



## Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30

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**Abstract:** Rest is an important biblical theology theme. Psalm 95 has strong parallels with Matthew 11:25-30, and the shared literary features and theological themes show that Matthew 11:25-30 alludes to Psalm 95. The invitation of Jesus to come to him for rest is the fulfillment of the typology of Sabbath rest in the Old Testament.

**Keywords:** Rest, allusion, Psalm 95, Matthew 11:25-30

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### Introduction

The theme of Sabbath rest is a very important research area in the Old Testament. Jon Laansma claims the theme includes Sabbath rest (from routine labor) and the promise of rest (from wandering/journeying or an enemy threat) in the land of Canaan. These two strands are combined in two NT passages: Matthew 11:28-30 and Hebrews 3-4.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is of great significance to take a closer look at Matthew 11:25-30.<sup>2</sup> In Matthew 11:25-30, the rest motif is contained in a saying which is considered by most scholars to be a component of Matthew's personalized wisdom Christology.<sup>3</sup> The suggestion that Matthew

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Laansma, "Rest," in ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 727.

<sup>2</sup> Since Matthew 11:25-30 is the prayer of Jesus, it is better to discuss the theme of rest within the unit of Matthew 11:25-30.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Laansma, *I Will Give You Rest: The 'Rest' Motif in The New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 And Heb 3-4* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 159. M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970). Frances Taylor Gench, *Wisdom in the Christology of*



11:28-29 echoes Exodus 33:14 and Jeremiah 6:16 is also problematic.<sup>1</sup> This paper will focus on the theme of Sabbath. The thesis is that a biblical theological understanding of Sabbath in the Old Testament, especially that of Psalm 95, provides the key for understanding Matthew 11:25-30, in which we hear the voice of the Davidic king offering Sabbath rest to the world.

### **The Sabbath Commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

After the Fall (Genesis 3), Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. The descendants of Adam and Eve suffer from the Fall and there is no rest for them (for example, God's cursing of the ground in Genesis 3:17). God shows his will for the redemption of human beings by choosing Abram and his descendants (Genesis 12:13; 32:22-32). Later, God chooses Moses (Exodus 3) to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Subsequently, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21). The Sabbath of Genesis 2:1-3 is picked up in the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 and continues to be developed in Deuteronomy 5:12-15.<sup>2</sup>

Genesis 2:1-3 emphasizes "the seventh day." In Exodus 20:8-11, on the other hand, the phrase "the Sabbath day" (יום השַׁבָּת) appears at the start and the

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*Matthew* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997). Richard Thomas France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 447.

<sup>1</sup> Davies and Allison suggest that Matthew 11:28 alludes to Exodus 33:14, see William David Davies and Dale C. Allison. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 287-288. Osborne also notes that in Matthew 11:29, "The promise [of rest] here quotes Jer 6:16(changing the LXX "purification" [ayviouoc;] to "rest" [avapauasis] so as to link it with "rest" in v. 28)" see Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010),444. Both suggested allusions are not possible, Laansma notices that, "the fragmentary nature of these parallels with Ex 33 and Jer 6 makes it difficult to establish whether these are intended to be allusions." See, Jon Laansma, *"I Will Give You Rest": The 'Rest' Motif in The New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 And Heb 3-4* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 227-228.

<sup>2</sup> A. G. Shead, "Sabbath," ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 746.



close of the commandment.<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:8-11 therefore interprets Genesis 2:1-3 and emphasizes “the Sabbath day” with the significant alteration of “seventh” to “Sabbath.”<sup>2</sup> God commands the Israelites to remember the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8), and continues to explain what “remember the Sabbath day” means: “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath (שַׁבָּת) to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.” The text continues to explain the reason for having a Sabbath day: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested (וַיָּנַח)<sup>3</sup> on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” God’s Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3 has the narrative function of concluding the creation account and is cited as the basis of Israel’s Sabbath.<sup>4</sup> God’s creation and the “six and seven” pattern becomes the foundation for Sabbath for the Israelites, and it is in imitation of God.<sup>5</sup>

In Deuteronomy 5:12-15, the Israelites are to “observe” (שָׁמֹר) the Sabbath (5:12), and in Exodus 20:8, they are to “remember” (זָכוֹר) the Sabbath.<sup>6</sup> The second addition to the Exodus text (v.12b) refers to the original giving of the fourth commandment. The additions in verse 14 stress that the cattle must not work,<sup>7</sup> and the purpose for all of these prohibitions is “that your male servant and your female servant may rest (יָנוּחַ) as well as you (כְּמֹדֶךָ).” In Exodus 20:8-11,

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<sup>1</sup> A. G. Shead, “Sabbath,” 746.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 746.

<sup>3</sup> In Exodus 20:11, the Hebrew word for “and rested” is וַיָּנַח, and in Genesis 2:2, the Hebrew word is וַיִּשְׁבַּח and Exodus 20:11 interprets Genesis 2:2 by using a different Hebrew word.

<sup>4</sup> John Laansma, “Rest,” in ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 729.

<sup>5</sup> A. G. Shead, “Sabbath” in ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2000), 746.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 488.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 746.



Moses states God's Sabbath (20:11) is the basis for Sabbath, therefore God's people should imitate God. Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 5:14, Moses states that your male servant and your female servant may rest (יָנוּחַ) as well as you. He is stressing that all the servants should share in the rest.

Another important difference is the way Deuteronomy explains the reasons for the law (Deuteronomy 5:15). An analogy is drawn between Israel's "slaving" ("labor" in v.13 translates תַּעֲבֹד) and the time spent as a "slave" in Egypt ("a slave" in v.15 translates עֶבֶד). Thus, the seventh work-free day symbolizes Israel's redemption.<sup>1</sup> In Exodus 20:8, God's creation is the basis for Sabbath. But with the development in God's redemption history in Deuteronomy 5:15, God's redemption becomes the basis for Sabbath.

Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 identify the basis for the Sabbath as creation and redemption. With the development of the redemption history, the idea of Sabbath plays an important role in the life of the Israelites.

### **Psalm 95 is the Progression of the Sabbath in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

Psalm 95 is a critical Psalm for the development of the theme of Sabbath. It gives no indication of authorship,<sup>2</sup> date or liturgical setting.<sup>3</sup> In the LXX the authorship is ascribed to David: "a praise song of David:" Αἶνος ᾠδῆς τῷ Δαυιδ. In this Psalm, the exhortation to worship and the reasons for worship parallel Ps. 100, moving through this sequence twice: exhortation (vv.1-2), reasons (vv.3-5);

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<sup>1</sup> A. G. Shead, "Sabbath," in ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 747.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 95 is included in Hebrew hymnbook as an anonymous psalm, but in Hebrews 4:7, it is quoted as a psalm of David, see John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms: An Expository Commentary Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2001), 62.

<sup>3</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms V.3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 89.



exhortation (vv.6), reasons (v.7a-c).<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 95 is a progression of the Sabbath teaching in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Psalm 95:1 depicts God as a God of redemption by naming him the ‘rock of our salvation’ (לְצִיּוֹר יִשְׁעֵנוּ). Psalm 95:7-11 also describes God’s redemption of the Israelites. It echoes the redemption basis for keeping the Sabbath in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Vv.2-6 describe God as the maker of everything (the depths of the earth and the heights of the mountains are “his,” the sea is his, for he made it in vv.4-5; the LORD, our maker in v.6). These verses stress that God is a God over creation. It echoes the creation basis for keeping the Sabbath found in Exodus 20:8-11. After the exhortations and reasons for worshiping God, v.7 stresses “today if you hear his voice...;” “Today;” and “listen to his voice;” which all recall Deuteronomy, where Moses repeatedly reminds Israel that “today” he is issuing commands to them (e.g. Deuteronomy 4:40; 5:1), and they need to “listen” ( e.g. Deuteronomy 4:1;5:1).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Psalm 95 is the progression of the Sabbath teaching in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15, with the emphasis on “today,” which is a key word in the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>3</sup>

In v.8, the psalmist warns, “do not harden your hearts...” Then the Psalm recalls the bad example of Israel in the wilderness, the story of the Exodus. The Psalm’s paraenesis is set against the stark background of several failures on Israel’s part, especially those in Exodus 17 and Numbers 14.<sup>4</sup> The psalmist depicts God as saying, “though they had seen my work”, and “your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof” (v.9). They had seen what Yahweh had done

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<sup>1</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms* V.3, 88.

<sup>2</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms* V.3, 95.

<sup>3</sup> “today” in Deuteronomy occurs no less than seventy-four times, see David G. Firth & Philip S. Johnston, *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 178.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel C. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath: The Sabbath Frame of Exodus 31:12-17; 35:1-3 in Exegetical and Theological Perspective* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 99.



for them, but they still did not want to submit themselves to him.<sup>1</sup> In v.10, the psalmist refers to Israel in the wilderness. In Numbers 14, Israel's sin was so severe that Yahweh threatened to destroy the entire nation; because of their unbelief and rebellion, all those who did not listen to Yahweh's voice (Number 14:22) would not enter the land.<sup>2</sup> Because of their rebellion, Yahweh loathes that generation, for their hearts go astray and they have not known Yahweh's ways (v.10). Because of Israel's rebellion and their straying hearts, Yahweh swore in wrath that "they shall not enter my rest (מנוחתִי)" (v.11)

The Psalm mentioned that "they shall not enter my rest," which means that even though eventually they entered the Promised Land, they still did not enter God's rest because of their rebellion and unbelief. Goldingay points out that the divine oath here leads one to connect the theme of rest and the land; the Promised Land is the place for rest given by Yahweh (Deuteronomy 12:9). This is the case for the time the psalmist is speaking of, "today". Psalm 95 utilizes the word "today" after the rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness, and this indicates that even Joshua, who led the next generation into the land, did not give them this rest but that God had appointed a future time.<sup>3</sup> This leaves room for the promise of rest in Matthew 11:25-30.

Psalm 95 is the progression of the Sabbath commandment in the two iterations of the Decalogue. It is also connecting the theme of rest with the Promised Land. Even though Israel had the Sabbath and entered the Promised Land, they still did not enter the rest of God due to their unbelief. This is portrayed in the discussion of the rest motif in Hebrews 3-4, which states that a

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel C. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath: The Sabbath Frame of Exodus 31:12-17; 35:1-3 in Exegetical and Theological Perspective*, 96.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), 207.



new typology of Sabbath rest awaits to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

### **Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30**

The previous section presents a glimpse of the biblical theology of Sabbath rest in the Old Testament. By outlining the progression and development of Sabbath rest in the Old Testament, we gain a solid foundation in understanding and interpreting the message of Matthew 11:25-30. In this regard, Carson is correct in commenting on Matthew 11:28-30 that “A theme of rest traces its own trajectory through the Bible. As God ‘rested’ at the end of creation, as God commands in the Ten Commandments a Sabbath day for his people to rest, so the ultimate rest is secured in Jesus—a theme greatly expanded later in the New Testament (see Hebrews 3-4).”<sup>1</sup> Carson recognizes that in front of the promise of rest from Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30, there is a whole trajectory of biblical theology concerning rest running throughout the Old Testament. The previous section makes this same recognition by outlining a biblical theology of Sabbath rest.

In the following section, we will explore the connection between Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-20 and indicate how Psalm 95 sheds light on the interpretation of Matthew 11:25-30.

### **The Connection between Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30**

In order to establish the link between Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30, one must address the issue of genre. In my opinion, Matthew 11:25-30, as a poetic prayer, parallels the poetic genre of Psalm 95. In the NA 28 Greek version, Matthew 11:25-30 is laid out in the narrative form, not in a poetic style. But

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 143.



considering that the Lord's Prayer is in poetic style,<sup>1</sup> one would not deny the possibility that the prayer of Jesus in Matthew 11:25-30 could also be placed in a poetic style. Buchanan notices the poetic nature of Jesus's prayer and comments that "this is a unique passage in Matthew. It is a poetic prayer, written in Johannine style."<sup>2</sup> On account of this comment, one would not deny that Matthew 11:25-30 belongs to the genre of poetry. Recognizing the poetic genre of Jesus' prayer in Matthew 11:25-30 paves the way for establishing the link between Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30.

The parallel between Hebrews 3-4 and Matthew 11:25-30 also supports the possibility of the link between Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30. Osborne asserts while commenting on the promise of rest from Jesus in Matthew 11:28 that the rest is "is closely aligned with the 'rest' theme of Heb. 3:7-4:16, especially the 'Sabbath-rest' of 4:3 -11."<sup>3</sup> In Hebrews 3-4, Psalm 95 is quoted four times.<sup>4</sup> Since Matthew 11:25-30 has a strong link with Hebrews 3-4, one cannot rule out the possibility that there is a link between Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30.

The link between Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30 is shown by their strikingly similar literary features. It has been pointed out that in Psalm 95, the exhortation to worship and the reasons for worship move through this sequence twice: exhortation (vv.1-2), reasons (vv.3-5); exhortation (vv.6), reasons (v.7a-c).<sup>5</sup> In the LXX, it is expressed in this way: δεῦτε (come, vv.1-2)..., ὅτι (for, vv.3-5) ...; δεῦτε (come, v.6) ..., ὅτι (for, v.7a-c)...This pattern of δεῦτε... ὅτι... shows up in Matthew 11:28-29: **Δεῦτε** πρὸς με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι,

<sup>1</sup> The Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:13 is displayed as poetic style in the NA 28.

<sup>2</sup> George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Volume 1 (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 500.

<sup>3</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 442.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 95:7-11 is quoted in Hebrews 3:7-12; Psalm 95:7-8 is quoted in Hebrews 3:15; Psalm 95:11 is quoted in Hebrews 4:3; Psalm 95:7 is quoted in Hebrews 4:7.

<sup>5</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms* V.3 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 88.



κάγω ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς. 29 ἄρατε τὸν ζυγὸν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι  
πραῦς εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν.

Talbert demonstrates that Matthew 11:28-29 concludes with two invitations and two promises:

A come (δεῦτε) to me all those who are tired and weighed down

B and I will give your rest

A' Take my yoke (ἄρατε) upon you and learn (μάθετε) from me, because  
(ὅτι) I am meek and lowly in heart

B' and you will find rest in your souls, for (ὅ) my yoke is pleasant, and my  
burden is easy to bear<sup>1</sup>

The imperatives ἄρατε and μάθετε are synonymous with the summons  
“come to me”.<sup>2</sup> More precisely, ἄρατε and μάθετε explain what it means to “come  
to me”. To view the verbs in the context, one can summarize it this way: “come  
(δεῦτε) to me.... for (ὅτι) I am meek and lowly in heart; Take my yoke (ἄρατε)  
upon you and learn (μάθετε) from me... for (ὅτι) my yoke is pleasant, and my  
burden is easy to bear.” In this regard, it parallels with the pattern of exhortation  
and reason found in Psalm 95.

In summary, Matthew 11:25-30 is a poetic prayer, parallels with Hebrews  
3-4, and has strikingly similar literary features with Psalm 95. This shows that  
there is a strong link between Psalm 95 and Matthew 11:25-30.

### Reading Matthew 11:25-30 from Psalm 95

<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 150. The Greek verbs were added by this writer.

<sup>2</sup> William David Davies and Dale C. Allison. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 289-290.



The previous section has shown that Matthew 11:25-30 has strong allusion to Psalm 95. This is proven by the parallel between Psalm 95:9 and Matthew 11:20-24, which is the contextual text of Matthew 11:25-30. Psalm 95:9 declares the judgment of God against the ancestors of Israel who tested God in the wilderness though “they had seen my work” (εἶδοσαν τὰ ἔργα μου LXX). “My work” may refer to the Exodus or the Parting of the Red Sea, or it may be a collective term for God’s deeds of deliverance and protection in general.<sup>1</sup> As a result, God swore that “they shall not enter my rest” (95:11). Matthew 11:20-24 states that Jesus has done “his mighty works” (δυνάμεις αὐτοῦ) in Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, and because they did not repent, Jesus denounced the cities. It is worth noting that “mighty works” occurs in 11:20, 21, and 23. The parallel between God’s work and Jesus’s works demonstrates that Jesus is doing what God was doing in the past. Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum are all Jewish towns.<sup>2</sup> The same pattern is displayed here—the Israelite people have seen the work of God, which is the mighty work of His Son Jesus. However, they still have not responded properly to the work of God; they did not repent! But contrary to the oath of God in Psalm 95:11, that they cannot enter his rest, Matthew 11:25-30 offers the promise of rest through Jesus. In Matthew 11:25, the phrase “Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ” indicates that Matthew 11:25-30 must be read in terms of the preceding denunciation.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Matthew 11:25-30 is the transformation and reversal of God’s oath in Psalm 95:11.

Matthew 11:25-30 can be divided into two parts: vv.11:25-27 and vv. 11:28-30.<sup>4</sup> A much better division, however, is the threefold division of vv.11:25-26, v.27 and vv.11:28-30.<sup>5</sup> Due to the limits of this paper, this writer will only give a

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<sup>1</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms* V.3, 96.

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, 149.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 317.

<sup>4</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1993), 316.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthe*, 317.



brief exposition of how Psalm 95 sheds light on reading Matthew 11:25-27. More focus will be placed on Matthew 11:28-30.

Matthew 11:25-26 is a thanksgiving, parallel to the pattern of exhortation to worship and the reason for worship in Psalm 95:1-6. As mentioned above, Psalm 95:1-6 has the pattern of δεῦτε (come, vv.1-2) ... ὅτι (for, vv.3-5) ...; δεῦτε (come, v.6) ..., ὅτι (for, v.7a-c) .... Though Matthew 11:25-26 does not have the same verb δεῦτε (come), it has the verb ἔξομολογοῦμαι, and the same word ὅτι (for). During the increasing conflict and rejection, Jesus thanked God as Father and the Lord of heaven and earth, ὅτι (for) the Father sovereignly hides “these things” (perhaps the eschatological significance of the miracles) from those who think themselves “wise” (σοφῶν) and “clever” (συνετῶν) and reveals himself to the “childlike” (νηπίοις).<sup>1</sup> V.26 does not provide a verb, but the vocative Father occurs again, followed with ὅτι (“for such was your gracious will”). This shows that Matthew 11:25-26 also loosely follows the thanksgiving pattern in Psalm 95:1-7.

Psalm 95 in the LXX ascribes authorship to David, which sheds light on the understanding of the claim of the Father and Son relationship. Jesus’ prayer in Matthew 11:25-30 is in the voice of the Davidic king. The Father-Son relationship is not echoing the relationship between Moses and God with reference to Exodus 33:12-13.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the intimate relationship between Father and Son in Matthew 11:27 is a fulfillment of the promise of God to David’s descendent in 1 Samuel 7:14: “I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.” This intimate Father-Son relationship can also be seen in Matthew 12:18-21, which is a direct quotation of Isaiah 42:1-4; “servant” (παῖς) in Isaiah 42:1-4

<sup>1</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 302-303.

<sup>2</sup> William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 282-286.



can also be translated as “son”.<sup>1</sup> The intimacy of the servant with God is expressed in the language of “my servant”, “whom I have chosen”, “my beloved...with whom my soul is well pleased,” and “I will put my spirit upon him” in Isaiah 42:1-2. Based on phrases like “come to me” and “my yoke,” scholars often link Matthew 11:28-30 with Jewish wisdom literature (such as Sirach) and claim that Jesus here is speaking in the voice of the wisdom, which demonstrates Matthew’s wisdom Christology. Turner thinks in this way. He suggests “the language of rest and an easy yoke is similar to the way wisdom was spoken of in Sir.6:23-31.24:19;51:23-27, which develops the personification of wisdom found in Prov. 8:1-21,32-36;9:4-6.”<sup>2</sup> France also sees the connection between Sirach 51:23-27 and Matthew 11:28-30 and claims that, “in vv.25-27 it is possible to trace conceptual links with aspects of Jewish Wisdom tradition, and so to see Jesus as ...the personified divine wisdom...as the focus moves in vv.28-30... the echoes of Wisdom literature become even clearer.”<sup>3</sup> Gench also asserts that Matthew 11:28-30 reveals the influence of Sirach.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is questionable whether Matthew 11:28-30 alludes to Sirach. Laansma compares the two texts and observes that the verbal links are not very strong. Moreover, there are significant syntactical differences.<sup>5</sup> Carson makes a similar judgment: “the contrasts between Sirach 51 and this passage are more impressive than the similarities.”<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to the claim of a personalized wisdom Christology, I argue that the

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, 330.

<sup>2</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 305.

<sup>3</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 447.

<sup>4</sup> Gench asserts that “the similarities between the two at least confirm that the closing verses of Matthew’s text had their origin in the wisdom tradition and that wisdom motifs have been employed in the formation of the text.” Frances Taylor Gench, 103.

<sup>5</sup> Laansam, *I Will Give You Rest*, 196-199.

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, 321.



Davidic authorship of Psalm 95—and Matthew 11:25-30’s allusion to it—provides the key in understanding the promise of rest from Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus’s invitation for coming to him is the invitation of the Davidic king. This is attested by the striking similarity between the invitation to worship in Psalm 95:1-7 and the invitation to rest here:

A come (δεῦτε) to me, I will give your rest (v.28)

B for (ὅτι) I am meek and lowly in heart; (v.29b)

A' Take my yoke (ἄρατε) upon you and learn (μάθετε) from me (v.29a), and you will find rest for your souls (v.29c)

B' for (ὁ) my yoke is pleasant, and my burden is easy to bear (v.30)

This parallels with the structure of Psalm 95:1-6:

A come (δεῦτε), worship Lord, the rock of our salvation with thanksgiving (vv.1-2)

B for (ὅτι) the Lord is a great King (vv.3-5)

A' come (δεῦτε), worship and bow down before the Lord our Maker (v.6)

B' for (ὅτι) he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture (v.7)

When Jesus invites the people to come to him by alluding to David’s invitation to worship in Psalm 95, it is seen that this invitation is the invitation of the Davidic king to come to the great rest which fulfills the rest theme running throughout the Old Testament.

When Jesus promises “come to me ... and I will give you rest (καὶ γὰρ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς)” (Matthew 11:28), he emphasizes that he himself is the source of the rest. Matthew associates Jesus’s promise of rest most directly with his Son



of David Christology under the influence of the OT rest tradition.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Matthew's placing of the rest saying just after an allusion to Isaiah 61 (which is phrased in terms of the sabbatical year of Jubilee) in Matthew 11:4-6 and immediately before two Sabbath controversies (Matthew 12:1-14) suggests that the idea of Sabbath rest was in his mind as well.<sup>2</sup> Thus, he blends the two primary OT traditions relating to rest and connect them to the present and future work of the Messiah.<sup>3</sup> The new meaning which emerges in Matthew 11:28-30 is that the ultimate rest is the salvation rest in Jesus himself. ἀναπαύσω connotes a refreshing and a fulfillment, and thus anticipates messianic or eschatological blessing.<sup>4</sup>

The voice of the Davidic king in Matthew 11:28-30 is in line with the emphasis on David as the King in Matthew. In the Gospels, the most frequent occurrence of David is in the book of Matthew.<sup>5</sup> That David was the king, and that Jesse was the father of David the king, was mentioned in Matthew 1:6. Jesus was born to be the king of the Jews (2:2). That Jesus as the Davidic king is humble in his promise of rest is in line with the quotation of the Isaiah 42:1-4 that Jesus is the humble servant.

Goldingay notices that the two exhortations in Psalm 95 are not repetitious. The first sequence urges out-loud enthusiasm for worship and the second is concerned with worship in awed prostration;<sup>6</sup> the emphasis on bowing down and kneeling down in prostration to show one's submission. This actually

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<sup>1</sup> John Laansma, "Rest," in ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 730.

<sup>2</sup> In Matthew 12:8, Jesus also claims, "For the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 730.

<sup>4</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 323.

<sup>5</sup> According to Accordance software, "David" occurs 17 times in Matthew, 7 times in Mark, Luke 13 times and John 2 times.

<sup>6</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms V.3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 88.



parallels with the promise of rest in Matthew 11:28-30. If “come to me” marks the “enthusiasm,” then “take my yoke and learn from me” is actually the way to show “worship in awed prostration” and is a way to show one’s submission and obedience to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

“Take my yoke” and “learn from me” is the explicit way of coming to Jesus. In the promise of the rest, Jesus invites people to have a personal relationship with him. To “take my yoke” and “learn from me” means to imitate Jesus. This echo of the creation rest in Genesis is intended to be an example for the created human beings to follow. The “six and seven” pattern occurs in the Sabbath commandment with the intention of God’s people imitating God. In this regard, Carson’s claims that v.27’s “learn from me” cannot mean “imitate me,” and “learn from my experience”<sup>2</sup> would be a stretch.

Jesus’s claim that “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (11:30) is in contrast to the yoke of the Pharisees.<sup>3</sup> Jesus’s claim shows the continuity and discontinuity in the theme of rest from the perspective of biblical theology. The continuity of Jesus’s claim is the continuation of the Old Testament law in the theme of rest. The discontinuity of Jesus’s claim is displayed by the reality that Jesus himself is the Old Testament law incarnate and he wants his disciples to have an intimate relationship with him. In this sense, he says that “you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). Thus, discipleship in him is “easy” and “light.”<sup>4</sup> The heavenly burden and yoke is displayed in the following pericope of the Sabbath controversy in Matthew 12:1-14. France is correct in saying that, “the ‘lightness of Jesus’ yoke’ is due not just to his ‘personal character’ (v. 29) but even more to his new interpretation of the Torah, which, in contrast to the

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<sup>1</sup> Osborne, *Matthew Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 442.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 322.

<sup>3</sup> The yoke refers to the Old Testament law, see Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second Edition (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 75.

<sup>4</sup> Osborne, *Matthew Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 444.



scribal concern for detailed regulation, enables a person to see beyond the surface level of dos and don'ts to the true underlying purpose of God.”<sup>1</sup> Ebert goes further in arguing that, “what made it particularly difficult for first-century Judaism was the shift in perspective on the law. With the gospel, the principle of interpretation shifts from the law as wisdom to Christ as wisdom (Christ being the fulfillment of the Torah).”<sup>2</sup> This shift is demonstrated in the promise of rest from Jesus to come to him, establish relationship with him, imitate him to have rest.

### Conclusion

Sabbath rest is a fascinating theme in the Old Testament. It originates in the creation rest of God, it is the foundation for the Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue, and it progresses in Psalm 95.

Psalm 95 has strong parallels with Mathew 11:25-30, and the shared literary features and theological themes show that Matthew 11:25-30 alludes to Psalm 95. The invitation of Jesus to come to him for rest is the salvation rest, which is the fulfillment of the typology of Sabbath rest in the Old Testament.

Psalm 95 provides the key for understanding that the invitation for coming to him for rest is uttered with the voice of the Davidic king, not the voice of the personified Wisdom. Jesus's invitation to come to him for rest restores the purpose of the Sabbath commandment and entails the eschatological rest that points both to the present and the future.

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<sup>1</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 450-451.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel J. Ebert IV, *Wisdom Christology: How Jesus Becomes God's Wisdom for Us*. (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2011), 34. Due to the limit of this paper, the relationship of Jesus and wisdom deserves another paper on this topic.



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