

## The Sabbath in the First Creation Account

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The seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, plays a dominant role in the first Creation story (Gen 1:1–2:4a),<sup>1</sup> and the purpose of this article is to clarify major issues related to that fact. The first Genesis Creation account is written in a very beautiful literary structure naturally falling into seven parts, according to the seven days of creation. This literary structure is built around the two Hebrew nouns תֹהוּ *tohû* (“without form,” “formlessness”) and בְהוּ *bohû* (“void,” “empty,” “emptiness”) which are found in the second verse of Genesis 1: “The earth was formless [תֹהוּ] and empty [בְהוּ]” (NIV). Each of these two crucial expressions draws to itself a cluster of three creation days. The “forming” idea of the term תֹהוּ is closely linked with the first three days, when God created light and various spaces, and in my table is represented by the left column. The “filling” process of the key expression בְהוּ forms the right column in my chart

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<sup>1</sup> Bible scholars are divided over whether Gen 2:4a belongs to the first Creation story or if it is an introductory formula to the second Creation account (2:4b–25). Among those exegetes who takes the first Creation story as Gen 1:1–Gen 2:4a are Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 78, 178, 197; Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Dissertation Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978), 59, 78–79; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., The Anchor Bible, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 3–13. To the second group belongs Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 5, 36, 49; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 150–153; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 35–36, 39–41, 65, 163; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 14–17; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 79, 83–84. For the discussion for and contra, see Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, Part One, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnus, 1961), 96–100; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 150–153; and Wenham, 5–10. Our arguments about the role of the seventh day in the first Creation account does not depend on either position. I concur with U. Cassuto, and it may well be that Gen 2:4 belongs to both stories as a transitory statement.

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and involves the next three creation days. Thus, three pairs of days are formed—first and fourth, second and fifth, and third and sixth—which correspond to each other and parallel each other. The first, second, and third days are related to the concept of *הִתְהַוֶּה* and represent the forming activity of God, while the fourth, fifth, and sixth days are related to the concept of *בִּהְרֵוֶה* and describe the filling activity of God. This literary structure demonstrates the beauty, balance, and unity of the biblical text.

God first created space, and then He filled it with the inhabitants. On the first day God created light, and on the fourth day He put lights or luminaries (sun and moon)<sup>2</sup> in their place as “inhabitants” of the light element. The second day He separated water from water by creating an expanse and on the fifth day filled the waters with fish and the sky with birds. On the third day God formed dry land and the vegetation on it, and on the sixth day God filled the land with the inhabitants he created—first a variety of land animals and creatures, and finally humans. He then gave humans and animals vegetation for food.

As a final and climactic act of His creation, God made the seventh day<sup>3</sup>—separating it from the other days of His creation and making it holy. Sabbath is a palace in time.<sup>4</sup> God created/formed a very significant temporal space, but much more than that, He also filled the time with His holiness. Thus, in the creation of the Sabbath, both columns or parts of the chart meet and find their culmination point—forming and filling kiss each other. The Sabbath is the only day where forming and filling are put together.

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<sup>2</sup> The biblical text does not state that God created the sun or the moon, but only a greater light and a lesser light. This is done on purpose because the account is anti-mythological. If the author of the first Creation story had written that God created the sun or the moon, it would mean that He created a god *שֶׁמֶשׁ* (*šemeš* “sun”) and a god *יָרֵחַ* (*yārēaḥ* “moon”) which were worshiped by people of ancient times. In order to demonstrate that God is a mighty Creator, the author speaks about the basic function of sun and moon: they are only luminaries; they are here to divide time and seasons. See Wenham, 21–23; Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10 (1972): 12–15; Westermann, 126–134.

<sup>3</sup> The first Creation account speaks three times (Gen 2:2, 3) about the seventh day *הַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי* (*hayyôm haššebîm*) and not explicitly about the Sabbath, but the verb *שָׁבַת* (*šābat*) is used twice (Gen 2:2, 3). It is important to notice that the noun “Sabbath” (in Hebrew *שַׁבָּת*) is most probably derived from this root. For the discussion on this topic, see Westermann, 173. About the relationship between Creation and the Sabbath, see Martin Buber, *Moïse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 119–127.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 12. This is a unique concept and feature of the biblical Creation account. God’s revelation starts with a special presentation of God—He dwells in time. In mythological stories of creation, gods are making places for their dwellings. In the Pentateuch there are close parallels between the creation of the world and the building of the Tabernacle (compare Gen 1:31–2:3 with Exod 39:32, 43; 40:33). For further study, see Michael A. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 12; Walton, 149; Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 298: “The Temple is to space what the Sabbath is to time.”

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The whole literary structure of the first Creation story may be captured as follows:

THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE FIRST CREATION ACCOUNT<sup>5</sup>

Forming The Unformed [תֹהוּ, <i>tohû</i> ] Is Formed Space	Filling The Unfilled [בֹהוּ, <i>bohû</i> ] Is Filled Inhabitants (Content)
1 <sup>st</sup> Day: Light—Division Day Night	4 <sup>th</sup> Day: Luminaries Sun Moon
2 <sup>nd</sup> Day: Firmament—Division Water Sky	5 <sup>th</sup> Day: Inhabitants of Water and Sky Fish Birds
3 <sup>rd</sup> Day: Dry Land—Separated from the Sea Earth Vegetation	6 <sup>th</sup> Day: Inhabitants of Land Animals; Humans (Man / Wife) Food for Humans and Animals
7 <sup>th</sup> Day: Sabbath—God in Relationship with Man A Day of Rest Is Formed and Filled with <i>Holiness</i>	

From the literary structure of the first Creation story, it is evident that the creation of the Sabbath is highlighted; humans are not the ultimate point of this account.<sup>6</sup> Humans are the pinnacle of Creation,<sup>7</sup> but the seventh day is the climactic apex of the whole story. It is significant to note that each day of creation

<sup>5</sup> Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (An Intertextual Study)*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 4 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000 [published Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1998]), 203. I developed the literary structure of the first Creation story on suggestions stated by Ronald F. Youngblood, “Genesis,” *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 6. See also Wenham, 6–7.

Jacques Doukhan presents a parallel literary structure of both Creation accounts (Gen 1–2). He also points out that the Sabbath is the culmination of the first Creation account. See his *Genesis Creation Story*, 44–48, 78–79. Also see Jacques B. Doukhan, “Loving the Sabbath as a Christian: A Seventh-day Adventist Perspective,” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Askenasi, Daniel J. Harrington, and William H. Shea (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 158–159.

<sup>6</sup> This conclusion is further supported and confirmed by the literary genre of the Creation account. According to the biblical text, the Creation story is a genealogy (Gen 2:4), in Hebrew תולדות *“tôl’ dôr.”* The whole book of Genesis can be structured according to this crucial word. There are ten genealogies mentioned in the book (Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1 [repeated in 10:32]; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1 [repeated in 36:9]; and 37:2). In genealogy, the most important pieces of a chain are usually the first and last elements, and they are tied together by these parts. The last part of the Creation genealogy, i.e., its climax, is the Sabbath.

See also Oswald Loretz, *Schöpfung und Mythos: Mensch und Welt nach den Anfangskapiteln der Genesis* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968), 70: “The goal of the whole creation and of man is God’s Sabbath. The creation of the world reaches its completion only through the Sabbath, the seventh day.” See also Walton, 65, who supports this view.

<sup>7</sup> Sarna, 14.

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is mentioned only once in the Genesis account (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), but the term seventh day is used three times, and these three occurrences happen approximately in the middle of each of three consecutive sentences. Each sentence consists of seven words in Hebrew (2:2a, 2b, 3a). It is purposely designed in this magnificent way. The Sabbath not only has a unique place in the biblical Creation account, but “as an institution is unparalleled in the ancient world.”<sup>8</sup> Nichola Nigretti points out that the seventh day “concludes, brings to perfection and overcomes the preceding six days.”<sup>9</sup> This is a great surprise, maybe for some even a disturbing fact, because one would expect to have the creation of humans as a culmination point of this Creation account. Why is it not so?

Theologians stress that humans are the crown of creation. Nevertheless, the creation of human beings is not at the peak of the Genesis story, even though man and woman are perceived as the crowning act of God’s creative activity.<sup>10</sup> Why is the Sabbath and not humans the crux of God’s creation activity? Humans were the last of the physical tangible objects God created during the Creation week. God first made the physical world, formed space and filled it with different physical inhabitants like fish, birds, and animals, and finally He created man and woman. They came to the fully prepared natural world as a final masterpiece. Wenham emphasizes that the creation of humans in the image of God is “the climax of the six days’ work. But it is not its conclusion.”<sup>11</sup>

The creation of the Sabbath is of another kind. You cannot see or touch the Sabbath, because time cannot be seen or touched, but only experienced. It’s of a different character than the physical; the Sabbath is a spiritual and temporal reality, spiritual in nature but nevertheless reality. The Sabbath is a time for fellowship within the context of rest.

Humans were created in the image of God,<sup>12</sup> but needed to maintain this image. Man and wife were made to the glory of God and for fellowship with

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<sup>8</sup> Sarna, 15. “Remarkably, the Israelite week has no such linkage [to the phases of the moon or to the movement of the sun] and is entirely independent of the movement of celestial bodies.”

<sup>9</sup> Nicola Nigretti, *Il Settimo Giorno* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 152.

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel correctly states, “The conclusion of the Genesis creation story indicates that just as man is the crown of Creation, so the seventh day, the Sabbath, is the final goal of Creation” (“The Sabbath in the Pentateuch,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand [Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982], 23).

<sup>11</sup> Wenham, 37.

<sup>12</sup> To be created in the image of God means that:

- A. Humans can relate to God as a Person; they can communicate with Him.
- B. Man and woman should rule over God’s creation as His representatives. They will exercise a delegated authority. They are responsible to Him.
- C. Humans should reflect His character themselves as human beings; they should cultivate loving and kind-hearted relationships together as living beings.
- D. Humans are all created as unique persons with unique faculties and abilities as God is also unique. They need to cultivate this individual uniqueness in order to be a blessing to each other, to bring an irreplaceable personal contribution.

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God and other humans. They were created in total dependency upon God. They will always be creatures—for eternity; they will never become God. Only in maintaining this status can they fully develop their humanity, flourish, live bountifully happy and satisfying lives, and fully grow in all their capacities and potentials. The Lord not only made humans (on the 6<sup>th</sup> day), but He also put them into a special relationship with Himself (on the 7<sup>th</sup> day). The whole creation story is thus theocentric and not anthropocentric.<sup>13</sup> Without Him, human beings degrade and are doomed to perdition and death. Humans without a relationship with God will stay only on the level of animals (they were created on the 6<sup>th</sup> day together with them). Every time humans try to become gods, they behave like wild beasts.

God made a special provision so that humans may stay really human and humane: He created the Sabbath and set it apart as a special and irreplaceable gift for the first couple and for all following generations so they might stay in a right relationship with Him and thus live honestly and nobly. The Sabbath is a gift of God to humanity, allowing humanity to maintain its true human value. Sabbath is in essence God in relationship with man.<sup>14</sup> God is offering Himself for fellowship. This personal involvement is perceived as an act of His genuine unselfish love, because He is a God of relationship. If man will live in dependence on God, everything will be all right. Should he start to act autonomously, he will become a tyrant and behave very strangely. He will lose the sense of sacredness, then nothing will be sacred to him—he will think he can do anything. Sabbath is therefore a safeguard for humanity and a wall against idolatry.<sup>15</sup>

The climax of the first Creation story is thus not the creation of humans but putting man in close intimate fellowship with God! In other words, the culmination point of God's creative activity is not the sixth day (humans as a crown of

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For the discussion about the meaning of the image of God, see Wenham, 29–32; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983–1985), 495–517; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 423–425; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan House), 442–450; and Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1985), 110–118.

<sup>13</sup> See Karl Barth: “The holy day does not belong to man, but to God” (*Church Dogmatics, Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961], III.4:67). God is the focus and center of the whole creation account. His activities are stressed. He speaks, acts, and is in control. He is a Sovereign Creator. Eleven times God directly speaks in the first creation story: ten times with a specific formula *וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים* (*wayyomer ’elohîm*, “and God said”) is used (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29), and only once the term *לֵאמֹר* (*lêmor*, “saying”) is employed (Gen 1:22).

God (*אֱלֹהִים*, *’elohîm*) is explicitly mentioned thirty-five times in thirty-four verses of the first Creation story. There is no doubt that God is presented as the Center and the sole Creator in this Creation account.

<sup>14</sup> Sakae Kubo expresses this well: “Thus the Sabbath is first of all a memorial of God’s friendship to man, a monument of God’s presence with him” (*God Meets Man: A Theology of the Sabbath and Second Advent* [Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1978], 16).

<sup>15</sup> See Heschel, 94–101.

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God's physical creation), but the seventh-day Sabbath (humans in a vivid mutual relationship with their Holy Creator, worshipping Him). This climax is teaching us that the Sabbath is the most important, i.e., not man per se, but only man in relationship with God; this is what counts. Sabbath is first of all about a relationship, a relationship of beauty and splendor, of God with humans and humans with God. In a palace, the most important being is the king. But a king needs his people as well as the people need their king. In that sense, when we rupture our relationship with God, we break the Sabbath.<sup>16</sup>

Gerhard Hasel argues that four activities are associated with the seventh day in Genesis 2: "(1) God 'had finished' His creative work on that day; (2) God 'rested' from all His creative work on that day; (3) God 'blessed' that day; and (4) God 'made it holy.'" <sup>17</sup> The Creation Sabbath passage (Gen 2:2, 3) is written in a chiasmic structure. Kenneth Strand draws it in the following way:

- A God finished His work (verse 2)
- B And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done (verse 2)
- C So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it (verse 3)
- B' Because on it God rested from all His work which He has done (verse 3)
- A' In creation (verse 3).<sup>18</sup>

This means that in the center of the Genesis account about the Sabbath is God's blessing and God's act of making it holy. "This day alone he sanctified."<sup>19</sup>

When God is the subject of blessing (the verb בָּרַךְ *bārak* is used), it means He is giving His presence; He grants prosperity, well-being, and future. His favor extends to every aspect of life, and His gracious blessings are even warranted by covenant (Gen 1:28; 5:2; 9:1; 12:1-3; 39:5; Deut 28:3-6; etc.).<sup>20</sup> God also made the Sabbath holy.<sup>21</sup> The root קָדַשׁ (*qdš*) was used for the first time in connection with the creation of the Sabbath.<sup>22</sup> "The first thing God con-

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<sup>16</sup> Scott J Hafemann, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith: Understanding the Heart of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 61.

<sup>17</sup> Hasel, "The Sabbath in the Pentateuch," 23.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, et al (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 495.

<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 143.

<sup>20</sup> A. C. Myers, "Bless," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:525; D. C. Davis, "Bless, Blessing," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 1976), 1:625.

<sup>21</sup> See Heschel, 78-82. Niels-Erik A. Andreasen argues in his published dissertation: "The Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, was a time in which holiness was concentrated" (*The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation* [Missoula, MT: The Society of Biblical Literature, 1972], 204).

<sup>22</sup> For the second time, the root קָדַשׁ (*qdš*) appears in Exod 3:5 (there are two previous occurrences of this root referring to a "holy woman," i.e., a prostitute, most probably designating a cult or

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secrates in this world is not a thing or a place, but a moment in time.”<sup>23</sup> This unique recognition of sanctifying time and not a specific physical Temple strongly suggests that humans can have fellowship with God at any place. This universal aspect of the relationship with God is in focus; it is a crucial function of the Sabbath. Gerhard von Rad stresses this aspect by saying that the author of the Creation account does not consider the seventh-day rest “as something for God alone but as a concern of the world.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, at creation God’s presence and blessing is not concentrated on a special chosen place (this visible manifestation of God’s presence among His people will come later with the inauguration of the Tabernacle in the wilderness [Exod 25:8]).

What is God’s holiness performing? Holy means to set apart, to separate, but it also means to have the experience of awe. The Holy Creator is an awesome God. His holiness, first of all, means His presence.<sup>25</sup> The Sabbath rest is uniquely a work of God. Sabbath was formed and filled with the holy presence of God. Sabbath is only lived correctly if the Person of God is worshiped through maintaining on that day of rest a living relationship with God. Sarna comments, “The day derives its special character solely from God.”<sup>26</sup> God not only made the Sabbath holy, but He also wants humans to keep it holy (Exod 20:8; Deut 5:12).<sup>27</sup>

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shrine prostitute; see Gen 38:21). The land is holy only because of the presence of the Holy God. The third appearance is in the story of the Exodus (Exod 12:16, 23); the fourth passage relates to God’s establishing His people and making a covenant with them (Exod 19:6, 10, 14, 22, 23), and the fifth one appears in the Ten Commandments, again in relation to the Sabbath (Exod 20:8, 11).

<sup>23</sup> Rachel S. Mikva, “The Fourth Commandment,” in *Broken Tablets: Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves*, ed. Rachel S. Mikva (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 43. The first creation story puts stress on time. Each day is counted, and the time element is highlighted on the fourth and seventh days.

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 1972), 62.

<sup>25</sup> See especially Exod 3:5: the place is holy because of God’s presence. It is important to stress that God is the only source of holiness. It is His very essence, His nature. God is the Other One. His “otherness,” His transcendence, His splendor, and glory call for utter awe on the part of His creatures. There is no holiness apart from Him. A person, a thing, time, and place can be holy, but only in relation to God. He is the Holy One. Without this relationship nothing can be holy. His presence makes persons, things, time, and places holy (Exod 3:5). For example, any item connected with the sanctuary service is rendered holy, such as the altars (Exod 29:37; 40:10), the food of the sacrifices (Lev 21:22; Num 5:9), the vessels (1 Kgs 8:4), the incense (Exod 30:35, 37), the table (Exod 30:27), and the clothing of the priests (Exod 28:2; 29:29; 31:10).

<sup>26</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1978, reprint), 21.

<sup>27</sup> To keep the Sabbath holy means to be holy as a person. Rachel S. Mikva stresses: “To sanctify the Sabbath, we must make it the essence of our being, the soul of our time. We seek in each moment to draw closer to God, and discover the powerful spirit of the day. Then we will know the true celebration of holiness. There is no greater thrill.” See her article, “The Fourth Commandment,” 44. Holiness is a command. God commanded His people to be holy (Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26). The new quality of life is always the result of a genuine connection with God. Growth is one of the fundamental signs of life. Life without growth is impossible and pathetic. It is an anomaly. Holiness

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The Sabbath without God is missing its target and its goal. The reason lies in the Hebrew understanding of time. The biblical concept of time is always closely tied to or even identified with its content.<sup>28</sup> The same is true with the concept of holiness, because there is no holiness apart from God. Richard Davidson articulately expresses this idea: “The Sabbath is holy because God fills it with His presence; therefore, the Sabbath is not just a day; but a Person!”<sup>29</sup>

The Creation week is about separation and division, and this principle is deeply rooted also in the Sabbath—the wonder of God’s creative activity and His offer to humanity. Creation is a process of separation, division, and distinction.<sup>30</sup> The word בָּדַל<sup>31</sup> (*bādal*—separate or distinct) is used five times in the Creation story itself (Gen 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18).<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon is very important when we take into consideration that in the Pentateuch itself this expression is used only twenty times. This means that one fourth of these occurrences are related directly to God’s creation activity. It reflects intentionality and design. God separated light from darkness, day from night, the heavens from the waters (sea), land from water, the Sabbath from the other six days. The same separating activity must be involved in the decision-making process when we separate/distinguish between holy and work days. Westermann correctly emphasizes,

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is the quality of life that results from trusting and obeying God. Holiness is intimately connected with God’s will. To be holy means to obey God’s will, to live according to His laws.

Holiness is also an eschatological notion. Someday God’s holiness will rule. God will clean the whole earth and universe and create a new heaven and a new earth with a new order and without sin. Holiness has an immense future and is thus closely connected with hope. Without protology there is no eschatology.

God is not only calling humankind to be holy, but He also provides all that is necessary to be holy. To miss this call means, in essence, to miss the purpose of life. The call of a holy life is made possible only by Him who is holy. This is not a capricious command. God calls us to the quality of life He Himself is and lives: “I am holy, therefore be holy” (1 Pet 1:16).

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Jenni, “Time,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4:646: “The abstraction ‘time’ belongs among the accomplishments of Greek culture. If, however, time (as a dimension) is not abstracted from the abundance of individual events, then, naturally, the events and their time constitute, to a large extent, a unit in OT thinking. It has been observed again and again how closely the Hebrew conception of time is bound up with its content, or even identified with it.” See also a chapter about the Hebrew concept of time in Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 200–207. A more cautious approach to the issue of time is presented by C. N. Pinnock, “Time,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:852–853. For the latest discussion see William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001); Gregory E. Ganssle, ed. *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Richard M. Davidson, *A Love Song for the Sabbath: How to Experience the Joy that God Intended When He Gave Us the Sabbath* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1988), 29.

<sup>30</sup> See Paul Beauchamp, *Création et Séparation: Etude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse*, Bibliothèque de Sciences Religieuses (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969).

<sup>31</sup> It is significant to note that all these occurrences of the verb בָּדַל (*bādal*) are in the *hiphil*, i.e., causative form, stressing that it is God’s activity of separation.

<sup>32</sup> Outside of Genesis 1, this word is used 37 times in the Hebrew Bible.



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“The sanctification of the Sabbath constitutes an order for humankind according to which time is divided into time and holy time, time to work and time for rest.”<sup>33</sup>

When humans participate in the observance of the Sabbath, they are participating in God’s creative activity, and they are demonstrating their respect for their Holy Creator. This observance helps them to develop abilities to choose in everyday matters of life what is right and reject what is wrong, and helps them to make right decisions. Walton eloquently points out that “God’s Sabbath is not a withdrawal from the world and its operations (e.g., ‘My work is done, it’s all yours now; good luck!’); instead, it represents his taking his place at the helm.”<sup>34</sup>

Creation is about the establishment of order. God sets boundaries, and living creatures of different species and different kinds are expected to keep them. The Sabbath preserves that creation order and respects those boundaries.

The best commentary on the first Creation account is given by Jesus Christ in Mark 2:28–29; it contributes to our understanding of the Creation story and shows that our interpretation is correct. There Jesus confirms that the Sabbath was created as a special gift for all humanity. This crucial gift serves humans as a safeguard, helping them live in dependency upon God. Its original intent was joy and benefit. Jesus states, “The Sabbath was made for man [notice an all inclusive, universal language of Creation, i.e., the whole humanity is in view],<sup>35</sup> not man for the Sabbath,” and further comments, “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Only when we worship the Lord of the Sabbath can we enjoy a fulfilling life of abundance. Trying to keep Sabbath without Christ leads to a misunderstanding of the true purpose, meaning, and intention of the Sabbath; it is like eating spaghetti without sauce.<sup>36</sup> Only Sabbath lived with Christ can bring genuine joy, peace, and satisfaction.

The religious leaders at the time of the first coming of Jesus failed to understand this vital concept, leading to a great tragedy: the killing of Jesus on Friday in order to keep the Sabbath holy (John 19:6–16, 31–42). We need to live the

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<sup>33</sup> Westermann, 171.

<sup>34</sup> Walton, 153.

<sup>35</sup> The concept of universality is clearly present in the linguistics of Genesis 1 and in the larger context of the Pentateuch. Human beings, Adam and Eve, were created long before Abraham existed or the Jewish nation was established. Also, Exod 20:10 points to this fact by connecting the observance of the Sabbath with the Creation week.

<sup>36</sup> This metaphor is used very often by Samuele Bacchiocchi (who is Italian) in his sermons about the Sabbath. He has written very significant books about the Sabbath. See his *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian UP, 1977); idem, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1988); idem, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Biblical Analysis of Recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998).

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Sabbath and not only keep it. We need to learn to celebrate it.<sup>37</sup> To lay down in bed and do nothing but sleep is not a proper observance of the Sabbath, even though there would be no transgression of the law. The seventh day is first of all about fellowship, fellowship with God and then fellowship with other human beings. The Sabbath has this irrefutable implicit social dimension. Even though the Sabbath was not given for entertainment, it's not all about worship but also about spending meaningful time with others. The seventh day is about the very presence of God; it is about His holiness in action.<sup>38</sup> It is possible to experience an empty time, to live time without a content, selfishly. Such time is not holy but a ruin, a loss.

The time of the seventh day is sacred. By our behavior we should maintain its content. Wayne Muller convincingly argues that we should “become Sabbath for one another.”<sup>39</sup> Being Sabbath means to be and live in a close relationship with God, to grow in love, care, responsibility, and friendship. These qualities of life can only grow in time. We need therefore to rediscover and restore, according to Muller, the sacred rhythm of life, of rest; i.e., to establish the correct rhythm between work and rest.<sup>40</sup>

The Sabbath is teaching us to stop, to finish our work as God finished His and paused (Gen 2:1–3). The idea about finishing is stressed four times in the biblical text (two verbs are used, *כָּלָה* *kālāh* and *שָׁבַת* *šābat*, and each is employed twice in this short passage). Sabbath is about ceasing;<sup>41</sup> work needs to be

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<sup>37</sup> We are greatly indebted to Judaism for this aspect of the Sabbath. Rachel S. Mikva excellently explains: “A great pianist was once asked by an ardent admirer: ‘How do you handle the notes as well as you do?’ The artist answered: ‘The notes I handle no better than many pianists, but the pauses between the notes—ah! that is where the art resides.’ In great living, as in great music, the art may be in the pauses. Surely one of the enduring contributions that Judaism made to the art of living was Shabbat, ‘the pause between the notes.’ And it is to Shabbat that we must look if we are to restore to our lives the sense of serenity and sanctity that Shabbat offers in such joyous abundance.” See her article “The Fourth Commandment,” 46.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan rightly stresses, “The Sabbath will not be holy without human beings; holiness of the Sabbath implies the holiness of men and women” (“Loving the Sabbath as a Christian,” 156).

<sup>39</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 183. Muller uncovers deep and meaningful dimensions and aspects of the observance of the Sabbath. He convincingly explains in clear language what the Sabbath is really all about and what is the true spirit of living the Sabbath. He pertinently points out how the Sabbath can become a delight and a joy.

Muller is very right in stressing the spirit of the Sabbath (Sabbath for him can be any day or moment in the week), but this Sabbath attitude in every-day life does not deny or stand against observance of a specific time—the biblical seventh day Sabbath, a God-ordained safeguard keeping humanity from forgetting to live in a true and loving attitude each day, and to cultivate a sacred life in God and in connection with others.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–11.

<sup>41</sup> This is the most probable original meaning and intent of the Hebrew verb *šābat*. God ceased His work and thus he rested. The idea of rest is further elaborated in the fourth commandment, where it is explicitly stated that God rested (Exod 20:10). See Victor P. Hamilton, “שָׁבַת (*šābat*)

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stopped. Dietrich Bonhoeffer eloquently explains, “In the Bible ‘rest’ really means more than ‘having a rest.’ It means rest after the work is accomplished, it means completion, it means the perfection and peace in which the world rests, it means transfiguration, it means turning our eyes absolutely upon God’s being God and toward worshiping him.”<sup>42</sup> God is entering into His rest, and He makes it possible for humans to rest. Walton correctly states, “The divine Sabbath is seen as the cause of the human Sabbath.”<sup>43</sup> When we pause, we participate in divine rest; we rest in Him. “God does the work, human beings enjoy the results.”<sup>44</sup> Karl Barth explains it precisely by pointing out that God’s rest day is man’s first day, that man rests before he works—man’s life therefore begins with the gospel, grace and not the law, in freedom to celebrate with joy the seventh day and not with an obligation to work.<sup>45</sup>

The Sabbath is thus also a wall against workaholism; it has an anti-stress dimension. Sabbath is a divine protection for our tendency to work without stopping. We need to learn to enjoy fellowship and not performance. Relationship is what matters and not achievements. Sabbath is a deep lesson that we as humans need to be God-oriented and people-oriented beings and not thing-oriented or work-oriented. Sabbath helps us start every week refreshed, start anew.

There is a creation power in holiness.<sup>46</sup> Those who observe the Sabbath participate in God’s holiness; i.e., they are strengthened and transformed so they

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cease, desist, rest,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), II:902; J. C. McCann, Jr., “Sabbath,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), IV:247; Westermann, 173; Walton, 146.

<sup>42</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 40. See also Barth, III.4:47–72.

<sup>43</sup> Walton, 153.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory P. Nelson, *A Touch of Heaven: Finding New Meaning in Sabbath Rest* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999), 30. Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, 69: “Thus on and through the Sabbath, God invites us to view our work in the light of His accomplishments.”

<sup>45</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.4:52: “It is only by participation in God’s celebrating that he [man] can and may and shall also celebrate on this seventh day, which is his first day. But this is just what he is commanded to do. Hence his history under the command of God really begins with the Gospel and not with the Law, with an accorded celebration and not a required task, with a prepared rejoicing and not with care and toil, with a freedom given to him and not an imposed obligation, with a rest and not with an activity.”

<sup>46</sup> The Creator made the Sabbath holy. God’s creative power not only set the Sabbath apart for a special purpose, but also separated many other things during Creation week and set the order and boundaries for everything. The Holy God also by His holy creative power elected and separated Israel for service. Holiness is also seen in connection with the Exodus, another great event in which the creative power of God is fully manifested. God not only created heaven and earth, but also life. He acts in history. His holiness and judgment are closely connected in the Flood. He elected His people, intervened in the Exodus, gave His laws, all by His creative power. Redemption and salvation is built on the concept of creation; it’s nothing else than re-creation, giving back the original

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can bring God's presence into real life and perform creative work as well. This is the meaning of God's blessing of the seventh day. By living Sabbath, believers are showing total devotion and respect to the Holy Creator.<sup>47</sup>

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intent; and is only possible because of the first Creation. The word "create" (אָפֶּשׂ) is used exclusively to describe God's solemn unique activity (Gen 1:1; Ps 51:12).

<sup>47</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 114–115: "The believer enters into a life of Sabbath rest from works and embarks on a life of holiness in that rest. . . . Obedience to his powerful Word, either the written Word or the living Word, our Savior, will transform believers into his glorious image."