

designated to sing right after the sermon. To my amazement, as soon as the sermon was over, he woke up and sang with us.

Let me assure you that I am not putting anyone down; I am simply highlighting a common problem. We do need to acknowledge the existence of this abuse. How can we honour the King when we sleep through most of his Shabbat? When people attend a royal ceremony in Thailand, there is one thing you will never see, someone sleeping. This would be an insult to HM the king. How much more of the King of kings? I am not saying that a short siesta may not be in order now and then. What I am talking about is the attitude that Shabbat is mainly for us to catch up, to slumber away the hours. We need to be judicious in our use of Shabbat sleep.

Shabbat Essentials Exhibit

The final stop in Decision Station is Shabbat Essentials Exhibit. Where does all of this leave us? I like the counsel of Rabbi Getz (he was the orthodox Rabbi in South Bend, Indiana, when I met him). He suggested that we should learn to intentionally reduce Shabbat to the two essentials of life, God and family. I would expand this to: worship God, spend time with family and serve others. These three things are the essentials of Shabbat. Anything more than this, conflicts with the spirit of Shabbat. At creation, God intentionally *shabat* so as to spend time with the newly created Adam and Eve. Through the covenant, God did the same thing; Shabbat became his 'time temple' for an audience with Israel. Shabbat has the same function today.

When I became aware of these things, I knew that changes could not be made unless I followed the path of intentionality. All changes require a decision to change. We do not change unless we decide to do so. Merely wishing for it is not going to do the trick. Here at Decision Station, I am calling you to a new approach to Shabbat. God expects it and we should learn it. I cannot dictate how you should *shabat* but you can make a decision to honour the King, spend time with your family and pay attention to the needs of others. These are the essentials of Shabbat.

Tomorrow we will reach Central Station. This will be our final destination of the tour. Hopefully you have found the tour beneficial. See you at Central Station.

~Day 7~ When the King Is in the House (Central Station)

Central Station is where we bring our tour to an end. This is where everything stops. Everyone has to get off here and make their way back to wherever they come from. I believe that the tour through Shabbat has unveiled some important exhibits and from them we have learnt some new things or affirmed old convictions. We have been through Torah Station. We have toured Prophets Station. We have travelled with Jesus through Gospels Station. We have listened to Paul at Letters Station. We have paused at Decision Station. So what else is there to say? I would like to leave you with some parting advice, like any tour guide should.

Remember the axiom I shared with you: when the King is in the house, the rules change. Not that the rules are bad but because someone greater than the rules is present. The King's presence alters behaviour and patterns of life. There are new protocols to learn. New ways of standing, bowing, sitting and walking are brought to our attention. When the princess comes to our University for graduation, the campus is washed, cleaned, decorated and spruced up. The auditorium is cleaned, polished and decorated. Flags bearing her royal emblem are raised on all roads. When she arrives, administrators and faculty members line up to welcome her and do the same at her departure. These are things we do because a royal person is present.

I suppose it is hard for those of us who come from democratic backgrounds to fully appreciate the beauty of this whole royalty approach to life. For me it has become a learning tool to help me understand God better. We are at a time in Christian history when most believers prefer to see God as friend, banker and supplier. We do not respond well to the biblical call to see him as King and Lord. Until we come to terms with his kingship, we will not fully comprehend the existence and observance of Shabbat.

Thailand has also taught me that in the presence of the royals, everything stops. The stoppage is both a matter of practicality as well as a symbol of deference. Can you imagine what life would be like if there is no break to the cycle of time? Someone has calculated that if we keep Shabbat and live to be 70 years old, we will have had 10 years of vacation without taking any other day off. Shabbat was God's first gift to the world and it is still his best gift today. If only we will *shabat*, we would see that to be the case. Shabbat would become our inspiration for the week. It would energise us and keep us afloat in the midst of life's changes.

As a symbol of deference, Shabbat also gives us an opportunity to aim for something higher than ourselves. It compels us to recognise that our lives are safe in hands more powerful than our own. By acknowledging the King we discover who we really are and find meaning to our lives. The words of the King become our delight. His expectations become our motivation. His love becomes our comfort. This is what Shabbat is all about.

In parting, I say to you, 'Shabbat shalom'. Thanks for being on this tour with me.