

THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH AND SABBATH THEOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION: CREATION, COVENANT, SIGN

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The Biblical Sabbath and Scripture's Last Book

The word “Sabbath” is never mentioned in the book of Revelation; yet, as “the last book of the Bible,” Revelation gives promise of yielding Scripture’s “final word”¹ on the seventh-day Sabbath for those who would follow Christ.

Revelation’s “last words” are significant because “they memorably summarize and conclude centuries of biblical insight, counsel, and experience.”² There “all the books of the Bible meet and end.”³ So much so that when reading Revelation one is plunged fully into the atmosphere of the OT— theologically, spiritually, morally.⁴ Through images drawn from the past both the present and the future unfold in a way that greatly resembles the past and in which the same relationships of cause and consequence are observable that have been at work throughout God’s dealings with humanity.⁵ The cascade of OT allusions seems to assert that no matter the times, spiritual/moral issues

¹See M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, ed. James Luther (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1989), 1-4; Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 26, 362.

²Peterson, 1-2.

³Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 585. As Richard Bauckham has aptly said, Revelation is “the climax of prophecy,” thereby bringing to consummate fulfillment the prophetic tradition of Israel (*The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993], x-xi).

⁴No NT book is as saturated with the OT as is Revelation. The more-than-two-thousand references of one kind or another to the OT means that the study of Revelation ties us to the OT in many ways. Even a conservative estimate works out at about one allusion for every verse. The larger percentage of the hundreds of symbols in the book is best understood by reference to the OT. See Bauckham, x-xi; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 76-99; Steve Moyise, ed., *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 117; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 25-27; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 8-10. See also Jon Paulien, “Criteria and the Assessment of Allusions to the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation,” in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steven Moyise (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2001), 113; idem, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 135-136.

⁵David A. deSilva, “Final Topics: The Rhetorical Functions of Intertexture in Revelation 14:14–16:21,” in *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the New Testament*, ed. Duane F. Watson (Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 240.

have not changed because both human nature and God's truth have remained constant.⁶ Biblical imagery is thus intentionally drawn from the OT in order to craft a theological vision that both incorporates the earlier spiritual/moral issues and nuances their enduring import more sharply toward present and last things (cf. 1 Cor 10:6-11; Rom 15:4).⁷

Our question here is whether Revelation's pregnant summary of Scripture includes the biblical seventh-day Sabbath. Would not this book, so saturated with OT imagery, include in its allusion medley the seventh-day Sabbath as one of the most prevailing of OT concerns?⁸ One would expect so, or at least not be surprised to find a Sabbath allusion somewhere—affirmed or negated, substituted or used theologically as metaphor.

However, if the seventh-day Sabbath appears nowhere in Revelation's purview of things, then why not? Why theologically would the Sabbath not be an explicit or at least implicit part of Revelation's biblical review and warning? What could or would take the Sabbath's prominent place in the biblical scheme of things from which Revelation so consistently draws?

If, on the other hand, Revelation does incorporate the biblical Sabbath within its theological vision, how would it do so? In this book full of direct and indirect OT allusions, bewildering symbols, subtle imagery, tacit concerns, and underlying theology, would one expect some reference or subtle hint to the Sabbath? Why would the Sabbath as a concept be implied, while the word "Sabbath" is never mentioned? Could it be assumed that the biblically informed reader would intuit the issues at play in the text so the writer need not mention the word at all? More importantly, why would possible Sabbath allusions appear quite ambiguous compared to other OT imagery from which Revelation draws? What would there be about the seventh-day Sabbath that one would not need to clearly articulate it in the text?⁹

⁶Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 40.

⁷Opinions differ as to whether John was faithful to the contexts of the OT allusions or largely disregarded their original meanings in order to make his own theological statement or express his own theological vision. We would affirm the position that John was faithful to both the contexts and the theological/moral issues at play in those contexts of the OT allusions. He does not do a new thing, but rather brings urgency and fresh focus to enduring spiritual/moral issues. See Bauckham, x-xi; Moyise, 126; Osborne, 25.

⁸Scott J. Hafemann, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith: Understanding the Heart of the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 41-81; 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). See Gen 2:1-3; Exod 31:13; Ezek 20:12, 20; Isa 56:3; 58; cf. Heb 4:3-11; Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15. Other OT themes in Revelation include creation, covenant, judgment, the sovereignty of God, holiness, idolatry, temple, Jerusalem, flood, commandments, worship, Satan, Babylonian exile, the exodus, mark, book of life, Tree of Life.

⁹The superscription for Psalm 92 states that it is a "A Psalm, a Song for the

These questions underline the problem at hand: Does Revelation's pregnant summary of Scripture include the biblical seventh-day Sabbath, and how forceful, patent, and positive might that inclusion be?

This study suggests that the biblical seventh-day Sabbath is both a tacit concern and an underlying theological-sign concept with regard to Revelation's worldview of covenant in relation to creation and redemptive re-creation. The investigation explores the theological significance of the seventh-day Sabbath in light of Revelation's creation/re-creation, covenant, exodus, and Babylonian-captivity motifs, which are purposely drawn from the OT's narrative and concerns. It includes identifying specific fourth-commandment allusions within the book's text. Theological, spiritual, and ethical implications of Sabbath with respect to the fundamental end-time crisis of humanity in relation to its Covenant Creator are also examined. This approach asserts a covenant/creation bridge between the OT (Genesis) and the NT (Revelation), in that the book of Revelation not only parallels Genesis thematically, but also fulfills, completes, and perfects God's creation into redemptive re-creation and the seventh-day Sabbath in the eternal rest of God.¹⁰ It will further assert that the phrase "the Lord's day" in the book's opening vision (1:10) is an intentional marker that alerts the thoughtful reader to critical issues to come and, as such, is an unambiguous reference to the seventh-day Sabbath.

Sabbath day," and yet it nowhere mentions the Sabbath.

¹⁰The fundamental principle reflected in Genesis and the prophetic vision of the end times in Revelation is that "the last things will be like the first things." The allusions to Genesis 1–2 in Revelation 21–22 illustrate the role that the early chapters of Genesis played in shaping the form and content of Revelation's scriptural vision of the future. Theologically, the term "beginning" in biblical Hebrew (as per Gen 1:1) marks a starting point, which already anticipates the consummation of history at the end of time. Already in Gen 1:1, the concept of "the last days" fills the mind of the reader: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; . . . Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev 21:1, 5; cf. Isa 65:17). In this context of beginnings, the emphasis on God's "rest" on the seven day (Gen 2:1-3) forms an important part of the understanding of what lies in the future. See Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR; Wipf and Stock, 2006); John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 83-84, 96-97. For further discussion of the relationship of the biblical beginning (protology) and ending (eschatology) and how the early chapters of Genesis are integrated with the rest of Genesis, Genesis with the rest of the OT, and the OT with the NT, see William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Home Bush, NSW: Lancer, 1985); Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter, 1984). "From the beginning to the end the biblical authors present a consistent, albeit selective (therefore interpretive) history. . . . It is this capacity of the biblical authors to interpret history, expressing a commonality of theme due to a consistency in the divine governance of history, that makes possible a comprehensive study of protology and eschatology" (ibid., 4).

We will begin with Revelation's creation/re-creation, covenant, exodus, and Babylonian-captivity motifs. We want to understand just how dominating these key motifs really are within Revelation's vision of reality.¹¹ In doing so, it may seem at first as though this study is more a theology of the Sabbath than it is about the Sabbath in the book of Revelation. However, these motifs yield considerable implications regarding the possible presence of the seventh-day Sabbath within the book's scheme of things. They provide important facets of Revelation's worldview from which exegetical implications of potential verbal, thematic, or theological allusions within the book can be better identified and investigated.¹² From this vantage point, we will explore specific Sabbath allusions and possibilities within the book's text. This includes (1) the verbal and thematic allusion to the fourth commandment (14:7), (2) reference to the Lord's Day (1:10), and (3) the frequent use of the number seven and the word "rest."

This study assumes the author of Genesis meant his account of creation and the flood to be understood literally and historically, i.e., a six-day creation¹³ and a global flood. Revelation's perspective on these biblical themes is in keeping with other NT writers (Matt 19:4-5; Luke 17:26-29; Heb 11:1-7; 2 Pet 3:3-7). This study also understands "covenant" in terms of God's "eternal covenant" with human beings (Heb 13:20; Rev 14:6), thus demonstrating the essential unity of his work in creation, redemption, and restoration, rather than in the disjointed consecutive phases of dispensational covenant theology.¹⁴

¹¹Mathilde Frey's brief, yet cogent, survey of some of these pervasive themes (covenant, creation, sign) does not adequately highlight just how dominating these key motifs really are within Revelation's vision of reality. Readers can observe a few footnotes along the way and may conclude there is something to her position. Most will not take the time to go in-depth enough for the text rather than the theologian to speak and to be assured enough that she is in reality reflecting the depth of the text. Her brevity enables her position to be easily dismissed as just that, her position ("The Theological Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation," in *You Have Strengthened Me: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin Pröbstle [St. Peter am Hart, Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007], 223-239)

¹²The writer understands that exegetical implications and demands are also at play in articulating the worldview-creating motifs.

¹³Norman R. Gulley, "Basic Issues between Science and Scripture: Theological Implications of Alternative Models and the Necessary Basis for the Sabbath in Genesis 1-2," *JATS* 14/1 (2003): 195-288; Jiří Moskala, "The Sabbath in the First Creation Account," *JATS* 13/1 (2002): 55-66; Randall W. Younker, "A Literal Reading of Genesis," *Perspective Digest* 15/3 (2010): 34-35.

¹⁴See Walter Brueggemann, *The Covenanted Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002); Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2005); Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained: What the Old and New*

Entering Revelation's World

Revelation unfolds a worldview in which God, human existence, and the spiritual/moral conflict at play are both spiritually and morally framed.¹⁵ As with any worldview, there is narrative, theology, and ritual.¹⁶ The reader is invited to enter this explicit world, assured that what the book says about God, human beings, moral/spiritual issues, central characters, and the moral/spiritual nature of the conflict is, in fact, both true and God-given (1:1; 21:5; 22:6, 18-19).¹⁷ The foundational themes articulated in Revelation's worldview provide a broad conceptual canvas against which any discussion of the Sabbath in the book must take place. As the prophecies of Revelation are especially built on the greatest and key events from sacred history, these foundational themes include creation and covenant in relation to the exodus and the exile to Babylon.¹⁸ It is within these pervasive spiritual and morally orienting backdrop themes that Sabbath implications are asserted and explored.

Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2007); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

¹⁵Revelation puts human beings in a spiritual/moral context. It constructs a world of vision. It tells who the players are, what condition human life is in, where the world is, and where it is headed; and it informs the reader as to what questions need to be answered. Revelation's worldview provides foundational themes and integrating motifs that facilitate reflection on the book's text and theology. This worldview provides the metaphysical map, the larger moral/spiritual vision against which the book's individual themes are to be considered and find meaning. See David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998), 3-5; Beale, 171-177; Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 181-184; Smalley, 16-19.

¹⁶Worldview is manifested in three ways: through narrative, rational, and ritual components. See Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 63; David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, foreword Arthur Frank Holmes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁷The apocalyptic medium establishes its own world, which one must enter in order to fully grasp it. The modern reader enters a worldview vastly different from his or her natural perspective. The first task, then, is to understand Revelation's outlook. Revelation is wrapped in a worldview and language quite alien to modern times. See Joseph R. Jeter, "Revelation-Based Preaching: Homiletical Approaches," in *Preaching Through the Apocalypse: Sermons from Revelation*, ed. Cornish R. Rogers and Joseph R. Jeter (St. Louis: Chalice, 1992), 10; Richard Melick, "Preaching and Apocalyptic Literature," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 382-383; Larry Paul Jones and Jerry L. Sumney, *Preaching Apocalyptic Texts* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1999), 9-23.

¹⁸Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says about the End-Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 41-71; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the*

Sabbath and Creation

Revelation unfolds a vibrant and sustained confession of God as Creator.¹⁹ It presupposes the Genesis creation narrative and posits the overarching worldview that “the whole of finite reality exists by God the Creator’s gift of existence.”²⁰ It sets the creation of the universe at the heart of its vision of the throne (chaps. 4 and 5), where the “Creation Song of the Elders” poignantly expresses themes such as the central way of characterizing both God and finite reality.²¹ The sovereign creative energy of God, expressed in the profound phrase “for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (4:11),²² concentrates all of Genesis 1 into a single thought.²³ God’s creative power includes both the original act of creation (they were created) and his ongoing preservation of the created order (they existed).²⁴ The deeply personal nature of creation (“by your will they . . . were created”) is likewise celebrated. God not only created “all that is,” he willfully “intended” to bring the universe into existence.²⁵ Thus God on his heavenly throne is praised without end by his court of throne-room guardians, who shout and sing about their holy Creator (4:11).

This understanding of God as the personal, transcendent source of all things permeates Revelation’s theology and moral vision.²⁶ The creation motif thus situates the creature relative to its Creator. It provides a basis for worship and the foundation for moral life.²⁷ God is identified as the Creator of all things as a motivation for people to worship him instead of the creation

Book of Revelation (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 19.

¹⁹See fuller discussion of the theological and ethical implications of Revelation’s central and pervasive creation theme in Larry L. Lichtenwalter, “Creation and Apocalypse,” *JATS* 15/1 (2004): 125-137. David Aune misses the import of this central theological theme and overarching worldview when he suggests that the emphasis on God as *creator* is not a central way of characterizing God in Revelation (*Revelation 1–5*, WBC 52a (Dallas: Word, 1997), 312.

²⁰Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, WBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 50.

²¹Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 78-79.

²²Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical passages will come from the NASB.

²³*Ibid.*, 79. In Genesis, God’s explosive voice speaks the world and most things in it into existence (Gen 1:6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29; Ps 33:6, 9), thus expressing his *will* through his creative word.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Boring, 106.

²⁶Lichtenwalter, 126-131.

²⁷Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 126.

(14:7; cf. 9:20).²⁸ Such motivation also reflects a moral impulse in that they “fear God and give glory to him” for “the fear of God” is the beginning of moral life (14:7; cf. Deut 6:2; Eccl 12:13; Pss 19:19; 34:11-14; 36:1; Prov 3:7; 8:13; 10:16).²⁹

Not surprisingly, the subject of creation nuances the book’s vision and message of the end. In an eschatologically oriented creation statement, a mighty angel swears to God the Creator that there will no longer be any further *chronos* or measured time in the finishing of the mystery of God (10:5-7).³⁰ When an angel proclaims the “eternal gospel” to all people on earth, calling them to repentance in view of the judgment, which already “has come,” the substance of this gospel is a call to recognize their Creator by worshipping him:³¹ “Fear God and give glory to him, because the hour of his judgment has come; worship him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water” (14:6). It is a prophetic and epochal end-time call, which both leads up to the second coming of Christ and produces the final harvest of the earth (14:6-14).³² This suggests that the question of creation is viewed as one of the moral/spiritual issues human beings are confronted with not only throughout history, but, particularly, also in the end-time leading up to the *eschaton*. The last rebellion of the dragon and his cohorts, then, is an attempt to draw the whole world into a unified rebellion against the Creator God.³³ The final crisis, in relation to worship by the faithful remnant, revolves around this critical creation worldview and the worship of the Creator God.

The ultimate character of Revelation’s eschatological age is a completely new creation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away” (21:1).³⁴ The final redemptive act is a creative

²⁸Beale, 753.

²⁹Doukhan, 124. See Lichtenwaller’s, 131-136, discussion of the ethical implications of creation in Revelation.

³⁰In the vision of the mighty angel with the little scroll that lay open in his hand, Revelation expands on God’s creation by explicitly mentioning the contents of the three divisions of the created reality (the heavens, earth, and sea)—“all that is” in each part is likewise stated three times for emphasis (10:6). As the angel’s posture (one foot on the sea, another on the land, right hand lifted toward heaven) encompasses all the spheres of creation, ascending from the sea’s depths to the dry land to the height of heaven, so also the Creator who secures his oath controls all spheres, descending from heaven’s heights to dry land to the depths. See Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 161-162.

³¹Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 48.

³²David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC 52b (Waco: Word, 1998), 848-849; Bauckham, 94-98; Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 362-369; Stefanovic, 436, 456-464.

³³Anthony MacPherson, “The Mark of the Beast as a ‘Sign Commandment’ and ‘Anti-Sabbath’ in the Worship Crisis of Revelation 12–14,” *AUSS* 43 (2005): 283.

³⁴Dumbrell, 165.

act (Revelation 21–22).³⁵ The biblical witness begins with creation (Genesis) and ends with the New Jerusalem heralding the dawn of the new creation (Revelation). The remarkable and moving presentation of biblical imagery details the magnificence of the new event, which fulfills every biblical and human expectation. Moral vision for the new corresponds with the ethic and unity of life intended in the original (21:8, 27; 22:14–15; cf. 2 Pet 3:13). Redemptive re-creation thus includes the ethical.³⁶ Clearly, the biblical narrative moves between these two poles. This raises the crucial question between creation and redemptive re-creation in Revelation's theology.³⁷ The connection highlights the cosmic scope of Revelation's theological and moral horizon, within which its primary concern with the human world is set.³⁸ "The universality of the eschatological new beginning corresponds to the derivation of all things from God's original creative act."³⁹ God is the ground of ultimate hope for the future creation of the world.

Creation is thus not confined forever to its own immanent possibilities, but is wonderfully open to the fresh creative possibilities of its Creator.⁴⁰ This biblical creation/re-creation bridge is more than conceptual. It is rooted in the Creator.

The natural implication of Revelation's creation worldview for any discussion of the Sabbath is that biblically there is no creation account without the seventh-day Sabbath.⁴¹ In the Hebrew Scripture, from which Revelation articulates its worldview, creation and Sabbath are inseparable (Gen 2:1–4a; Exod 20:8–11). Neither creation nor the Sabbath can be separated from the Creator God or the proper response of human beings who would worship

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Revelation's ultimate aim is ethical (Beale, 184–186). It relates to everyday life. This is borne out by the conclusion in 22:6–21, which is an intentional expansion of the moral implications of the prologue in 1:1–3, and especially by the ethical emphasis of 1:3 (cf. the phraseological parallels in 22:7b, 9b, 10b, 18a, 19a). Biblical eschatology always casts a moral vision. It generates an ethic to go along with it, or it fails to keep its promise of offering a unity of life and the possibility of total fulfillment. See Carl E. Braaten, *Eschatology and Ethics: Essays on the Theology and Ethics of the Kingdom of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 20.

³⁷The imagery encompasses both continuity and discontinuity (2 Pet 3:13; Isa 65:17). There is an eschatological renewal of creation, not its replacement by another. For the first time since 1:8, the one who sits on the throne speaks directly: "Behold, I am making all things new" (21:5a). The key significance of the words echoing Isaiah is underlined by God's own command to John to write them down (21:5b). There is paradox in that, although a complete new beginning is anticipated, the spiritual experience of the believer is preserved (Dumbrell, 167).

³⁸Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 50.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 48. This eschatological hope for the future of God's whole creation includes the hope of bodily resurrection (21:4; 1:18; 2:8, 10; 20:4–6).

⁴¹MacPherson, 282.

him. Scripture itself makes the bridge both thematic and verbal. Why would it be any different in Revelation? If the biblical creation worldview so dominates the book of Revelation, wouldn't the Sabbath also be assumed and implied?

In particular, and in relation to this study, the question of the seventh-day Sabbath is bound up with Revelation's promise of a perfected creation.⁴² The literary structure of Genesis places the Sabbath as the final and climatic act of God's creation on the seventh-day—"placing human beings in a vivid mutual relationship with their Holy Creator, worshiping him."⁴³ Creation was thus actually finished or consummated on the seventh day. The seventh day brings the creation week to an end and, therefore, to its goal.⁴⁴ This day alone is sanctified.⁴⁵ In doing so, God endowed this day with a special relationship to himself, who alone is intrinsically holy (1 Sam 2:2; Lev 11:44; Isa 6:3; cf. Rev 15:4; 4:8).⁴⁶ Thus in Scripture, God, holiness, creation, and Sabbath are integrally linked (Gen 2:1-4a; Exod 20:8-11; Isa 43:15; Rev 4:8-11). It is significant that the biblical concept of the *holy* first appears in relation to the Sabbath.⁴⁷ Worship, ethics, and the unity of human moral life are envisioned in this intentional linkage of the Sabbath with the *holy* (Gen 2:1-4a; Exod 20:8-11; 31:13; Ezek 20:12).

The action taken by God on the seventh day gives expression to the total purpose intended for creation.⁴⁸ Later biblical connections made between creation, Sabbath, and the sanctuary further nuance God's intended purpose.⁴⁹ As the climax of creation, the Sabbath became "a sanctuary in time," not space,

⁴²Dumbrell, 40.

⁴³Moskala, 55-66. The chiasmic center of the Genesis account of the Sabbath is God's blessing and act of making it—the seventh day—holy (2:2-3). See Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 493-495.

⁴⁴Dumbrell, 40.

⁴⁵Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:143. The first thing consecrated by God in this world is not a thing or a place, but a moment in time.

⁴⁶Roy Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," *JATS* 10/1 (1999): 314. See also Mathilde Frey, "The Creation Sabbath: Theological Intentionality of the Concept of Holiness in the Pentateuch (unpublished paper presented to the Adventist Theological Society Annual Meeting, Providence, Rhode Island, 2008), 1-11. How can a day be holy? "It must be consecrated *in relation to* beings who are affected by it. The only way for intelligent beings to make/treat time as holy is by altering their behavior. Thus, God altered His behavior on the seventh day of Creation, the archetype of the weekly Sabbath (cf. Hasel 1982: 23), and proclaimed the day holy" (Gane, 314).

⁴⁷See Frey, "The Creation Sabbath," 1-11.

⁴⁸Dumbrell, 177.

⁴⁹See Gregory K. Beal, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 17 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 66-74; Gregory K. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *JETS* 48/1 (2005): 5-31; Dumbrell, 35-76.

that God creates by himself.⁵⁰ As Israel's earthly tabernacle and temple were reflections and recapitulations of the first temple of the Garden of Eden—a unique place of God's presence where Adam walked and talked with God (Gen 3:8)—Revelation's (21–22) new-creation allusions to Genesis 2–3 bring promise of the final presence of God among his people, who see him face to face (21:3–5; 22:4).⁵¹ The envisioned sabbatical consummation is fully and gloriously realized (21:3–7). Interestingly, in a vision replete with both temple and Sabbath-rest imagery, neither the new temple nor the Sabbath is conspicuously present in Revelation 21–22. As the Sabbath of creation ushers in a complete relationship with God (Gen 2:1–4a), so also does Revelation's sabbatical consummation and the moral vision that that consummation engenders in relation to eternal fellowship with God (Rev 21:1–8, 27; 22:1–15).⁵² As creation's temporal seventh-day Sabbath rest provides the typology here, it also implies the enduring nature of the weekly seventh-day Sabbath in biblical thinking.

Sabbath and Covenant

Revelation's portrait of the *eschaton* includes the fulfillment of the divine covenant with human beings. The descent of the New Jerusalem at the close of the millennium, symbolizing God's everlasting presence, marks the consummation of an intimate covenant commitment: a connection rendered unmistakable by the use of Lev 26:11–12 in Rev 21:3.⁵³ The language is unambiguous in its echo of the pervading biblical concept of covenant (21:3, 7).⁵⁴ No greater statement of a promise kept can be found in Scripture. Here, too, God's voice is heard pronouncing the conclusion of earth's restoration—"Behold, I am making all things new"⁵⁵—which, in effect, affirms the Creator's covenant faithfulness to his creation (21:5).⁵⁵ The triumphant divine cry, "It is

⁵⁰Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Wolff, 1951), 29; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2285.

⁵¹Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation."

⁵²See Dumbrell, 35–42, 71, 177–178.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 78–79; Johnson, 304–305; T. M. Moore, *I Will Be Your God: How God's Covenant Enriches Our Lives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 183–190.

⁵⁴Indeed the covenant established in Sinai is now fulfilled, as seen in the Holiness Code of Lev 26:11–13: "I will make My dwelling among you. . . . I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (cf. Lev 21:3). This promise was repeated often as a note of comfort and hope for God's beleaguered people (Exod 29:45; Jer 30:22; 31:33; Ezek 37:27). V. 7 expands this covenant imagery with the reality that individual overcomers will be children of God, with all the rights of heirs: "I will be his God and he will be My son" (cf. Exod 29:45). See David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC 52C (Waco: Word, 1998), 1123.

⁵⁵Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 50–53. It is fulfillment of what was announced earlier through Isaiah: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; The former things will not be remembered or come to mind" (Isa 65:17; cf. 43:19). In the biblical picture, creation is prior to covenant and is the foundation

complete” (21:6), confirms the eschatological new creation and redemption, now completed in the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven.⁵⁶

This covenant consummation in Revelation’s final vision echoes significant covenant expressions found elsewhere in the book. The designation of the redeemed as a kingdom of priests (1:6; cf. 5:10; 20:6) is drawn from the covenant experience of the exodus, in which redeemed Israel is bound to God in sacred covenant and commissioned to a special priestly task among the nations of the world (Exod 19:5-6; cf. Isa 61:6; 1 Pet 2:9-10).⁵⁷ God’s self-designation—“the One who is and who was and who is to come” (1:4, 8; cf. 11:17; 16:5)—interprets his OT covenant name YHWH—“I AM WHO I AM” (Exod 3:14).⁵⁸ The drama of the Lamb and the sealed scroll (4:1–11:19) concludes with the most specific covenant language in the Apocalypse: “And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple” (11:19). This clear reference to covenant (ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ) is an integral part of Revelation’s transition into the last portion of the book, namely, both encapsulating the heart of everything that has gone before and signaling what lies behind every issue that unfolds ahead—covenant realities.⁵⁹ It asserts that God’s covenant with humanity through history is the stage on which the divine drama is performed in the book of Revelation.⁶⁰

of the covenant and covenantal relationship between God and man. See Hasel, *The Promise*, 14.

⁵⁶Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 7; Smalley, 540.

⁵⁷Waldemar Janzen, *Exodus* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000), 232, 234. Revelation follows this pattern of covenant redemption and commissioning (1:5-6; 5:10; 10:11; 14:6-12; 18:4; 20:6). Interestingly, the encounter of Moses with God at the burning bush and his subsequent commissioning (3:1-12) is repeated for all of Israel (Exod 19:1-6). Moses is commissioned and then Israel as a nation is commissioned. In Revelation, John is first commissioned, and then the church, the people of God as a whole, are commissioned. See *ibid.*, 234. In keeping with the NT, the church is seen as a new exodus (covenant) community, fulfilling the high priestly role of the OT (1:6; 1 Pet 2:9-10). See Osborne, 65; Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 21, 23, 201.

⁵⁸Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 28-30; Easley, 14.

⁵⁹On the duo-directionality of Revelation’s transition passages, see Paulien, *The Deep Things of God*, 115-119; Stefanovic, 26, 362. The striking parallels between the language of Revelation 5–9 and the OT covenant/curse passages suggest that the scene of the opening of the seals and the sounding of the trumpets has to do with the NT covenant established with Christ and the consequences of breaking, rejecting, or opposing it, and for those who identify with it. See David Marshall, *Apocalypse! Has the Countdown Begun?* (Lincolnshire, UK: Autumn House, 2000), 60.

⁶⁰Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 15.

It is also the context in which both moral choice and accountability are envisioned.⁶¹

The theme of the covenant is crucial for the reading of Revelation.⁶² No theology of the book is complete without considering its covenant backdrop.⁶³ Correspondingly, no biblical theology of God's covenant is complete without considering the covenant consummation therein.⁶⁴ In Revelation, all God's previous covenants are integrated into one glorious consummation in the New Jerusalem, thus demonstrating the essential unity of God's work in creation, redemption, and restoration.⁶⁵ No more concrete category can unite the beginning and the end, creation and redemptive re-creation, history and eschatology, the individual and the community, divine and human agency, moral life and accountability (judgment), than Scripture's own method of moral contextualization: the covenant.⁶⁶

With respect to creation and redemptive re-creation, covenant provides a sense of *relationality*.⁶⁷ Since the Creator of all reality is a person, all of that reality which God voluntarily produces exists in relationship. God not only shares a divine relationship to creation, but has also entered into covenant with all creation—the natural world and human beings alike. Covenant establishes and reflects the formal commitment that God has to creation, and, in turn, that human beings would have to their God, to one another, and

⁶¹Ibid. See Stefanovic's discussion of Revelation's pervading covenant motif (*Revelation*, 167-179, 195-211). Cf. Rev 21:1-8; 1:5-6; 5:1-11:19; Lev 26:11-12; Exod 29:45; 19:5; Jer 30:22; Ezek 37:27; 1 Pet 2:9-10.

⁶²David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler: Dominion, 1987), xvii-xviii.

⁶³The idea of the covenant is one of the most profound biblical concepts. It uniquely expresses the deep communion, intimate relationship, and closest fellowship between God and human beings. It functions as one of the central themes of Scripture (Hasel, *The Promise*, 17). See Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 1:13-17; Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis, Chalice, 2000); Moore; Robertson.

⁶⁴LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer*, 150.

⁶⁵Dumbrell, 78-118; LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer*, 154.

⁶⁶Horton, 16.

⁶⁷Carol J. Dempsey, *Hope Amid the Ruins: The Ethics of Israel's Prophets* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 19. Since the Creator of all reality is a person, all of that reality that God voluntarily produces exists in relationship. God not only shares a divine relationship to creation, but also enters into covenant with all creation—the natural world and human beings alike. Covenant establishes and reflects the formal commitment that God has to the creation and, in turn, that human beings would have to their God, to one another, and to the natural world. For the ancient biblical people "covenant was central to life; it sustained life, preserved it, and ensured its future." To be in covenant was to be interdependent. When the covenant was preserved, life flourished. When the covenant was broken, life suffered.

to the natural world.⁶⁸ Thus ethics and moral life are envisioned, and so with the eschatological covenant consummation and the conduct appropriate or inappropriate for the maintenance of covenant life (21:7-8, 27; 22:14-15).

As with Revelation's creation theme, the natural implication of the book's pervading covenant imagery for any discussion of the Sabbath is that, in the biblical scheme of things, the Sabbath is God's enduring covenant sign (Exod 31:12-17; Ezek 20:12, 20; Isa 56:6; cf. Mark 2:27).⁶⁹ Again, we ask frankly, why would it be any different in Revelation? If the biblical-covenantal worldview so dominates the book, wouldn't the Sabbath also be assumed and implied?

In the Hebrew Bible, from which Revelation unfolds its worldview, covenant, creation, and Sabbath are interrelated and inseparable. The original divine Sabbath represented the Creator's covenantal lordship over the world.⁷⁰ It was the sign of the creation covenant.⁷¹ In effect, "the history of the covenant was really established in the event of the seventh-day."⁷² It would seem that Revelation's biblical creation-and-covenant themes provide a perspective in which the corresponding seventh-day Sabbath is assumed and implied.

With respect to this study, the Sabbath in relation to the covenant is bound up with *relationality* and the question of fulfilled promises. As the conclusion of creation, the Sabbath declares both God's holy presence among his people and the sufficiency of his provision for the future.⁷³ Moral vision is likewise engendered. The sabbatical realization portrayed at the end of the book of Revelation asserts that the same covenant relationship that will exist between God and his people throughout redemptive history is already in place from the beginning of creation. These principles of *relationality*, provision, commitment, ethics, and fulfilled promises embodied in the Sabbath stand at the center of the covenant consummation by God at the re-creation of the world.⁷⁴

Sabbath and the Exodus

The exodus was a decisive moment in Israel's history.⁷⁵ Throughout Scripture, it is perceived as a "divine event" and "the powerful, compelling center of

⁶⁸Ibid., 19-34.

⁶⁹Gane, 311-332; Hafemann, 41-60; LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer*, 7-9; MacCarty, 180-205.

⁷⁰Kline, 19, 39. See also Hafemann, 55.

⁷¹Hafemann, 50; LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer*, 7.

⁷²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 3/1:217.

⁷³Hafemann, 54. The Sabbath signifies a promise from God that he has provided and will provide everything that Adam and Eve need. There is nothing he will have to do that he has not already committed himself to do.

⁷⁴God is graciously and wonderfully present among his people. He has kept all of his promises and sufficiently meets the needs of his people for all eternity (21:1-22:5; cf. 7:15-17).

⁷⁵Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old*

Israel's defining memory of faith"⁷⁶ (Exod 12:26-27; 13:8-10, 14-15; Deut 5:12-15; 6:20-24; 26:5-9). As one of Scripture's "most significant symbols of biblical faith,"⁷⁷ it is paradigmatic in that it provides the plot and structure of later, defining moments in the history of God's people.⁷⁸ Thus the exodus becomes a theological symbol throughout Scripture, serving as the literary backdrop for spiritual/moral imagination, formation, and decision.⁷⁹ It unfolds and nuances themes of deliverance, covenant, Sabbath, divine presence, holiness, sanctuary, worship and idolatry, judgment, law, election, and commission to service.⁸⁰

Of all the NT books, the Apocalypse uses the exodus motif most thoroughly in its unfolding theology and moral vision.⁸¹ The exodus symbolism in Revelation is both subtle and pervasive.⁸² Where the Apocalypse's OT allusions are drawn from Isaiah or the Psalms, the exodus forms the moral/spiritual backdrop for the respective imagery, further portraying Revelation's underlying exodus motif.⁸³

Testament, ed. Roy B. Zuck, Eugene Merrill, and Darrell Brock (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 31. The exodus was the key salvation event in which God liberated his people from oppression in Egypt, destroyed their oppressors, made them his own people, and led them to a better land. The exodus denotes not only Israel's physical deliverance from Egypt, but also includes the whole range of inseparably connected events and experiences of the people of God—deliverance from Egypt, from the armies of Egypt at the Red Sea, from the difficulties of desert life, and from enemies during forty years of wilderness wandering—including God's gracious provision along the way to the Promised Land. The exodus motif unfolds in each of the Pentateuchal books, including Genesis, which set its historical/theological/ethical contextual background. The theology of the book of Exodus in particular further shapes this permeating biblical theme.

⁷⁶Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 53.

⁷⁷Stephen Hre Kio, "Exodus as a Symbol of Liberation in the Book of the Apocalypse" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1985), 86.

⁷⁸Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 53, 55.

⁷⁹Kio, 79. At its core, Egypt stands as a symbol of oppression, suffering, bondage, sin, and the brokenness of our world. The exodus is seen as a story repeated in every soul (and generation) that seeks deliverance from the enmeshing and enervating influence of the world.

⁸⁰Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 65-66; Janzen, 25-26; Merrill, 30-56; Sailhamer, 241-322.

⁸¹Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 70.

⁸²See my more complete discussion, "Exodus and Apocalypse: Deliverance Then and Now," in *Christ, Salvation and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle*, ed. Jiří Moskala, Daniel Heinz, Peter van Bemmelen (Berrien Springs: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2009), 393-418.

⁸³Kio, 219, 222-223.

In the broadest sense, Revelation portrays the victorious saints as having participated in the “final exodus.”⁸⁴ Their song is “the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (15:3; cf. Exod 15:1-18). God’s victory in liberating his people and destroying their enemies stands in continuity with the ancient exodus. But it is also the Lamb’s song, a “new song” (Rev 14:3), for the triumph of the Lamb in his sacrificial death, resurrection, life, and coming judgment is the last great exodus, the ultimate salvation that was foreshadowed when the Israelites left Egypt in Moses’ day.⁸⁵ In keeping with this overarching deliverance narrative, there seems to be no end to the intersection and amalgamation of exodus submotifs within Revelation’s panorama.⁸⁶

As the fall in Genesis 3 began the tragic decreation of the completed perfect creation, the exodus symbolized the fulfillment of creation—itsself an act of new creation⁸⁷ or “the reclamation of creation.”⁸⁸ Within the exodus narrative, Sabbath and tabernacle imagery nuance and symbolize this “fulfillment of creation” motif (Exod 25–31 and 35-40, respectively). There is a sanctuary in both time and space, each the symbol and locus of God’s special presence.⁸⁹ In the final text of Exodus, the Lord’s holy presence in the tabernacle is so near and real that even Moses, who has often been privileged in approaching the Lord beyond the limits of others, cannot enter the tabernacle when the glory of the Lord fills it (Exod 40:35; cf. 19:20-25; 24:12-18; 33:7-11; 34:2-3, 28-35).

⁸⁴Easley, 269.

⁸⁵Johnson, 216.

⁸⁶In other words, I AM (1:4, 8, 17; 21:6; 22:12; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5; cf. Exod 3:14); the plagues and trumpets (15:1–16:21; 8:2–11:19; cf. Exod 7:14–12:34); wilderness difficulties and provision (12:6, 14; 17:3; cf. Exod 13:18; 15:22; 16:1; 19:1; Num 32:13; Deut 29:5); peals of thunder, lightning, hail, and sounds (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:17-21; cf. Exod 19:16-19); the Passover (5:6; 1:5; cf. Exod 11:1–12:51); deliverance through blood (1:5; 5:9; 7:14; cf. Exod 11:1–12:51); kingdom and priests (1:6; 5:10; cf. Exod 19:4-6); the Lord as Creator of heaven and earth (14:7; cf. Exod 20:11; 31:17); mark or sign (13:16-17; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4; cf. Exod 13:9, 16); erasing or keeping names in God’s book (3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; cf. Exod 32:32-33); covenant (1:6; 5:1–11:19; 21:3, 7; cf. Exod 2:24; 6:4-5; 19:5-6; 24:7-8; 31:16; 34:27-28); temple (11:1-2, 19; 16:17; 3:12; 7:15; 14:15, 17; 15:5-6; 8:3-4; 21:22; cf. Exod 25:8; 25–31; 35–40); and God dwelling among his people (21:3, 7; cf. Exod 25:8; 29:45-46; 40:34-38).

⁸⁷Dumbrell, 167-171; Hafemann, 77.

⁸⁸Terence E. Fretheim, “The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus,” *Interpretation*, 45/4 (1991): 354-365. “When God delivers Israel from bondage to Pharaoh, the people of Israel are reclaimed from the human situation intended in God’s creation. . . . God’s redemptive acts reclaim all that makes for life, including that which is truly human. Redemption is in the service of creation, a creation that God purposes for all” (ibid., 358-359).

⁸⁹See Janzen, 337, 368-370, 423-424.

In keeping with this larger plot and structure, Revelation, too, tells of true communion between God and his people, but pushes the imagery to include how, in the eschatological reclamation, God will reveal his face (22:4). The moral implications of such restored and intimate communion between God and his people are likewise paralleled.⁹⁰

Not surprisingly, and in conjunction with both creation and covenant themes, one finds the Sabbath factoring large in the exodus narrative. In particular, the Sabbath is articulated as the premier “sign command,” linking one’s worship, identity, and moral vision with God as Creator-Redeemer (Exod 31:12, 17; 20:8-11; 35:1-3; cf. 16:22-30).⁹¹ Strategically positioned in the heart of the covenant commands of the Decalogue, the Sabbath functioned theologically and ritually as *the focal* command, representing the whole covenant.⁹² As Adam and Eve’s ruptured relationship with God in Genesis 3 could be deemed a “fall from the Sabbath,” so also the exodus would both symbolize and bring about a return to the Sabbath and all that it meant in terms of God’s ultimate redemptive re-creation.⁹³ Thus the reestablishment of the Sabbath after the exodus parallels the first Sabbath after the sixth day of creation. The link is made explicit in the heart of the covenant commands:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Exod 20:8-11).

There would be a restoring of the same kind of relationship that existed between God and Adam and Eve in the garden.

In keeping with the exodus-envisioned re-creation experience, Deuteronomy’s version of the Sabbath commandment links the seventh-day Sabbath to the existential realities of deliverance:

Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as

⁹⁰Lichtenwalter, “Exodus and Apocalypse.”

⁹¹MacPherson, 270. There are hints that the children of Israel found it hard to keep the Sabbath while in Egypt (Ps 105:34-35; cf. Exod 4:22-23; 5:1, 3, 5; Deut 5:12-15) and that Sabbath was at least part of the reason for the exodus (Exod 5:5; 16:22-30; Deut 5:14-15).

⁹²Ibid. By the postexilic period, the expression “to keep the Sabbath” appears to be an equivalent of “to keep the law.” See Bernard Gosse, “Sabbath, Identity and Universalism Go Together after the Return from Exile,” *JOT* 29/3 (2005): 362-363.

⁹³Dumbrell, 61-81.

well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day (Deut 5:12-15).

With such compelling Sabbath imagery of the exodus in view, one cannot help but wonder how or where Revelation would treat such things in its use of the exodus. Again we ask, why would it be any different in Revelation? If the Sabbath looms so large in the biblical-exodus narrative, from which Revelation so thoroughly draws, wouldn't it be assumed and implied in Revelation itself?

Sabbath and the Exile

Israel's exile to Babylon is the tragic outworking of the exodus covenant promises and curses in the history of God's people (Deut 28–30; cf. Ezek 5:5-17). Within this covenant context, the Sabbath emerges as one of the underlying reasons for both the exile (2 Chron 36:21; Jer 17:21-27; Isa 56:2, 6; 58:13-14; Ezek 20:13, 16, 21, 24; 22:8, 26; Neh 9:1, 16) and the ongoing struggle for fidelity to God afterward (Neh 10:31; 13:15-22; Hos 2:11; Amos 8:5). The prophetic vision of release from Babylon gave promise of the freedom to keep the Sabbath in the worship of the Creator-Redeemer (Isa 66:23; Ezek 44:24; 46:1, 3-4, 12). The eschatological perspective of the coming new creation (and temple) heightened the Sabbath's prominence in the moral/spiritual imagination of a new and faithful generation (Isa 65:17-19; 66:22-23; Ezek 44:24; 45:17; 46:3).

While neither the pre-exilic fathers nor their children had respected the Sabbath (Ezek 20:12-32), there would be a new generation who would (Ezek 46:1, 3-4, 12; Isa 65:17-19; 66:22-23). Respect for the Sabbath would be seen as the difference between these generations and those who returned after the exile.⁹⁴ Respect for the Sabbath would also permit entrance into the house of the Lord, just as its profanation demands exclusion.⁹⁵ This new Sabbath-respecting generation is universalized in that both the eunuch and the foreigner would be included among the people of God (Isa 56:3-8; cf. 56:1-2). The opening-up of access to foreigners is permitted by the very special part played by the Sabbath. Thus Sabbath observance is a primary criterion by which membership would be defined.⁹⁶ The foreigners who join the community are the proselytes who keep the Sabbath. In effect, keeping the Sabbath plays an important part in the constitution and identity of the community during the exile and after the return.⁹⁷

In keeping with this focused identity formation, the Sabbath is linked concretely with acting in a socially responsible manner and is placed in the context of an emergent social vision of compassionate service, social justice,

⁹⁴Gosse, 367.

⁹⁵Ibid., 367, 369.

⁹⁶Ibid., 369.

⁹⁷Ibid., 359-363, 368.

and personal ethics (Isa 58:1–59:15).⁹⁸ The ethical vocabulary in relation to keeping the Sabbath is explicit: the Sabbath and *holiness* are linked.

Ezekiel further nuances the identity-shaping role of the Sabbath, with clear links between the Sabbath and one's relation to God. The Sabbath was the specific and symbolic *sign* (תּוֹטָה—the Greek equivalent is σήμειον) of the covenant relationship by which God sanctified (made holy) his people: “Also I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. . . . Sanctify my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God” (Ezek 20:12, 20). The bridge between the vocabulary of the Sabbath and the vocabulary of the covenant is clear.⁹⁹ Other vocabulary bridges in Ezekiel 20 include links between (1) the Sabbath and a specific identifying *sign*, (2) the Sabbath and *holiness*, (3) the Sabbath and keeping the law (Ezek 20:11, 13, 16, 21, 24), and (4) idolatry and the profanation of the Sabbath (Ezek 20:16, 24, cf. vv. 27-32).

In the envisioned second coming into the promised land (see Ezek 20 and Isa 56:1-2), respect for the Sabbath must make the difference. So much so that “‘to keep the Sabbath’ appears to be an equivalent of ‘keep the law.’”¹⁰⁰ Sabbath is a concrete, observable sign that identifies one's relation to God and the gods (the idolatry of false worship)—whether or not one keeps the Sabbath. Ezekiel (along with Isaiah) follows the exodus paradigm of fall from the Sabbath to the return to the Sabbath in conceptualizing the eschatological new creation and its temple.

⁹⁸See *ibid.*, 359, 361; J. David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 263-270. The context of Isaiah 40–66 is the exile of Judah in Babylon and the period that immediately follows. It deals with the community of renewal and the triumph of hope over desolation. In Isaiah, the Sabbath is linked with acting in a socially responsible manner and it is placed in the context of an emergent social vision in Israel, where community renewal is the triumph of hope over desolations to come. That is why the reference to Sabbath-keeping (Isa 58:13-14) is sandwiched between graphic descriptions of both social and personal moral dysfunction and the call to an entirely different way of being in the world (Isa 58:1-12 and 59:1-10 forming an *inclusio*). An appeal to the Sabbath was especially appropriate in conjunction with exhortations for social justice, because Sabbath observance was to be a reminder of Israel's freedom from bondage and her responsibility to treat her own servants in a humane fashion (cf. Deut 5:12-15). See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., “A Theology of Isaiah,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, Roy B. Zuck, Eugene Merrill, and Darrell Brock (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 336. The two versions of the Sabbath commandment cannot be divorced or played against each other, as both stress social implications and mentions fellow human beings. See Jan Milič Lochman, *Signposts of Freedom: The Ten Commandments and Christian Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 62. That Sabbath-keeping involves compassionate ministry to others was clearly demonstrated in the life of Jesus (Matt 12:10-12; Mark 2:27; John 5:1-20; Luke 13:14-17; 4:16-21; cf. Isa 61:1-6).

⁹⁹Gosse, 363.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 362.

Revelation's concept of end-time Babylon the Great (14:8; 16:19; 17:1-13; 18:1-24) is rooted in the role of ancient Babylon in the OT and the exile experience of God's people. The name "Babylon" is chosen intentionally to disclose the theological connection of type and antitype with Israel's archenemy.¹⁰¹ The historic fall of the Babylonian Empire, as predicted by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, becomes the paradigm of the fall of end-time Babylon. The literary correspondence posits a typological connection between Israel's history and church history.¹⁰² When the connection between the *theological essentials* of both Babylons has been established, the Apocalypse provides the end-time application.¹⁰³ In effect, the moral/spiritual issues surrounding Israel's captivity by ancient Babylon, Babylon's sudden fall, followed by Israel's exodus from Babylon and her return to Zion to restore true worship in a new temple—which includes keeping the Sabbath—will be repeated in principle. God will call his people out of Babylon in the time of the end (Rev 18:4-5). This call is God's initiative to reestablish his remnant church and is part of his redemptive re-creation.

Given the unambiguous creation, covenant, and Sabbath context underlying Israel's exile to Babylon and envisioned second coming into the Promised Land, one would naturally look for these three themes to be evident somewhere in the *theological essentials* that Revelation applies to the crisis of the end. We have already seen how creation/redemptive re-creation and covenant are clearly so. Considering that Ezekiel provides the key theological/ethical backdrop of Revelation's captivity imagery and themes,¹⁰⁴ one would expect

¹⁰¹LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*, 344.

¹⁰²Ibid., 264.

¹⁰³Ibid., 344. "The description of the collapse of end-time Babylon in Revelation is based on the fall of ancient Babylon. This is the sense in which the theological concept of end-time Babylon the great is to be understood in the book of Revelation" (Stefanovic, 447).

¹⁰⁴While John has more than one lead to follow and uses pregnant images and themes from other OT texts, it appears that the primary framework of Revelation's visions is provided by Ezekiel (even more so than Daniel or Exodus). See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 87; Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 74-83; Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16, 17-19, 10* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989). Ezekiel appears to be the dominant influence on nearly twenty major sections of the Apocalypse (throne vision, Revelation 4, cf. Ezekiel 1; the scroll, Revelation 5, cf. Ezekiel 2-3; covenant curses, Rev 6:1-8, cf. Ezekiel 5; slain under the altar, Rev 6:9-11, cf. Ezekiel 6; coming wrath of God, Rev 6:12-7:1, cf. Ezekiel 7; sealing, Rev 7:2-8, cf. Ezekiel 9; scattering of coals, Rev 8:1-5, cf. Ezekiel 10; eating the scroll and no more delay, Revelation 10, cf. Ezekiel 2-3, 12; measuring the temple, Rev 11:1-2, cf. Ezekiel 40-41, 43; Jerusalem and Sodom, Rev 11:8, cf. Ezekiel 16:43-63; cup of wrath, Rev 14:6-12, Ezekiel 23; the Great Harlot, Rev 17:1-6, cf. Ezekiel 16 and 23; laments for Babylon, Rev 18:9-24, cf. Ezekiel 26-27; the birds' supper, Rev 19:17-21, cf. Ezekiel 39; Gog and Magog, Rev 20:7-10, cf. Ezekiel 38; the New Jerusalem/temple, Revelation 21-22; Ezekiel 40-48; the river of life, Rev 22:1f., cf. Ezekiel 47).

the Sabbath (as in Ezekiel 20) to be present also, especially in an identity-defining role.

The Sabbath in Revelation 14:7

At almost the literary center of the Apocalypse, an angel proclaiming the “eternal” gospel calls to all people on earth to recognize their Creator by worshiping him: “Fear God and give glory to him, because the hour of his judgment has come; worship him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water” (14:7). The concentric structure of the book places this call squarely within the book’s theological center, which unfolds the central issues of the final crisis of earth’s history (11:19–15:4).¹⁰⁵ It unfolds a war between the dragon and the remnant people of God (12:17), a war that is fleshed out in more detail in Revelation 13–14. Worship is clearly the central issue (13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11; cf. 9:20; 19:10; 22:8-9). The explicit creation vocabulary at this decisive center-point reflects an overarching creation/covenant motif at play within the literary unit.¹⁰⁶ It is here, at the interpretive apex of Revelation’s chiasmic structure, that the book’s most explicit Sabbath language seems to appear.¹⁰⁷

Creation Motif

Revelation’s call to recognize the Creator by worshiping him reflects an overarching creation/reversal-of-creation motif at play within the unfolding narrative (11:19–15:4).¹⁰⁸ Subtle allusions to Genesis and the fourth-through-

While up to 130 Ezekiel allusions have been found in Revelation, it is the parallels between the substance of whole single units of the Apocalypse and often whole chapters of Ezekiel which makes Ezekiel the most important prophetic influence on the Apocalypse (M. D. Goulder, “The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 343, 348.

¹⁰⁵For discussion of Revelation’s chiasmic structure and 11:19–15:4 as both a literary unit and the book’s theological center, see Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 14-18; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 131; William Shea and Ed Christian, “The Chiasmic Structure of Revelation 12:1–15:4: The Great Controversy Vision,” *AUSS* 38 (2000): 269-292; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 175-176; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 46-48; MacPherson, 271-275; Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4–11* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1996), 573-589, 608; Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” *JATS* 9/1 (1998): 179-186; idem, *The Deep Things of God*, 122-123; Trafton, 10.

¹⁰⁶MacPherson, 280-283; William Shea, “The Controversy over the Commandments in the Central Vision of Revelation,” *JATS* 11/1-2 (2000): 227-229.

¹⁰⁷Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” 183.

¹⁰⁸Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 284; MacPherson, 280-283; Shea, “The Controversy Over the Commandments,” 227-229.

the-seventh days of creation are evident.¹⁰⁹ There is the woman (12:1-2, 5; cf. Gen 3:1-6, 13-16), the serpent (12:3-4, 9; cf. Gen 3:1-6, 13-15), the seed of the woman (12:2, 4, 13; cf. Gen 3:15), the life-and-death conflict between the seed and the serpent (12:4, 7-9, 10-13; cf. Gen 3:15), the enmity between the serpent and the woman (12:4, 6, 13, 15, 17; cf. Gen 3:15). There are the heavens—day four of creation, and, in Revelation, the woman is clothed with the created lights of sun, moon, and stars into which the dragon intrudes (12:1, 3; cf. Gen 1:14-19). There is the sea—day five of creation, which brought forth great sea creatures producing after their own kind (Gen 1:20-23). Now a hybrid and destructive beast rises from the sea (13:1). There is the earth—day six of creation, which brought forth the beasts of the earth and human beings made in the image of God, who are given life by the breath of God and dominion over the earth (Gen 1:24-31). Now a lamb-like, yet demonic beast rises from the earth. An image is created into which life is breathed and life engendered. Dominion marks all with the beast's mark (13:11-17). There is rest—day seven of creation, during which God rests from all his work, forever linking the seventh day with his holy presence and blessing (Gen 2:1-4a). Now there is rest for the commandment-keeping saints who die in the Lord, while those who receive the mark of the beast have “no rest” (14:11, 13).

This creation backdrop highlights the essential nature of the dragon's attack on God and his people. It is decreation—the reversal of creation. The primal serpent disrupts God's original order (12:3, 9), thus challenging the Creator himself (12:3, 7-8; 13:6). His entrance into the earth turns the earthly realm from goodness to utter chaos (12:13; cf. 9:1-2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3, 7-9a). A “satanic trinity” exercises dominion over all the earth, bringing coercive deceit and illusion (13:12-17).¹¹⁰ They contest God's rule as Creator of heaven, earth, and sea.¹¹¹ Their goal is to place their name upon all the inhabitants of the earth. The mark of the beast signifies that all of creation is now under the beast (13:16-17; cf. 13:8).¹¹²

The opening of the heavenly sanctuary at both the beginning and throughout this literary unit (11:19; 15:5), together with the redeemed singing the song of Moses (15:2-4), unfold redemptive re-creation activity, which not only indicates the direction of the unit as a whole, but foreshadows the conclusion of the book of Revelation. This countering of the chaos-engendering reversal of creation is in keeping with the broad biblical theological pattern from which Revelation draws. The call to recognize the Creator by worshiping him (14:7) plays an integral role in this re-creation motif.

Covenant Motif

The forgoing creation/reversal-of-creation narrative is introduced with the most specific covenant language in the Apocalypse: “And the temple of God

¹⁰⁹MacPherson, 283.

¹¹⁰Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 284.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²MacPherson, 282.

which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of his covenant appeared in His temple” (11:19). This clear reference to the covenant (ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ), located in the opened heavenly sanctuary, is an integral part of Revelation’s transition into the last portion of the book, which moves the reader’s vision toward the new creation. This explicit covenant imagery looks both forward and backward in that it encapsulates the heart of everything that has gone before in the vision of the sealed scroll, seven seals, and seven trumpets (4:1–11:18), and it signals what lies behind the issues that unfold ahead (12:1–22:21)—covenant realities.¹¹³ Most immediately, it sets the stage for the appearance of Revelation’s faithful *covenant community* (12:1-2, 5-6, 13-17; 13:7-8, 10; 14:1-5). They appear as the book’s first great sign in heaven: “a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out being in labor and in pain to give birth” (12:1-2). While Revelation 12 covers the whole of the covenant history of the Christian church,¹¹⁴ it begins with the church’s essential identity and continuity with the covenant people of the past. There is only one woman! There is only one dragon! Multiple attacks, yes, but one essential worldview and covenant identity in relation to the Creator-Redeemer. The remnant, against which the dragon vents his frustrated wrath, is the *covenant community* of the final crisis of earth’s history (12:17).

The explicit reference to the “ark of the covenant” highlight the *covenant commands*, i.e., Ten Commandments, which were located in the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 34:28; 26:15; Deut 4:13; 10:1-5; Heb 9:4).¹¹⁵ This allusion to the Decalogue is further nuanced with specific reference to these *covenant*

¹¹³Macpherson, 282, questions the duo-directionality of 11:19, asserting that it is more narrowly focused as the introduction for chaps. 12–15. However, the covenant and sanctuary motifs at play in the throne-room vision, such as the sealed scroll, seals, and trumpets (4:1–11:18), strongly suggest that 11:19 is duo-directional in perspective. See Rev 11:19 as both an introduction to 12:1-17 and a conclusion of 11:15-18 (Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 661).

¹¹⁴LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*, 265.

¹¹⁵The reference to “flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm” is borrowed from language used to describe the celestial manifestations on Mount Sinai surrounding God’s writing of the Ten Commandments with his own finger (Exod 19:16-19). The covenant commandments of God are his specified way of life within the covenant between himself and humankind. It calls people to an ethical way of life, i.e., the wholeness and preservation of one’s relationship with God and with fellow human beings. That God’s covenant and its concrete commands are with humanity as a whole (and not just believers) is implied in the refusal to repent of violating the Decalogue’s concrete moral stipulations by those surviving the corrective judgments of the sixth trumpet (9:20-21), as well as the call to people of all nations, tribes, tongues, and peoples to “fear God and give Him glory” (14:7). If any analogy is intended between “the Ark of the Covenant” and the seven-sealed scroll of Rev 5:1, then the connotation could be that the sealed scroll has to do with a covenantal document consistent with the moral principles of the Ten Commandments (cf. 12:17; 14:12). Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 342; Stefanovic, 367-368.

commands in relation to the end-time *covenant community*: “So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep *the commandments of God* and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (12:17, emphasis supplied); and “Here is the patience of the saints who keep *the commandments of God* and their faith in Jesus” (14:12, emphasis supplied). Revelation is permeated with direct and indirect allusions to the Ten Commandments, affirming their enduring covenantal nature.¹¹⁶ In view of these many allusions, it would be hard to argue that the book’s explicit vocabulary, “the commandments of God” (12:17, 14:12), does not stand for both the Ten Commandments and the law’s characteristic call to obedience (Deut 6:1-2, 5-6; 11:1, 13-14, 22-24). The seventh-day Sabbath would naturally be included in this imagery of the *covenant commands* and the implied covenant faithfulness to those commands.

The prominence that the *covenant commands* play within this reversal of creation/re-creation vision is heightened by the conceptual frame that the heavenly sanctuary scenes of 11:19 and 15:5-8 form around chapters 12–14.¹¹⁷ The heavenly visions of 11:19 and 15:5 form an *inclusio*,¹¹⁸ which highlights the Decalogue as the particular set of commandments at issue in the unfolding conflict.¹¹⁹ This *inclusio* emphasizes the fact that the central dispute over creation/decreation and covenant faithfulness is related in particular to the Ten Commandments.¹²⁰ The implication is that the call to worship the Creator God involves at least one of the commandments, if not the

¹¹⁶References that allude specific commandments include the second, “worshiping idols” (9:20; cf. 21:8; 22:15); the third, “have not denied my name” (3:8; cf. 21:8), blasphemies against God” (13:6); the fourth, Lord’s day (1:10); the sixth, “murderers” and “liars” (21:8, 27; 22:18); the tenth, “fruit you long for” (18:14). See MacCarty, 199-200. That these *covenant commands* are for humanity as a whole (and not just believers) is implied in the refusal to repent of violating its concrete moral stipulations by those surviving the corrective judgments of the sixth trumpet (9:20-21). The commandments of God are his specified way of life within the covenant between himself and humankind. It calls people to an ethical way of life, i.e., the wholeness and preservation of one’s relationship with God and fellow human beings.

¹¹⁷“Both passages are set in the Most Holy Place, and both include manifestations of the glory of God that recall the giving of the law at Mount Sinai” (MacPherson, 273). Both refer to the heavenly sanctuary as being opened. Both imply the presence of the covenant commands of the Decalogue. The heavenly temple is referred to as “the dwelling of the testimony” because the law of God was located in the Most Holy Place of the OT tabernacle (Exod 30:26; 31:7; 32:15; 38:21; 40:21; Deut 10:5). See MacCarty, 201; Stefanovic, 479.

¹¹⁸While one could argue for chiasmic structure here, the simpler and more easily defined principle of *inclusio* is used, in which materials included between the brackets must be interpreted as influenced by the enclosing ideas.

¹¹⁹MacPherson, 275; Müller, 608-609.

¹²⁰Shea, 229. This is in keeping with the link between law and reclamation of creation in the exodus. See Fretheim, 362-363.

commandments as a whole. The interpretive import of this *inclusio* is that the call to worship the Creator is framed by references to the “commandments of God,” which, in turn, are framed by explicit *covenant commands* focused on sanctuary imagery.

11:19—Ark of the Covenant: Sanctuary Scene plus Covenant Commands

12:17—Keep the Commandments of God and Testimony of Jesus

14:7—Worship the Creator

14:12—Keep the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus

15:5-8—Temple of the Tent of the Testimony: Sanctuary Scene plus Covenant Commands¹²¹

Sabbath Commandment

It is within this *covenant-commands* framework that explicit Sabbath language seems to emerge: “worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (14:7). Within the broader context of creation-reversal taking place within this narrative portion of Revelation (12–14), these words assert the Creator’s sole sovereignty in those creation realms in which the “satanic trinity” has intruded and brought chaos, i.e., heaven (12:3), earth (13:11), and sea (13:1).¹²² In the wider context, the words transport the reader back to the Genesis creation accounts. But given the immediate *covenant-commands* context, the verbal and thematic parallels with the fourth commandment are forceful. The words “made the heaven and the earth and sea” are fourth-commandment expressions (Exod 20:11),¹²³ suggesting strongly that Revelation has in view the seventh-day Sabbath.¹²⁴ The implication is that when Revelation describes heaven’s final appeal to the human race in the context of earth’s final crisis, “it does so in terms of a call to worship the Creator in the context of the fourth commandment.”¹²⁵ Again the interpretive import of the *inclusio* highlights the implications:

¹²¹Abridged and adapted from Shea, 217.

¹²²Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 284.

¹²³Exod 20:11 is not the only passage within which these words are found and in the same order. In Rev 10:6, the same words are used and in the same order, but with expansion (“who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it”), although the word κτίζω (“created”) is used rather than ποιέω (“made”). Ps 146:6 contains virtually identical language in the LXX. Thematic links to creation in each are obvious; however, the exodus and *covenant-commands* backdrop nuancing Rev 10:6, along with the creation-reversal, redemptive re-creation motif, points strongly to the Sabbath of creation, not just a general reference to the Creator as such. Cf. Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” 183-184.

¹²⁴The UBS’s third edition of the scholarly Greek text indicates in the margin that these words are an allusion to Exod 20:11, the fourth commandment.

¹²⁵Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” 185.

- 11:19—Ark of the Covenant: Sanctuary Scene plus Covenant Commands
 12:17—Keep the Commandments of God and Testimony of Jesus
 14:7—Worship the Creator in the context of the Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment
 14:12—Keep the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus
 15:5-8—Temple of the Tent of the Testimony: Sanctuary Scene plus Covenant Commands

The verbal and thematic parallels between Rev 14:7 and Exod 20:11 are both intentional and pregnant with implications regarding not only the Sabbath in particular, but in the enduring biblical triad of creation, covenant, and Sabbath in relation to the Creator-Redeemer and his envisioned redemptive re-creation. In effect, they underline the unique role that the Sabbath has consistently held both within the biblical scheme of things and, more specifically, within the *covenant commands*.

As the *inclusio* strongly suggests, while the *covenant community* is characterized as those who “keep the commandments of God (12:17, 14:12), the issue is not just any commandment of God. It is the seventh-day Sabbath in particular that is in view. This is in keeping with the creation/covenant worldview from which Revelation draws its understanding of moral/spiritual reality and the issues at play. More concretely, Revelation’s underlying exodus and Ezekiel themes further nuance the meaning of the language.¹²⁶ In both the books of Exodus and Ezekiel, the Sabbath is articulated as the premier “sign command” linking one’s worship, identity, and moral vision with God as Creator-Redeemer (Exod 31:12, 17; 20:8-11; 35:1-3; cf. 16:22-30; Ezek 20:12, 20).¹²⁷ Strategically positioned in the heart of the *covenant commands* of the Decalogue, the Sabbath functioned theologically and ritually as *the focal* command representing the whole covenant.¹²⁸ As there was a “fall from the Sabbath,” with its attending reversal of creation, there must be a “return to the Sabbath” and all that it means in terms of the worship of God and God’s ultimate redemptive re-creation.¹²⁹ “Keeping the Sabbath” and “keeping the commandments” were always synonymous.¹³⁰ In Scripture, the Sabbath has always been a concrete, observable sign, which identifies one’s relation to God and the gods (the idolatry of false worship). Not surprisingly, Revelation appears to display this consistent biblical pattern.

The *covenant commands*, so prominently placed in Revelation’s narrative, further suggest that the creation reversal therein includes rebellion against God’s covenant law. Within the narrative, the forces of chaos threatening to undo God’s creation subvert the very principles that promote and protect

¹²⁶Both of which are present in Revelation 12–14.

¹²⁷MacPherson, 270.

¹²⁸Ibid. See Gosse, 362-363. This reflects both the theological and ritual aspects of worldview as noted above.

¹²⁹Hafemann, 61-81.

¹³⁰Gosse, 362.

the life and well-being of the community.¹³¹ Their anticreational actions tear at right relationships with God, humanity, and all creation (cf. 9:21; 21:8, 27; 22:15; 11:18).¹³² They create their own culture and their own worldview (13:11-17; cf. 18:1-19). God's objective, then, in both the "everlasting gospel" (i.e., redemption, 14:6) and the *covenant commands* (14:7; cf. 14:12, 12:17) is the reclamation of creation. Thus the thrust of the narrative is as ethical as it is theological—and certainly not abstract in the least.

In this setting, heaven's call to worship becomes the focusing reality.¹³³ The matter of worship comes to a head with the demand to worship the beast (13:4, 8, 12, 15; cf. 14:9-11). Thus worship becomes the very heart of Revelation's solemn appeal. Do not worship the beast or his image (14:9-11); rather, worship the Creator (14:7).

Not surprisingly various facets of worship come into view: confession (who and how one worships), character (who one is, i.e., *being*), and conduct.¹³⁴ The anticreation forces demand that they be worshiped. They prescribe how that worship is to be (13:14-17). There is an ethic to go with that worship (9:20-21; 18:4-5; 21:8; 22:19). The narrative's parallels with Daniel 7 reveal how divine time and laws are changed and truth is flung to the ground (Dan 7:25; 8:9-14). These Danielic parallels reveal the essential continuity of experience among the covenant people of God throughout history with regard to the religious and moral issues evident as they face the question of ultimate loyalties.¹³⁵ The laws that the anticreational powers enforce become sign commandments and tests of loyalty and allegiance. This sign of loyalty is ritualized in a "mark" placed on the hand or forehead (13:16-17). In the end,

¹³¹For discussion on the link between redemption, law, and the reclamation of creation, see Walter Brueggemann, Bruce Birch, Terrence E. Fretheim, and David Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 158; Dempsey, 29-30, 42-45; Fretheim, 357-360.

¹³²Within the immediate context, these anticreational actions include deceit (12:9; 13:14), accusation (12:10), persecution (12:13; 13:7), arrogant words (13:5), manipulating power (13:12-14), blasphemy against God and his name (13:6), the introduction of an idolatrous image (13:14-15), coercive economics (13:17), and murder (13:10, 15).

¹³³The idea of worship constantly emerges as a central theme of Revelation, esp. so in chaps. 12–14. There is no book of the NT in which worship figures so prominently, provides so much imagery, and is so fundamental to its purpose and message as the book of Revelation. The ultimate goal of Revelation's message is to inspire the worship of God (14:7; 19:10; 22:9). See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1129; Marianne Meye Thompson, "Worship in the Book of Revelation," *Ex Auditu* 8 (1992): 45.

¹³⁴Michael R. Weed, "Worship and Ethics: Confession, Character, and Conduct," *Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 47.

¹³⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 680-730; LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*, 291-320.

such worship forms character and determines conduct that further plunges the world into chaos (cf. 9:20-21; Ps 115:1-8).¹³⁶

Images of true worship are clear. It is the Holy Creator alone who is to be worshiped (14:7). Accordingly, the covenant community would reflect his character and way of being in the world (14:1-5). There is an ethic to go with it (12:17; 14:12), ritualized in the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath (14:7). This implies that, at its heart, the ritualizing element of the “mark” is “anti-Sabbath.”¹³⁷ The “mark of the beast” is a parody or substitution of the seventh-day Sabbath, the sign commandment of God’s covenant. It both imitates and seeks to replace the Sabbath. In such a contentious context (and the envisioned eschatological Babylon), God’s covenant community will undoubtedly find it hard to keep Sabbath. Such obedience will demand virtues of “keeping,” “perseverance,” and “faith” (12:17; 13:10; 14:12).¹³⁸ The seventh-day Sabbath will be a key reason for the second exodus—“Come out of her, My people” (18:4; 14:6-12).

At this point, the question is naturally asked, “Why the Sabbath?” Why not just any commandment? What does the Sabbath intend? What would the mark reverse?

The Sabbath as a biblical sign (Exod 31:12-17; Ezek 20:12, 20) and the mark as sign (13:16-17) reveals differences between the respective characters and the reign of God and of Satan. The Sabbath ultimately points beyond creation and any created entity to God himself—the holy Creator¹³⁹ and holy Redeemer (Isa 41:15; 47:4). As already noted above, the seventh-day Sabbath and holiness are linked. As such, the Sabbath plunges human beings into the midst of what comprises the nature of biblical holiness and what it means to be in covenant relationship with God and others. The seventh-day

¹³⁶Worship is a constitutive act. Worship and ethics are inescapably related. Confession, character, and conduct profoundly connect in worship, each impacting the others. We become what we worship. See G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008); Miroslav Volf, “Worship as Adoration and Action: Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World,” in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 207; Weed, 47.

¹³⁷MacPherson, 278-280.

¹³⁸ὑπομονή (“patient endurance, steadfastness, perseverance”) is a key ethical term in the Apocalypse (1:9; 2:2-3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). In this decisive worship context, it is defined together with τηρέω in terms of ethical requirements, as well as in terms of maintaining loyalty or allegiance to Jesus, i.e., “their faith in Jesus” (14:12). Worship is characterized by obedience to God in keeping his commandments (14:12; cf. 12:17). See Osborne, 543.

¹³⁹God’s holiness points to his uniqueness as Creator and to moral and ethical concerns of the Godhead. God’s holiness points to his nearness, as well as his distance to humanity, and is ultimately manifested for the purpose of saving sinful creatures. See Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Spanning the Abyss: How the Atonement Brings God and Humanity Together* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), 17-19.

Sabbath was formed and filled with the holy presence of God (Gen 2:1-4a). It is holy because God fills it with his holy presence. It is not just a day, but a holy Person that is in view. The Sabbath is about the very presence of God; it is about God's holiness in action,¹⁴⁰ and it implies the holiness of men and women.¹⁴¹ The seventh-day Sabbath has an irrefutable, implicit social dimension.¹⁴² It plays an important part in the constitution and identity of God's covenant community.¹⁴³ It is linked concretely with acting in a socially responsible manner and is placed in the context of an emergent social vision of compassionate service, social justice, and personal ethics (Isa 58:1-59:15).¹⁴⁴ The Sabbath serves as a hinge commandment, pointing in two directions (toward God and toward one's neighbor) and, at the same time, fundamentally linking them.¹⁴⁵

In contrast to the mark, which plunges one into the fallenness and apostasy that Revelation envisions (18:4-5), and the book's clear link between idolatry and moral chaos (cf. 9:20-21), the seventh-day Sabbath reminds

¹⁴⁰Moskala, 64.

¹⁴¹Jacques B. Doukhan, "Loving the Sabbath as a Christian: A Seventh-day Adventist Perspective," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Tara C. Akenasi, and William H. Shea (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 156.

¹⁴²Moskala, 64.

¹⁴³Gosse, 359-363, 368.

¹⁴⁴See *ibid.*, 359, 361; Pleins, 263-270. See Zuck, 336.

¹⁴⁵The principle of indivisible unity of the *covenant commands* is evinced in the Sabbath commandment. It is not insignificant that within the Decalogue, the Sabbath commandment's placement is the symbolic link between the divine-human relationship (Exod 20:4-11) and the human way of life, which is further addressed in the following six commands (Exod 20:12-17). The Sabbath command takes the most space of any of the ten in the two tablets. It is the only command that mentions both God and neighbor together. See Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Restless Until We Rest in God: The Fourth Commandment as Test Case in Christian 'Plain Sense' Interpretation," in *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 223; Lochman, 67; Susan Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 73. The indivisible unity of the covenant commands is likewise illustrated in the imagery of the sixth trumpet, which links the cults of paganism ("idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood") with murders, sorceries, immorality, and thefts as an expression of the rebellion of humankind against the rule of God the Creator (9:20-21). False worship and immorality are closely linked. V. 20 focuses on sins directed against God (the first four of the Ten Commandments, Exod 20:1-11). V. 21 directs our attention to sins directed against other human beings (the last six of the Ten Commandments, Exod 20:12-17). When human beings worship images (idols), they demonstrate disrespect for the true image of God—their fellow human beings (Gen 1:26-27). No matter one's interpretation of the sixth seal, the bottom-line issue is the matter of worship and ethics. The stark note of moral reality coming at the close of grotesque symbolic imagery further highlights the tangible realities of worship as ethical practice and conduct.

human beings of the “creation power” in divine holiness.¹⁴⁶ Those who observe the Sabbath participate in God’s holiness; through divine grace and the Holy Spirit’s empowerment, they are strengthened and transformed so that they can bring God’s holy presence into real life and perform creative moral/spiritual work as new creatures in Christ (Heb 6:4-5; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 5:16-24; Eph 3:16). Such is implied in the vision of the 144,000, who have the Lamb and the Father’s name in their foreheads and whose moral lives are blameless (14:1-5).¹⁴⁷ They both think and act like their holy Creator (1 Cor 2:10-16; Phil 2:5). Through divine grace, they experience, express, and proclaim the present hope of redemptive re-creation, which God alone can bring in the midst of Revelation’s formidable and encapsulating creation-reversing realities.¹⁴⁸

The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day in Revelation 1:10

There is little doubt that Revelation’s initial vision of the risen Christ, which 1:10 introduces, is fundamental to the rest of the book.¹⁴⁹ In keeping with the book’s narrative character, it is a focusing vision that unfolds themes and prepares one for understanding what lies ahead. Working from the presupposition that the book of Revelation is a literary and thematic unity, the significance of the phrase ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ (“the Lord’s Day”) in Rev 1:10 must be viewed from its context in the whole book,¹⁵⁰ as well as its serving as a marker, which alerts the thoughtful reader to critical issues to come.¹⁵¹

In its immediate setting, the verse completes the description of 1:9, in which John tells the story of why he was at Patmos and how he shares his reader’s situation of faithful witness under trial. Evidently, it was important for John to make three basic statements before he described his first vision. He defines the specific place where he received the heavenly visions (“I . . . was on the island called Patmos). He gives the reason for his stay on the island of Patmos (“because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus”). Finally, he establishes a temporal connection by defining a specific day when he heard the loud voice behind him (“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”). The vast

¹⁴⁶Moskala, 65.

¹⁴⁷The juxtaposition of the 144,000 and the call to worship the Creator in the context of the fourth commandment—within the covenant commands *inclusio* (12:17 and 14:12)—imply their relationship.

¹⁴⁸Revelation does not envision perfectionism, but rather transformation of life and thought—conversion—through the “eternal gospel” (12:11; 14:7). See Larry L. Lichtenwalter, “Worldview Transformation and Mission: Narrative, Theology, and Ritual in John’s Apocalypse,” *JATS* 21/1-2 (2010): 211-244.

¹⁴⁹Richard J. Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” in *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 241. Barr, 37.

¹⁵⁰Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” 240.

¹⁵¹Frey, “The Theological Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” 238.

majority of commentaries interpret the phrase “the Lord’s day” as a reference to Sunday, the day when the churches met for corporate worship and on the same day would read the book of Revelation.¹⁵² In so doing, they tacitly affirm the essential historical and temporal nature of both the text and the day referred to, i.e., the vision took place on a specific day. “The Lord’s day” was the day on which John’s first vision took place. While part of the narrative, it is not part of the vision itself.¹⁵³

The Greek phrase ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ is unique in its form and its meaning is debated. Among the options considered—the eschatological day of the Lord, Easter Sunday, the Emperor’s Day, Sunday, or the biblical Sabbath—Sunday is usually selected for two reasons: because of (1) the temporal implications of the text itself; and (2) the external witness of emergent Christian tradition, which ultimately would link ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ with the first day of the week.¹⁵⁴

Naturally, the question arises, though: Does one work backward (and thus externally) from developments in Christian history to the text and its meaning—assuming such emerging tradition is faith-positive and in no way evidences creation-reversal compromise and/or apostasy already at work within the church or history?¹⁵⁵ Or does one work forward (and internally)

¹⁵²For examples and discussion, see Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 84; Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” 240-246; A. T. Lincoln, “From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” in *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 382-384; Osborne, 83-84; Smalley, 51; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 91.

¹⁵³Discussions suggesting that John’s being “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” was essentially an ecstatic visionary phenomenon in keeping with similar “in the Spirit” experiences later in the book (4:2; 17:3; 21:10) miss the subtle difference between the passages in question. There is a fundamental temporal/spatial difference between John’s first vision experience and the following three. John received the vision *on* the Lord’s day rather than being *brought into* or *taken to* the Lord’s day. In each of the following occurrences, John was transported elsewhere; i.e., into the throne room, into the wilderness, or onto a high mountain. Given the narrative character of the introductory information preceding John’s first vision one can conclude these subsequent “in the Spirit” experiences likewise took place on the same Lord’s day.

¹⁵⁴Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” 221-250. Lincoln, 383-384, asserts that “the Lord’s Day is the designation for Sunday rather than the eschatological day of the Lord, Easter, or the Sabbath, Bauckham has convincingly argued.” Given the unambiguous evidence from the second half of the second century, it “is highly unlikely that John writing to the churches of the province of Asia at the end of the first century would use κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ (‘the Lord’s day’) to mean some different day.” Thus “Rev 1:10 provides evidence from the NT that by this time, at least in the churches in Asia Minor, the first day of the week had become regularly observed in the Christian church and was distinctive enough to be graced with the title of the Lord’s Day.”

¹⁵⁵Both Bauckham and Lincoln build their case for Sunday as the Lord’s day primarily from second-century usage, working backward and externally to the text,

from the text within the book of Revelation itself in order to discover its contextual, intertextual, and theological origins, and only afterward move outwardly to emerging traditions in Christian history in order to discover the text's meaning in relation to those traditions?

Following the latter methodology plunges one immediately into the compelling creation/covenant/Sabbath drama unfolding within the larger narrative—suggesting that it is within this context that “the Lord’s day” must be understood. Even so, one must begin with the immediate context and vision to observe if similar themes are indeed present.

The creation/re-creation covenant motifs within John’s first vision are subtle but nevertheless evident, such as the “Tree of Life” (2:7); “the paradise of God” (2:7); numerous exodus images (1:10; 3:14, 17); images of pre-exilic idolatry (2:20); and explicit eschatological sanctuary imagery (2:12-16; 3:1, 12). Four designations of Christ in particular highlight the underlying creation/covenant motifs: “the faithful and true witness” (3:14), the “Beginning of the creation of God” (3:14), “the first and the last” (1:17; 2:8), and “the living one” (1:17). As holy Creator, Jesus is the First—he is also the Last (cf. 21:5-6; 22:13; 1:8). He is the Omega-Consummator, who not only initiates creation, but also consummates it in redemptive re-creation (2:7; 3:12, 21; 21:1–22:5; cf. 5:6-10, 13). Jesus is likewise faithful to his creation (the seven hurting churches of Asia Minor, his people along the way, and the world at its close). As an allusion to the Sinai covenant and the loud trumpet sound when God spoke the ten *covenant commands* (Exod 19:16, 19), the description of a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet places the entire book of Revelation into a covenant context (1:10).¹⁵⁶

Surprisingly, John’s self-identity as a “fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus” (1:9) not only connects with the creation-reversing realities already experienced by the seven churches in the first century, but thrusts the reader forward thematically into the deeper anticreational conflict that lay on the horizon for both the churches and the *eschaton* (12–14). The word “perseverance” (ὑπομονή) links one thematically

assuming that such usage reflects positive traditions emerging within the Christian community rather than any consideration of possible compromise or apostasy already at work within the church by that time. Christian tradition thus determines their exegesis and ensuing theology. For Bauckham, as a technical term, the meaning of “the Lord’s day” must be the same as that of the phrase used in the second-century Christian literature. Sabbath or the eschatological day of the Lord are thus discounted (Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” 227). He asserts that, given second-century usage, the very title makes it clear that the Lord’s day was the regular and most significant day on which John’s churches gathered for worship (*ibid.*, 245). John “receives his visions on the day when the churches meet for corporate worship and on the same day his prophecy will be read aloud (1:3) in the church meeting” (*ibid.*, 240-241). Little or no attention is given to the Sabbath as an option, i.e., either to the unambiguous allusion to the fourth commandment in 14:7 or to other Sabbath-oriented nuances within the text of Revelation as a whole (e.g., language, structure, chiasms, themes).

¹⁵⁶Frey, “The Theological Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” 232.

to the future call to perseverance in keeping the *covenant commands* (14:12; 12:17; cf. 13:10). The word “kingdom” (βασιλεία) encompasses the creation/covenant/Sabbath realities of God’s sovereign rule over the world and his control of its history.¹⁵⁷ It also connects thematically and personally with the true Lord of “the Lord’s day” (1:10). There is the Lord’s sovereign reign—both rule and realm (1:5; 5:11-13). There is the vision of the Lord’s consummation of that reign and the ultimate possession of the world (11:15). There is the Lord himself—“Lord of lords and King of kings” (17:14; cf. 19:16). There on the horizon are the Kingdom city and the Kingdom people (2:7; 3:12; 20:9; 21:1–22:5; 19:7-9). Finally, and purposefully prominent in this inaugural narrative vision, there is *the day* that celebrates and symbolizes that the Creator alone is Lord.¹⁵⁸ This can be none other than the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment!¹⁵⁹

The interpretation of “the Lord’s day” as the seventh-day Sabbath is put forth not only by the creation/covenant themes within this opening vision and larger context of the book of Revelation, but also by the larger biblical witness. The OT designates the seventh-day Sabbath as “my holy day,” “the holy day of the Lord,” “the Sabbath of the Lord” (Isa 58:13; cf. Exod 16:23; 20:10). The expression “the Lord’s day” sounds similar to Jesus’ words in all three of the Synoptic Gospels—“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt 12:8; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 6:5).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷For a discussion of the book of Genesis as kingdom prologue in relation to Revelation’s final consummation and the foundations of God’s covenantally administered kingdom in relation to both creation and the Sabbath, see Kline, 34-38, 42-61, 215.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 81.

¹⁵⁹While Baukham also argues that the issue of divine sovereignty is a central theme of the Apocalypse, he builds the case for the lordship of Jesus Christ on both his faithful witness until death and the vindication of that witness in the resurrection. Thus John associates the choice of this day with Jesus’ resurrection on the first day of the week (“The Lord’s Day,” 241-244). In doing so, he forgets that both within the biblical witness as a whole and the Apocalypse in particular, the hope of resurrection is dependent on the creative possibilities of the covenant Creator (idem, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 48, 51). Creation precedes resurrection, and resurrection is an act of redemptive re-creation. It is the seventh-day Sabbath that points to the creation power evident in the resurrection of Christ and holds out the promise of final resurrection in the end (20:4-5, 13; cf. 2:8; 1:17). In this light, focus on Sunday would essentially undermine the larger vision of Christ as Creator-Redeemer in light of the final consummation. Linking resurrection to Sunday dismisses the continuity of God’s acts and purposes in history. The resurrection of Christ does not stand out in isolation or independence from creation.

¹⁶⁰Frey, “The Theological Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” 230. The NT consistently refers to Sunday as the “first day of the week” (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). The Gospel of John, which is dated later than the book of Revelation, likewise refers to Sunday as “the first day of the week.” It would be inconsistent if “the Lord’s day” meant Sunday in the Apocalypse.

The reference, then, to the Lord's day is clearly intentional, serving as a marker that alerts the thoughtful reader to critical issues to come.¹⁶¹ Symbolic to some degree, its real meaning unfolds within the book. It is probable that John purposefully used this terminology in light of developments, which the Spirit enabled him to see already happening in the church. If indeed "the Lord's day" points to the seventh-day Sabbath against growing pressures developing toward abandonment of the Sabbath for the first day of the week, it would highlight the crucial issues through history, especially in regard to the end-time. Is it possible that if the language of the Lord's day was already beginning by John's day among a compromising element within the church, that he purposefully put a biblical twist to the terminology in order to firmly anchor the truth of the seventh-day Sabbath in both history and the *eschaton*? Or is it possible that the second-century usage of the terminology reflects a twist put on it by an already compromising element within the church?

Sabbath Language

Sabbath language can be identified in Revelation's frequent use of the number seven, as well as by the word "rest." The number seven has had symbolic value from the most remote times.¹⁶² The number seven occurs eighty-eight times in the NT, fifty-six of which are in the Apocalypse. There are seven menorahs, seven stars, seven seals, seven spirits, seven angels, seven plagues, seven horns, and seven mountains. There are seven churches, seven blessings, seven sanctuary introductory scenes, and seven promises of Christ's coming. In its very structure, Revelation is molded around the number seven.¹⁶³ Seven is the biblical number of completeness and fullness.

The biblical link between the number seven and the seventh-day Sabbath is clear (Exod 20:8-11). The Genesis creation narrative presents God as "the Sabbatarian Creator" and "a Sabbatarian Consummator" (Gen 2:1-4a; cf. Mark 2:27; Rev 21:1-8).¹⁶⁴ The number seven is woven into the creation account, symbolizing completeness and fullness of God's good creation. Accordingly, human life was to have a sabbatical structure.¹⁶⁵ The frequent use of the number seven as the number of completeness and fullness implies that the seventh-day Sabbath was paradigmatically used as a theological concept for the entire book of Revelation. The number seven nuances the creation/covenant motifs found within the book.

Likewise, Revelation's concept of "rest" further suggests that the seventh-day Sabbath rest and Sabbath consummation are underlying themes of the

¹⁶¹Ibid., 238.

¹⁶²Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 27.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Kline, 33, 40, 78.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 78.

book.¹⁶⁶ The verb ἀναπαύω (6:11; 14:13—“to give relief, refresh, rest, relax”) and the noun ἀνάπαυσις (4:8; 14:11—“relief, rest, resting-place, ceasing, stopping”) are each used twice. These words “are commonly employed in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *shabat*.”¹⁶⁷ While no theological implications seem to be at play in 4:8, the other three places are of interest.¹⁶⁸ On one hand, the death of God’s faithful people is described as resting “for a little while” or resting “from their labors; for their works follow them” (6:11; 13). On the other hand, those who have rejected and resisted the gospel “do not have rest day and night” (14:11). Given the creation/decreation covenant commands and the specific fourth-commandment, seventh-day Sabbath imagery already at play in chapters 12–14, the juxtaposition created in 14:11-13 between the horrendous fate of worshipers of the beast and its image who “have no rest, day or night” and the blessed dead in the Lord who “rest from their labors,” the presence of intentional Sabbath-language becomes unmistakable.¹⁶⁹

The threat that the worshipers of the beast and his image will never rest echoes the declaration made to rebellious Israel regarding its rest in the Promised Land: “Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest” (Ps 95:11). This is instructive. The epistle to the Hebrews picks up this theme of rest/no rest with soteriological and eschatological purpose in relation to the seventh-day Sabbath (Heb 4:3-6), where it asserts: “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience” (Heb 4:9-11).¹⁷⁰ Here the ultimate or antitypical rest in Christ awaits the believer at the end of time. It is a rest compared to the Sabbath rest of God in Gen 2:2 (cf. Heb 4:3-6). It is a rest that the Canaan rest pointed toward (Heb 4:8-10). The Sabbath rest initiated by God on the seventh-day of creation is the archetype of what rest is all about. There are strong implications in the text that both the writer and the reader were keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and that they could think of heaven as one extended Sabbath rest.¹⁷¹

Parallel soteriological and eschatological purpose of the use of rest in relation to the seventh-day Sabbath is found in Revelation. In Revelation, the

¹⁶⁶Frey, “The Theological Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” 235.

¹⁶⁷Robert M. Johnston, “The Eschatological Sabbath in John’s Apocalypse,” *AUSS* 25/1 (1987): 46.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰David A. deSilva, “Entering God’s Rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews,” *Trinity Journal* 21/1 (2000): 25-40; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, ed. C. Clifton Black (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 122-130; George R. Knight, *Exploring Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 72-76.

¹⁷¹Knight, 75-76.

final attainment of rest by the people of God will be a participation in God's seventh-day of creation—his everlasting Sabbath—to be revealed upon the re-creation of heaven and earth with the subsequent enthronement of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (21:5, 22f.; 22:1-3).¹⁷² Sabbatical eternity is an underlying theme in the book.¹⁷³

Summary and Conclusion

This study shows how the seventh-day Sabbath is both a tacit concern and an underlying theological concept with regard to Revelation's worldview of covenant in relation to creation and redemptive re-creation. It demonstrates how Revelation places the Sabbath in the context of the entire biblical message and addresses the theological and historical issues of the Sabbath with respect to the fundamental end-time crisis of humanity in relation to the covenant Creator. The biblical triad of creation, covenant, and Sabbath in relation to the Creator-Redeemer and his envisioned redemptive re-creation is an enduring one. The triad posits continuity in history and reflects a biblical historicism that posits enduring themes within the creation/creation-reversal conflict throughout history. It reveals how redemption, in effect, is in the service of creation.¹⁷⁴ It also makes evident that the theology of the Sabbath is inextricably linked with the theology of the Sabbath within the larger biblical canon. Any discussion of the Sabbath in the book must take place against that broader conceptual canvas.

A covenant/creation bridge exists between the OT (Genesis) and the NT (Revelation) in that Revelation not only parallels Genesis, but also fulfills, completes, and perfects God's creation into redemptive re-creation and the Sabbath in the eternal rest of God. The parallels between the two books include the issues and events of the last things on earth, including creation and the restoration of creation as an eschatological reality. These issues touch on human moral orientation and behavior in relation to the Holy Creator and have a constitutive impact both for the individual and the community. The Sabbath provides both a tangible and symbolic connecting link with these fundamental theological and ethical realities.

Given the narrative, ritual, and theological roles that the Sabbath plays within Revelation's worldview in terms of conveying prophetic-theological-ethical truth regarding creation and covenant, is it merely a metaphor? In the end, do we really need to "keep the Sabbath"?¹⁷⁵ The answer is Yes! Why? Because the Sabbath is one of the *covenant commands* that Revelation asserts the saints will, literally, *keep* (12:17; 14:12). In keeping the Sabbath, one participates in an observable sign that both shapes one's self-identity and demonstrates

¹⁷²Kline, 37.

¹⁷³Johnston, 50.

¹⁷⁴Fretheim, 359.

¹⁷⁵The question is an important one. Hafemann, 221, who outlines so eloquently how the fundamental issue of redemptive re-creation is a return to Sabbath, essentially abandons it as a reality for the believer in Christ.

one's relation to God, who alone is holy (14:1, 7; Exod 31:12-17; Ezek 20:12, 20). The Sabbath is not just an idea, but also a temporal reality—a real day rooted in creation past from which theological and moral meaning is drawn (1:10, Gen 2:1-4a; Exod 20:8-11). Scripture affirms that the renewed creation will worship the Creator from one Sabbath to another (21:5; cf. Isa 66:22-23). Both the weekly and the eschatological Sabbath stand side by side in John's own experience and within his vision of the conflict of the ages and the sabbatical consummation. The vision of the Sabbath consummation affirms weekly rest.

Having shown that the Sabbath is present as a tacit concern and underlying theological theme in Revelation, it still remains that the word "Sabbath" is never mentioned in the book. Thus the question remains: Why would it not be so clearly named? What is there about the Sabbath in Revelation that one does not even need to make it clear, let alone mention it? What theological reason would there be for it? Does absence of the word "Sabbath" in the book of Revelation speak compellingly for its presence? When we scrutinize the text for traces of the Sabbath, are we doing what the author made us do? What God wants us to do? Does Revelation use the perceived absence of the Sabbath as a way to bring us more deeply into the heart of the cosmic conflict? Would one's search for the Sabbath in the book serve to bring them into deeper relationship with the Creator himself?

It is evident that Sabbath fingerprints are on nearly every page of Revelation. Perhaps that is enough. Perhaps the very ambiguity has something to do with the meaning of the words "here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus" (14:12). It is likely that John's first readers would have still been keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.¹⁷⁶ Yet powerful forces may have already been at play to undermine such keeping and confuse the real issues. That is why, in the end, the question of the Sabbath is never about the Sabbath itself. It is about the Lord of the Sabbath. It is about our holy Creator—a Sabbatarian Creator, a Sabbath-giving Creator, and the Sabbatarian Consummation Creator.

¹⁷⁶Massyngberde Ford, 384.