

Book Review

Fanwar, Wann M. (2013). *From Time to Eternity: A Sabbath Tour*. Muak Lek, Saraburi: Institute Press. 48 pages.

From Time to Eternity is a short book presented in the manner of a tour. The tour guide, the author, is a pastor-theologian who is serious about what it means to believe and practise Sabbath. As a pastor, Fanwar reflects upon the meaning of Sabbath. He is more interested in the process of understanding Sabbath than simply presenting his view. For him, a person who desires to keep Sabbath meaningfully should first wrestle with the question of meaning. That is why his reflection includes his Sabbath experiences while growing up as well as his struggle to make sense of those early experiences. As a theologian, he discusses important biblical passages pertaining to the understanding of Sabbath. His discussion is solidly grounded upon biblical scholarship which includes sound exegesis and knowledge of biblical languages as well as social and historical milieu of those passages. The combination produces a unique and fresh pastor-theologian perspective on Sabbath. This presents an interesting dimension of biblical theology: biblical theology in pastoral language.

For symbolic reasons, the tour goes through seven days of travel. Each of the seven days is spent in different stations with significant exhibits to explore. This review will present the valuable contents of each station before discussing the overall contribution and notable, though minimal, improvable parts of the book.

Beginning with Day One, Fanwar guides the tour at Reflection Station by sharing his own transitional journey from seeing Sabbath as legalistic duty-day to one that is liberating. It is also a transitional journey from understanding Sabbath as one of human's possession to one that is exclusively God's. Sabbath, according to him, is God's means 'to cover us with a robe of liberty so that we can exist without being terrorised by life, time and space' (6) and the only way to receive the liberty is by acknowledging him as the King of kings who owns Sabbath (9).

On Day Two, the readers are brought to explore the Torah Station. The proper tour begins here. Fanwar introduces the idea that Sabbath is a temple, not in space but in time. This becomes a motif that helps readers to understand the rest of the book better. He also points to three principal ideas in the Torah related to 'time temple' that were also found in the Ancient Near East texts. First, God rests (Heb. *Shabbat*, 'to cease') because he has completed the work of creation (11). Second, God is in the temple and worshippers come to worship him there (13). As a 'temple in time' Sabbath becomes a special time for worship (14). Third, 'Shabbat [sic] is a sign of God's control and commitment' (14) and as such it becomes 'the most comforting device to aid us in our struggles of life' (15) because God cares.

Day Three presents Prophets Station. The view of two important prophets is discussed: Ezekiel and Isaiah. The order is deliberate, reflecting the order Fanwar presents them. One thing for sure, the prophets never take issue with which day is Sabbath; they simply assume the fact. The exegesis of Ezekiel 20 demonstrates that Ezekiel's main concern is loyalty. A person's loyalty is tested by his or her attitude toward Sabbath. He or she becomes disloyal by 'profaning Shabbat [sic]' and 'rejecting God's ruling' (19). As for Isaiah, three of his Sabbath texts (chapters 56, 58, and 66) are closely connected with eschatology. Through exegesis, Fanwar suggests that 'Isaiah is teaching us that Shabbat [sic] is really about practising eternity. In time we learn to celebrate the presence of God so that one day we can do that forever' (26).

Day Four turns to the New Testament, in the Gospels Station. Two primary texts are found in Matthew 12 and Mark 2. Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees brought a very significant thought to us about Sabbath, that is, he is the Lord of Sabbath and therefore has the authority to do what he wishes to do on that day. Fanwar suggests, therefore, that the real question of Shabbat observance should not be, 'What should I do during Shabbat?' but 'How do I maintain the quality of life by the way I *shabat*?' (30; *shabat* is the verb form of Heb. *Shabbat*). 'Serving the unserved' (32) does certainly contribute to the quality of life and the 'best way to please God' (32).

Day Five, the shortest of all four days, explores Letters Station. The main text discussed in this station is Hebrews 4:1-11. Three principal ideas are presented: Shabbat without 'rest', Shabbat with 'rest' and Shabbat as 'seeking rest' (33). These ideas boil down to our attitude toward our relationship with God where 'Shabbat [sic] becomes the barometer' to measure the state of the relationship.

On Day Six, at Decision Station, readers are presented with several exhibits that challenge them to rethink and re-evaluate their position regarding Sabbath keeping. These include Sabbath work, Sabbath abuses, and things that are essential to Sabbath. It seems that here, Fanwar is alluding to his statement in Day One, 'while I may be observing Sabbath, I did not actually *shabat*' (4) and invite readers to go through the reflection process all over again.

Day Seven closes the tour when readers are brought to the Central Station. Here the axiom introduced earlier is repeated: 'when the King is in the house, the rules change'. This line is fitting to conclude everything that has been discussed in the book. The King is in his 'time temple' called Sabbath and those who acknowledge him will certainly defer everything for the sake of the King in the 'temple'. Fanwar concludes the book with an encouraging statement: 'Shabbat [sic] . . . compels us to recognise that our lives are safe in the 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' (42).

For those who wonder why this book does not include a discussion on which day is the Sabbath, Fanwar states that his book is for those who are already keeping the Sabbath. For him, such discussion is a non-issue, echoing the prophets of the Old Testament. In fact, all the writers of biblical books do not see that as an issue. This puts Fanwar's book as unapologetic to those whose views are different, but compelling to the thoughtful readers. This is a valuable contribution to Christian living, especially those who keep Sabbath.

This book is valuable study material on Sabbath, yet another contribution to Sabbath Keepers Christian living. Those who desire to have biblical understanding of Sabbath, not so much doctrinal but theological, would find this little book stimulating. The book is structured in such a way that Bible study group leaders may go through each day and find valuable gems from the Bible to be discussed with group members, and hopefully this will enhance their appreciation of Sabbath.

With such valuable content, it is hard to find anything that needs improvement. However, here I will mention a couple of them. First, the length is quite short. This, however, can both be strength and weakness. On the one hand, the shortness limits thorough discussion of other biblical texts on the subject. On the other hand, it helps to sustain reader's attention to finish the reading in one sitting. And I think this is more important. Second, there is no table of content. Perhaps the absence is explainable by the tour style presentation of the book. Apart from these two, this book is an informative, enjoyable and valuable reading.

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