

## THE SABBATH AND GENESIS 2:1-3

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The Creation account of Gen 1:1-2:3 climaxes with the description of events connected with the seventh day in Gen 2:1-3:<sup>1</sup>

1. And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their hosts.
2. And on the seventh day God declared finished his work that he had done, and he ceased on the seventh day from all his work that he had made.<sup>2</sup>
3. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it he ceased from all his work that God created and made.

There is general agreement that the weekly Sabbath is at least partly in view in Gen 2:1-3.<sup>3</sup> The more controverted point is whether it is presented as a Creation ordinance, i.e., as something commanded for human beings to keep from the beginning of human history. Nor is this question merely of academic interest, for it is a *crux interpretum* that has long tended to divide those who believe the Sabbath is of universal, permanent significance, from those who believe it is of only local

<sup>1</sup>See Ian Hart, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as Prologue," *TB* 46 (1995): 324, 325.

<sup>2</sup>The harder MT reading ביום השביעי ("on the seventh day") is preferable to the reading ביום הששי ("on the sixth day") in the Samaritan Pentateuch, which is reflected in the LXX and the Syriac. The consecutive verb ייכל is here taken to be a declarative Piel, although it is conceivable that it should be translated as a pluperfect (i.e., "he had finished"); see Niels-Erik Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation*, SBLDS 7 (Missoula, MT: SBL, 1972), 63, n.2. On the primary meaning of the verb שבת as "to cease," see Victor P. Hamilton, "שָׁבַת (*shābat*) cease, desist, rest," *TWOT* (1980): 2:902.

<sup>3</sup>It has been suggested that "the seven-day scheme was attached to the creation account prior to the association between the seventh day and the creation Sabbath," and "that the creation account belongs to the cult liturgy of the Babylonian New Year Festival" (Andreasen, 187). However, Andreasen, 188, correctly notes the increasingly cautious nature of proposed reconstructions of this festival and the consequent realization that "the so-called cultic-ritualistic elements in Gen. 1:1-2:3 are far less prominent than was once thought."

It has been argued that Gen 2:1-3 is an attempt to justify the significance of the seventh day in a large number of the purification rites found in the rest of the so-called "P" corpus. For instance, see Samuel A. Meier, "The Sabbath and Purification Cycles," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 6. However, the seventh day in these cycles is never explicitly linked to the seventh day of Creation. On the other hand, just such a link is explicitly made between the seventh-day Sabbath and the seventh day of Creation in Exod 20:9-11 and 31:15-17. Accordingly, there can be little doubt that even on the assumption of the documentary hypothesis, any final redactor would have had this link in mind in the context of Gen 2:1-3.

temporary significance.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this article is to evaluate arguments used on both sides of the debate and to advance an exegetical argument in favor of seeing the Sabbath here as a Creation ordinance.

*Genesis 2:1-3 and the Case against the Sabbath  
as a Creation Ordinance*

In the context of Gen 2:1-3, the case against the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance rests on three arguments from silence: the absence of the noun שַׁבָּת ("Sabbath"), the absence of any reference to the seventh day consisting of an evening and a morning, and the absence of any explicit command to observe the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup>

The Absence of the Noun שַׁבָּת

The noun שַׁבָּת is absent from Gen 2:1-3, but the verb שָׁבַח in vss. 2-3 is clearly cognate to it.<sup>6</sup> The noun שַׁבָּת is also absent in Exod 23:12 and

<sup>4</sup>As argued by William Paley, who placed the origin of the Sabbath in the wilderness, "if the Divine command was actually delivered at the creation, it was addressed, no doubt, to the whole human species alike, and continues, unless repealed by some subsequent revelation, binding upon all who come to the knowledge of it. If the command was published for the first time in the wilderness, then it was immediately directed to the Jewish people alone, and something further, either in the subject or circumstances of the command, will be necessary to show that it was designed for any other. . . . The former opinion precludes all debate about the extent of the obligation; the latter admits, and prima facie induces a belief that the Sabbath ought to be considered as part of the peculiar law of the Jewish people" (*The Works of William Paley*, new ed. [Philadelphia: Crissy and Markley, n.d.], 103). Merrill F. Unger argues that the Sabbath was kept by Adam and Eve before the Fall, but was suspended when the Fall marred the perfect rest it symbolized, and in the time of Moses was reintroduced only for Israel ("The Significance of the Sabbath," *BSac* 123 [1966]: 53-59). However, this approach forgets that Creation themes continue to provide a model for human existence after the Fall (Gen 8:20-9:7).

The relevance of whether the Sabbath is pictured as a Creation ordinance has been challenged by some interpreters, who question the whole historicity of Gen 1-11. See, for instance, Kenneth Hein, "A Catholic Response to J. B. Doukhan," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 169-175. However, this challenge is invalid if "the object of theological reflection is the canonical writing of the Old Testament" rather than "the events or experiences behind the text, or apart from the construal in scripture by a community of faith and practice" (Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 6).

<sup>5</sup>For instance, see Roger Douglas Congdon, "Sabbatic Theology" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1949), 127, 128, 134, 135; Richard James Griffith, "The Eschatological Significance of the Sabbath" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 32, 43-49.

<sup>6</sup>Hamilton, 902; E. Haag, "שַׁבָּת *šabbā*," *TWAT* (1993), 7:1047; for an extended discussion, see Andreasen, 100-104.

31:17,<sup>7</sup> yet few interpreters would argue that “the seventh day” in these texts refers to anything other than the weekly Sabbath. There is no reason why the case should be any different with the interpretation of Gen 2:1-3.

### The Absence of Any Reference to “Evening and Morning”

Genesis 1 refers to each of the first six days as consisting of an evening and a morning, but Gen 2:1-3 makes no reference to an evening or morning in connection with the seventh day. However, there is no reason to interpret this omission as evidence that the seventh day is different in length to each of the first six days. On the contrary, this variation is undoubtedly just an “example of the break up of a stereotypic pattern upon reaching the climactic crescendo conclusion.”<sup>8</sup>

It has been argued that “if God’s rest referred to cessation from creative activity for only twenty-four hours, it logically follows that this creative work resumed on the eighth day, . . . a deduction to which no one wants to ascribe.”<sup>9</sup> However, this argument overlooks the fact that the difference between the seventh day and the subsequent days “consists in the novel character of the seventh day; after a series of six days on each of which some work of creation was wrought, came a day on which God did not work or add anything to his creation; hence the remembrance of this abstinence from labour remained linked with the day on which this situation first arose.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Andreasen, 121.

<sup>8</sup>Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 76. Paul, 76, sees a parallel in the fact that the beginning of the oracle against Israel in Amos 2:6-16 “is fashioned in the standard stylistic pattern of the preceding seven. It then continues with a detailed catalogue of accusations, but unlike the others it does not conclude with the same formulaic pattern.” The reference to an evening and a morning in connection with each of the first three days of Creation is not surprising, since on the first day God is pictured as separating the light from the darkness (Gen 1:4). The next three days are parallel to the first three days, successively witnessing the Creation of a fullness parallel to the form called into being on each of the first three days (Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC, vol. 1 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975), 45, 46. It is, thus, not surprising that reference to an evening and a morning is also made in connection with each of these three days of Creation since on the fourth day the luminaries are pictured as taking over the task of God himself in separating the light from the darkness (Gen 1:18). However, no reference to an evening and a morning would be expected in connection with the seventh day, since the account of this day stands outside the parallel structure of the first six days.

<sup>9</sup>Griffith, 48.

<sup>10</sup>Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 1:64. Griffith, 49, 50, argues from Heb 4 that God’s Creation “rest has a future aspect and thus cannot be limited solely to the twenty-four hour period following the creation.” However, “true as it is that the sabbath of God has no evening, and that the σαββατισμός, to which the creature is to attain at the end of his course, will be bounded

## The Absence of Any Explicit Command to Observe the Sabbath

Genesis 2:1-3 contains no explicit command for human beings to keep the Sabbath, although the reference to God resting on the seventh day would have provided an ideal opportunity for such a command to be given. Niels-Erik Andreasen explains this absence noting that the passage focuses on divine rather than human sabbath-keeping.<sup>11</sup> The common ancient Near Eastern concept was that the gods made human beings their slaves, then promptly entered a state of permanent retirement. However, the writer of Gen 2:1-3 demythologizes the concept by affirming that when God finished creating, he rested only for “a Sabbath, the first Sabbath,” nothing more.<sup>12</sup> The elaboration of the implications of this divine rest for human beings can then be safely left for another context.

Whatever the ultimate strength or weakness of Andreasen’s proposal, it is obviously no more interpretive than assuming that the Sabbath is not a Creation ordinance just because no explicit command to keep it is given in Gen 2:1-3.

### *Genesis 2:1-3 and the Case for the Sabbath as a Creation Ordinance*

There is important theological evidence that lends support to the idea of the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance. Genesis 2:1-3 lacks the vivid anthropomorphism of Exod 31:17, in which God not only stops on the seventh day, but catches his breath.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the prohibition of idolatry “forcibly reminded even the most earthy Jew of the non-material nature of the true God. But if God was so different from anything material, what could be the reason for the emphatic assertion that He ceased from His work of six days by taking a rest on the seventh? . . . Clearly, one is faced here with a divine role model set for man.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it can be convincingly argued that

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by no evening, but last for ever; we must not, without further ground, introduce this true and profound idea into the seventh creation-day”; see also, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin, Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:69.

<sup>11</sup>Niels-Erik Andreasen, *Rest and Redemption: A Study of the Biblical Sabbath*, Andrews University Monographs, Studies in Religion, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1978), 75, 76.

<sup>12</sup>Andreasen, *Old Testament Sabbath*, 186, 196. For examples of how Gen 1-2 polemicizes against other aspects of ancient Near Eastern mythology, see Gerhard F. Hasel, “Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels,” *AUSS* 10 (1972): 1-20; idem, “The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *EQ* 46 (1974): 81-102.

<sup>13</sup>So John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, 3 (Waco: Word, 1987), 411.

<sup>14</sup>Stanley L. Jaki, “The Sabbath-Rest of the Maker of All,” *AsTJ* 50 (1995): 37, 38.

the call to human Sabbath-keeping is already implicit in the Gen 1:26-27 account of the Creation of human beings in the image of God.<sup>15</sup> The last section of each successive genealogy in Genesis is always “the one which announces the following history,” so that in Gen 2:1-3 the divine Sabbath-keeping clearly introduces “the new history, the human one.”<sup>16</sup>

As helpful as such theological evidence is, one cannot help but wish for clear exegetical evidence to confirm whether or not Gen 2:1-3 presents the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance. From the perspective of literary structure, it is useful to note that Gen 2:1-3 is not only the climax of Gen 1:1-2:3, it is also a tightly knit unit in its own right, “a unified composition which does not let the reader bracket out any traditions within it with any degree of certainty.”<sup>17</sup> The blessing and sanctification of the seventh day in Gen 2:3 thus constitute “the planned climax to which the earlier verses move.”<sup>18</sup> Clearly, the narrator intends to picture the divine blessing and sanctification as happening at the end of Creation week, not millennia later. All the blessings in Gen 1 obviously have Creation and humanity in view and become operative from the time that they are pronounced. Accordingly, it is only to be expected that it would be “with respect to his creation, and with respect to man in particular that God blessed the Sabbath day,” and that the blessing would be operative from the first seventh day onward.<sup>19</sup> However, the clearest evidence in favor of the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance comes from a close study of the statement וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ (“and he sanctified it [the seventh day]”) in Gen 2:3.

<sup>15</sup>The image of God is both an ontological and functional concept. Certainly, it can be interpreted in terms of the command to fill the earth and to subdue the creation in the very next verse, Gen 1:28. However, the work here commissioned “is a mirror image of the divine activity in Genesis 1” (Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* [Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter, 1984], 31). An essential feature of God’s work is its completion in a weekly cycle. Thus, one can only conclude that the writer probably “intended the reader to understand the account of the seventh day in light of the ‘Image of God’ theme of the sixth day” (John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], 2:39).

<sup>16</sup>Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1978), 221, 222.

<sup>17</sup>Andreasen, *Old Testament Sabbath*, 191.

<sup>18</sup>Desmond Ford, *The Forgotten Day* (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford, 1981), 80.

<sup>19</sup>O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 69; see also, Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Sabbath in the Pentateuch,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 25.

*The Significance of the Divine Sanctification  
of the Seventh Day (Genesis 2:3)*

Some interpreters have attempted to separate the divine sanctification of the seventh day from the institution of the Sabbath. For example, R. J. Griffith has suggested that at Creation “God blessed and set apart the day for its future use as a day of rest and worship for Israel under the Law. . . . In like manner He set apart Jeremiah while in the womb (Jer 1:5), though his ministry as a prophet did not commence until years later.”<sup>20</sup>

The difference between Jeremiah and the seventh day is that Jeremiah had to be born, grow, and mature before he could assume the prophetic office, whereas the seventh day is an impersonal abstract object that does not require growth or maturity. However, the most basic problem with this proposal is that it automatically equates the use of the Piel stem of קדש (“to sanctify”) in Gen 2:3 with the use of the Hiphil stem of the same verb in Jer 1:5.

Stative Qal verbs, such as קדש, form factitives in the Piel and causatives in the Hiphil.<sup>21</sup> It is true that factitives and causatives lie so close together in meaning that often “the English tends to blur the distinction.”<sup>22</sup> However, a good case has been made that there is a real distinction, consisting primarily in the notion that Piel factitives “direct attention to the results of the situation apart from the event,” while Hiphil causatives refer to “the process” involved.<sup>23</sup> The use of the Hiphil stem of קדש in Jer 1:5 would thus stress the *process* by which YHWH set Jeremiah apart as a prophet even before birth, irrespective of when he might actually assume the prophetic office. However, the use of the Piel stem of קדש in Gen 2:3 would stress that here is an action whose *results* are evident immediately, and the canonical picture of the Creation origin of the Sabbath would be clearly affirmed.

It is possible to specify the significance of the use of the Piel stem of קדש in Gen 2:3 even further. “The factitive Piel can be the result of a sensory causation, a ‘real’ result available to the physical senses, or of a psychological or linguistic causation, a mental change or a speech act that reflects a mental change.”<sup>24</sup> In cases of psychological causation, the Piel is

<sup>20</sup>Griffith, 33.

<sup>21</sup>Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 400, 437.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 438.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. Waltke and O’Connor cite as an example the contrast between the use of the Piel of קדש in 1 Sam 7:1 and the Hiphil of קדש in Lev 27:16; see also Ernst Jenni, *Das Hebraische Pi<sup>c</sup>el* (Zurich: EVZ, 1968), 20-52.

<sup>24</sup>Waltke and O’Connor, 401.

designated as estimative, while in cases of linguistic causation, it is designated as declarative/delocutive.<sup>25</sup> Apart from Gen 2:3 and the parallel reference of Exod 20:11, the Piel stem of קדש is used, with a period of time as its object, a total of thirteen times in the OT.<sup>26</sup> There is no instance of a “real” factitive Piel in this list, as is to be expected, given the abstract nature of time. However, it is used as an estimative Piel eight times and as a declarative Piel five times.<sup>27</sup> In Gen 2:3 and Exod 20:11, the estimative use of the Piel can be ruled out since these texts do not state that God sanctified the seventh day by stopping all activity on it. Instead, they state that he sanctified it because he then ceased his work. Accordingly, the Piel in these instances must be declarative, with an emphasis on the public proclamation of the sanctity of the seventh day right at the time of Creation.<sup>28</sup> A grammatical analysis of the statement ויקדש אתו (“and he sanctified it [the seventh day]”; Gen 2:3) thus provides persuasive evidence in favor of the Sabbath being presented here as a Creation ordinance.

### Conclusion

The question of whether or not Gen 2:1-3 pictures the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance is of intense practical and academic interest, as it is a *crux interpretum* that has long tended to divide those who believe the Sabbath is of universal, permanent significance, from those who believe it is of only local temporary significance. The case that this passage does not present the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance rests on three arguments from silence: the absence of the noun שבת (“Sabbath”), the absence of any reference to the seventh day consisting of an evening and a morning, and the absence of any explicit command to observe the Sabbath. None of these arguments is convincing. Theological evidence that Gen 2:1-3 does present the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance includes the anthropomorphic description of God working six days and stopping on

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 402.

<sup>26</sup>Exod 20:8; Lev 25:10; Deut 5:12; 2 Kgs 10:20; Neh 13:22; Jer 6:4; 17:22, 24, 27; Ezek 20:20; 44:24; Joel 1:14; 2:15. For a listing of OT uses of קדש in its various grammatical forms, see George V. Wigram, *The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance: Coded to Strong's Concordance Numbering System*, rev., ed. Jay P. Green (Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 1984), 1090.

<sup>27</sup>The estimative Piel is used in Exod 20:8; Deut 5:12; Neh 13:22; Jer 17:22, 24, 27; Ezek 20:20; 44:24 and the declarative Piel is used in Lev 25:10; 2 Kgs 10:20; Jer 6:4; Joel 1:14; 2:15.

<sup>28</sup>Compare the translation of Gen 2:3 offered in *Tanakh—The Holy Scriptures: The JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1988): “And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.” William L. Holladay also cites Gen 2:3 as an instance of the Piel of קדש being used to pronounce something as holy (*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 313).

the seventh to catch his breath, hints that the call to human Sabbath-keeping is implicit in the creation of human beings in the image of God, and evidence that the divine Sabbath-keeping introduces the human history that follows. At the exegetical level, literary structure suggests that the divine blessing and sanctification of the seventh day is pictured as occurring at Creation. The blessings of Gen 1 all have an immediate human focus, so there is a presumption that the blessing of the seventh day would be the same. However, the clearest evidence in favor of the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance comes from a close study of the statement *ויקדש אהו* (“and he sanctified it [the seventh day]”; Gen 2:3).

It has been argued that in Gen 2:3 God sanctified the seventh day for its *future* use under the law, just as he sanctified Jeremiah as a future prophet in Jer 1:5. However, this argument fails to take into account the fact that while both verses use the verb *קדש*, Gen 2:3 uses the Piel stem and Jer 1:5 uses the Hiphil stem. While the factitive use of the Piel lies close in meaning to the causative use of the Hiphil, evidence suggests that the former emphasizes result and the latter emphasizes process. Whenever the Piel stem of *קדש* has a period of time as its object, it is never used as a “real” factitive, but always as an estimative or a declarative Piel. Context rules out the estimative use in Gen 2:3, suggesting that *קדש* is here used declaratively to picture the public proclamation of the sanctity of the seventh day at the time of Creation.