

author finishes his research with the observation that both parts of the book help to demonstrate that “the compelling weight of inter-textual, linguistic, semantic, structural, and contextual evidence demonstrates that the *sabbata* of Colossians 2:16 refers to the ancient Jewish ceremonial sabbaths, and not the weekly Sabbath” (148). Thus, he states, this text cannot be used as evidence that the seventh-day Sabbath of the Decalogue has been abolished.

The author’s intertextual hermeneutical approach leads to valuable discoveries about the meanings of the single words “festival,” “new moon,” and “sabbath” of Col 2:16 that should be given serious attention. However, I do not think this unique approach fully identifies the significance of these expressions. The fact that NT scholarship is not united on the context of Colossians, the issues Paul is fighting against, or the Colossian heresy is not an excuse for not carefully studying these aspects unless we assume *a priori* that all views on the type of conflict Paul is dealing with are wrong.

The author is very critical of the exegesis practiced by 88 commentaries with different hermeneutical perspectives. From his analysis, he finds that nearly half of them did not engage in exegesis, the others practiced some exegesis, while none did any exegesis of these vital three terms (56). He discovered four commentaries that interpreted the “sabbath” in Col 2:16 as ceremonial Sabbaths, but again these “nowhere engage in any serious exegesis of the crucial three terms” (57). Unfortunately, the author nowhere defines what he means by “exegesis,” so it is difficult to evaluate the validity of his criticism.

Exegesis, as it is generally defined, includes questions of the intention of the writer, the understanding of the message by the original audience, and the issues the document tries to settle, all of which impact the outcome of the interpretation of the text. Paul’s strong exhortation and caution in Col 2:13-17 did not take place in a vacuum, but in a powerful conflict with opponents he most likely had been facing in other places. In Gal 4:10-11 and Rom 14:5-6, Paul also dealt with the issue of observance of days and times. A study of these challenges could provide further support of the author’s arguments. However, simply criticizing the exegesis of others—while avoiding the contextual and exegetical study of the text in the immediate and larger context of Colossians and other Pauline letters because there are so many different interpretations—begs the question.

With this minor criticism, I fully recommend this book for anyone who wants to be informed about the latest research on one of the most challenging texts of the letter to the Colossians.

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Du Preez, Ron. *Judging the Sabbath: Discovering What Can’t Be Found in Colossians 2:16*. Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2008. xv + 190 pp. Paper, \$19.99.

Ron du Preez is a man of strong convictions. He is also a careful Bible scholar with a passion to help people resolve theological and ethical issues.

The difficult topic he engages in this book is one he has been working on for several years and which is now the topic of his Ph.D. dissertation in New Testament studies at the University of the Western Cape, Republic of South Africa. Du Preez has already earned a D.Min. from Andrews University and a Th.D. in theological ethics from the University of South Africa.

Du Preez's book is an important contribution to ongoing studies on a very difficult passage. It will no doubt not end the discussion, but it does significantly further the discussion, pressing the case for careful reading and interpretation not only of the text itself but also of its scriptural backgrounds and historical and literary contexts. It raises some very important textual issues.

According to the preface, Du Preez began his study with presuppositions. He states in the first paragraph, "My own plain-sense reading of the immediate context of the passage had long since satisfied me that whatever else Paul may have been addressing, he clearly was not discussing the seventh-day Sabbath of the Decalogue" (vii). In support of this interpretation, he offers four points of "relatively simple" "logic" (ibid.). He notes that "most of the scholarly interpretation chose to bypass that context and logic, and instead made a case against the plain-sense reading through other interpretive methods" (ibid.). This introduction will probably not endear him to many of his readers.

After reviewing a selection of the evidence of scholarly interpretation in chapter 1, Du Preez observes that "the vast majority of scholars, now and in the past, have come to the conclusion that Colossians 2:16 clearly indicates that the observance of the weekly Sabbath is not obligatory for Christians because it has allegedly been abrogated" (9-10). Yet he still raises the question, "Where does the weight of biblical textual evidence lead?" (10). Clearly, he is convinced of the soundness of his own intuition against the weight of scholarship, having surveyed the positions of 110 commentaries and found them all lacking in a careful study of the biblical evidence (55-56). He cites F. F. Bruce as asserting that "the *onus probandi* lies on those who argue that the weekly sabbath is not included in this reference" (10). He is ready to take up the challenge—and he does it with a zeal that leaves few stones unturned.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 addresses basic issues of language and context that Du Preez believes will resolve the matter for the average reader. Part 2 considers additional issues that are of interest to scholars who would probe the matter more deeply. Following a summary and conclusions, he provides appendices with charts of the hard data used in his study.

Part 1 begins in chapter 2 with a study of the use of *šabbāt* in the Hebrew Bible. He shows that of 111 occurrences of *šabbāt*, 94 have contexts that require interpreting them as the seventh-day Sabbath. He identifies linguistic markers that identify the seventh-day Sabbath but are otherwise absent or have other markers to indicate types of sabbaths such as the Day of Atonement, the sabbatical years, or the week. These data are pretty straightforward and noncontroversial. Du Preez cites a number of scholars who have achieved similar results.

In chapter 3, Du Preez examines the translation of the Hebrew expression *šabbat šabbātôn* into Greek in the LXX, thus preparing the way for

understanding *sabbatōn* in Col 2:16. After comparing the seven occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, he concludes that it is used four times with reference to the seventh-day Sabbath, two times with reference to the Day of Atonement, and once with reference to the sabbatical year, so “it cannot function as one of the uniquely identifying linguistic indicators” for the seventh-day Sabbath (29). Further, the LXX translates the expression only once as *sabbata sabbatōn* (Lev 23:32, referring to the Day of Atonement), making that reference “a completely unique interpretation” (29). Thus the claim of various scholars that *šabbat šabbātōn* is always rendered by *sabbata sabbatōn* in the LXX is shown to be incorrect. This seems to bolster Du Preez’s case against the scholars.

In chapter 4, Du Preez studies *sabbaton* and *sabbata* in NT Greek, showing that the neuter singular *sabbaton* appears 44 times and the neuter plural *sabbata* appears 25 times. However, he argues that *sabbata* is not always used as a plural. It is rendered 17 times as a singular, once as a plural (based on context), and six times as a “week.” He cites other scholars and various English versions in support of these statistics. He also offers evidence that already in the LXX *sabbata* can be either singular or plural. He argues from J. B. Lightfoot, and buttressed by the testimony of others, that “*sabbata* is derived from the Aramaic . . . שבתא [šbtʾ] and accordingly preserves the Aramaic termination in *a*” (35). Thus it is normally a singular but is often mistaken for a plural. Du Preez follows the argument of many scholars that this is the basis for reconsidering *sabbata* in Col 2:16 as a singular rather than a plural, and that linguistic and theological context are crucial for determining its real meaning. What is generally overlooked in this regard is that the ambiguous *sabbata* does not appear in Col 2:16. The word in Col 2:16 is *sabbatōn*, which is not ambiguous: it is a genitive plural and it cannot be singular. Here, scholars, including Du Preez, indulge in a careless substitution of something from outside the text for what is actually in the text. Du Preez then follows through the rest of his argument with this false assumption, weakening the rest of the argument. This is a weak link in his study, casting doubt on some of his other conclusions.

Also in chapter 4, Du Preez looks for linguistic markers used with *sabbaton* and *sabbata* in the NT to see what is being referred to in the context. He concludes that, of 69 occurrences of the two terms, 59 refer to the seventh-day Sabbath, nine refer to a week, and only Col 2:16 lacks the linguistic markers and contextual indicators to refer either to the seventh-day Sabbath or to a week. Therefore, the reference in Col 2:16 must refer to a ceremonial sabbath or to something else.

Chapter 5 functions to demonstrate the incorrectness of the assertion of some scholars that the Hebrew word *šabbāt* when used alone, and its Greek equivalent in the LXX, *sabbata*, is used exclusively for the weekly Sabbath and never for ceremonial sabbaths. Du Preez sets forth evidence that this language is, in fact, used for the Day of Atonement, for sabbatical years, and even, in some Greek manuscripts, for the Day of Trumpets (Lev 23:24). This evidence counters the argument that *sabbata* (purportedly) in Col 2:16 must necessarily refer to the seventh-day Sabbath.

Du Preez gets into the issue of the calendar sequence in chapter 6, namely, that in Col 2:16 *heortē* designates yearly feasts, *neomēnia* designates feasts at the beginning of each month, and *sabbata* designates the weekly holy day. Many scholars have cited the strong OT precedent for this interpretation, though a few have challenged this interpretation. Du Preez analyzes six of the OT texts that have been cited as containing the yearly-monthly-weekly sequence and finds significant differences between them and Col 2:16. One difference is that Du Preez finds a four-part sequence in these passages as opposed to a three-part sequence in Col 2:16, though he admits that the four-part sequence “is at times difficult to recognize in some Bible translations” (60). (One should not too glibly assert that lack of a fourth element in Col 2:16 negates the allusion entirely.) He also points out that the sequence is reversed in these passages, so they cannot be alluded to by the alternative sequence in Col 2:16. (Again, various scholars see this as inadequate evidence to deny the strong allusive character of the sequence.) Further, he adds that the subject of these six passages is the offerings offered on these days, whereas he contends that there is no context of offerings in Col 2:16. This is a debatable argument. In fact, Paul Gies, whom he cites several times, actually makes the case that that is exactly what Col 2:16 is about, as parallels with Heb 10:1 and the OT strongly suggest. Additionally, Du Preez argues that the terms used in these six passages are all plural, whereas the terms in Col 2:16 are singular. This, of course, is not quite true, since *sabbatōn* in Col 2:16 is, in fact, unquestionably genitive plural. Further, Du Preez’s own study of Ezek 45:13-17 and 46:1-15 in this same chapter shows a mix of singulars and plurals in a similar context, which offers precedent for the same in Col 2:16. Du Preez opts to leave Hos 2:11 out of consideration in this chapter, though Hos 2:11 offers the best parallel with Col 2:16 in a similar context, listing the same calendar sequence as in Col 2:16, in the same order, and in the singular. He reserves the study of Hos 2:11 for Part 2.

In chapter 7, Du Preez presents the case from the OT, LXX, and NT for a distinction between the use of *heortē* and the use of *sabbata* when referring to festivals or holy days. He shows that *heortē* was consistently used to translate the Hebrew *hag*, referring always to one of the three annual pilgrim festivals, whereas *sabbata*, as shown in chapter 5, was used—besides for the weekly Sabbath—for the Day of Atonement, the Day of Trumpets, or sabbatical years. Thus there is no justification for the argument of some scholars that all ceremonial festivals are referred to by the term *heortē*, thereby requiring that the use of *sabbata/sabbatōn* in Col 2:16 must refer to the seventh-day Sabbath.

Chapter 8 closes Part 1 with a discussion of the use of the term “shadow” (*skia*) in Col 2:17, showing the cultic context of the language of the verse parallels with Heb 10:1-4. This is the first time Du Preez makes any attempt to touch on the actual context of *sabbatōn* in Col 2:16, and he does not discuss it in its own larger literary context, aside from the reference to *skia* in v. 17, except in the context of another NT book. This is one of the great weaknesses of Du Preez’s contribution. As extensive as his word studies are, there is little attention given to literary context, which should play a significant

role in interpretation. As valuable as the parallel to Heb 10:1 is, he uses it for his own purposes, ignoring the fact that Heb 10:1 states that the (ritual) law, which is a shadow of coming good things, can never by those sacrifices which they offer continually year after year make perfect those who bring them. In other words, the sacrifices offered throughout the calendar year, whether daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly, are at the heart of the ritual law, which was a foreshadowing of the One who is to come, who is the body or substance, the reality to which the shadows pointed. This detail needs to be brought into the context of Col 2:16-17, whereas Du Preez ignores and even denies it, insisting that there is nothing in Col 2:16 that suggests that sacrificial offerings are part of the context. Yet in the OT context of the various festivals, whether daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly, the sacrifices were always at the heart of what was being celebrated.

Du Preez summarizes his findings in Part 1, concluding that “The interpretation that is best supported by the comprehensive weight of careful biblical research reveals that the *sabbata* of Colossians 2:16 refers to the ceremonial sabbaths of the ancient Israelite nation. This passage does not address the seventh-day Sabbath of the Decalogue, and cannot reasonably be used in anti-Sabbatarian apologetics” (94).

In Part 2, Du Preez attempts to add weight to this conclusion by a series of additional arguments. First, in chapter 10 he argues that the eight OT passages cited in chapter 6 should not be considered as background for Col 2:16 because Paul never quotes from 1 or 2 Chronicles or Nehemiah and has only allusions to or paraphrases of Ezekiel. However, if there is an OT source for Paul’s comment in Col 2:16, “the book of Hosea is the more obvious candidate” (102), since he quotes from Hosea several times.

In chapter 11, Du Preez studies the linguistics of Hos 2:11 (v. 13 in Heb.) and compares the verse with Col 2:16, concluding that there are at least six correspondences between the two texts. It is not difficult to agree that Hos 2:11 is probably the best literary background for Col 2:16. However, Du Preez makes a leap here that he does not make with the other eight similar passages. Whereas he clearly states regarding the other eight passages that “The word *sabbata* in the above eight passages does refer to the seventh-day Sabbath” (98), he proposes that here “the *šabbāt* in Hos 2:11 may actually refer to these annual and septennial sabbaths” (109). He offers support for this thesis by noting that the text speaks of “her sabbath,” referring to Israel’s sabbath as opposed to God’s Sabbath, paralleling “her [pilgrim] festival” and “her new moon.” This seems to be a good argument, but given the context of the passage, it may be that God is merely saying that what he had ordained has all been turned from its original intention to serve self instead of to serve him by what was done on those occasions. God is speaking to Hosea about his wife Gomer, a harlot who became an enacted parable representing Israel. God says in vv. 8 and 9 that he will take back from her the gifts he gave her because she was spending them on her lovers and using them to worship Baal. What was God going to take back? Did Israel have her own separate pilgrim festivals different from those three ordained by God? No. Did Israel have

her own separate new moon festivals different from those ordained by God? No. Why then must we conclude that the sabbaths here should be different from God's Sabbaths, which are represented in all of the parallel passages? It is not necessary. Israel had merely perverted God's Sabbaths so that they had become self-serving, and God calls them Israel's rather than his own. There is a clue to that effect when God states that he will cause all their merrymaking to cease. The festivals and holy days have lost their intended function and have become merely an opportunity to feast and party at God's expense. The sacrifices and offerings, which were an essential aspect of the worship at the festivals and holy days, have become an offense to God because they are being misused. Verse 13 points out that the festivals have become "the days of the Baals, to which she burned incense." "But Me she forgot," God says. So there is no good reason contextually to conclude that *sabbattāh* in Hos 2:11 is other than the rituals offered on the seventh-day Sabbath, just as on the new moons and pilgrim festivals as in the other eight parallel OT expressions, even if the rituals or sacrifices are not explicitly mentioned in this verse.

In chapter 12, Du Preez attempts to clinch his argument by proposing a literary structure in Hos 2:11 that will confirm his interpretation once and for all. He cites evidence for other parallelisms and chiasms in Hosea, then argues that 2:11 forms a chiasm in which the sabbaths parallel the annual pilgrimages and are therefore annual ceremonial sabbaths rather than weekly Sabbaths. There are several problems to his line of argumentation. One is that there are five things that God says he will cause to cease: all her merrymaking, her pilgrim festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her set feasts. Du Preez reduces these to three, with a "prologue" and an "epilogue." The three central terms, which he arranges chiastically, are really all parallel, equal examples of the times during the year when they had special occasions of worship and sacrifice. They are not an exhaustive list, so God adds, "and all her set feasts," to cover the rest. The three central terms, if not all five, should be seen instead as a simple list of things that God will put a stop to, rather than a chiastic structure in which "her new moons" forms the center of a chiasm. One has to ask if the center of Du Preez's chiasm meets his own test: "Whatever the writer intentionally placed at the literary center can thus be recognized as pivotal in the overall chiastic structure" (118). It is hard for me to see how "her new moons" can be pivotal in explaining the meaning of the whole structure, but he makes an effort, arguing that "These lunar observances were extremely crucial for the religious practices of the entire ancient Israelite nation. Hence, the monthly new moons stand at the peak of this chiastic structure" (124). He tried to explain this in the previous chapter in terms of the appearance of the new moon as the basis for the entire Hebrew calendar. However, in view of the dearth of evidence for any actual celebration of the new moon festival worship services, as opposed to merely the implicit importance of the viewing of the new moon at the beginning of each month for dating purposes, one must question the overall importance of the new moon festival as the dominant one in the trio. The purpose of this purported chiasm is to make "her Sabbaths" parallel with "her [pilgrim] festivals" and thus refer to ceremonial sabbaths rather than weekly Sabbaths.

Since Hos 2:11 is held up to be the only legitimate OT passage alluded to by Paul in Col 2:16, this is supposed to clinch the argument that the sabbaths mentioned in Col 2:16 are ceremonial sabbaths. In my view, Du Preez has failed to make this case convincingly.

He goes on in chapter 12 to argue not only for his chiasm, but also for an “augmented inverted parallelism” (122). His conclusion is that “sabbaths” in Hos 2:11 includes the “rest” times of Trumpets, Atonement, and sabbatical years, and is therefore an augmentation over the pilgrim festivals, which are all annual, whereas the sabbatical years are septennial. This argument is based on changing the language of the text from the singular to the plural. If, as he earlier argued, these terms are singular, what ground is there for making them represent plural entities? There is too much manipulation of the text here, and too much speculative reasoning.

Chapter 13 contributes little to the line of argumentation, but attempts to show evidence for literary parallelisms and chiasms in Colossians. The formation of “Do not touch, Do not taste, Do not handle” (2:21) into a three-part augmented inverted chiasm is less than convincing. Again, it seems to be a simple listing of three elements of prohibition. What would make “Do not taste” pivotal for the meaning of the structure?—though Du Preez asserts, without support, that it is so. All of this is supposed to lend credence to making Col 2:16 form an augmented inverted parallelism, like its OT background, Hos 2:11, confirming that the “sabbaths” in Col 2:16 are ceremonial sabbaths. There are simpler solutions that require less speculation.

It can no doubt be said that Du Preez has conducted one of the most extensive studies on the “sabbaths” in Col 2:16 that has been undertaken. He has established a lot of good data and has successfully undermined some careless scholarly assertions. While this reader has not found his line of argument to be convincing in several areas, I would note that his general conclusion regarding the nature of the sabbaths in Col 2:16 is in harmony with long-standing published Seventh-day Adventist interpretation. I do recommend that the interested student of Scripture obtain Du Preez’s study and read it carefully and thoughtfully. It will not be possible to explore this topic seriously in the future without considering Du Preez’s contribution. At the same time, his subtitle suggests the real contribution of his study: *Discovering What Can’t Be Found in Colossians 2:16*. I agree that it is much more difficult in the light of Du Preez’s study to find the seventh-day Sabbath per se in Col 2:16. However, he has not convinced me that the passage is not discussing ritual observances, especially sacrifices, offered at different times in the Jewish ritual calendar, including the burnt offerings offered on weekly Sabbath days, as repeatedly mentioned in a variety of OT passages. Parallels in Heb 10:1-4, along with Heb 9:9-12, strongly seem to support that interpretation. There may yet be room for more work in this area.

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