

**THE SABBATH IN THE PENTATEUCH: AN
EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY**

Name of researcher: Mathilde Frey
Name of adviser: Roy E. Gane, Ph.D.
Date completed: March 2011

Many studies have explored the seventh-day Sabbath in the Pentateuch from historical-critical, theological, and historical perspectives. However, systematic contextual exegesis and a close reading of the pentateuchal Sabbath texts have been neglected. This dissertation investigates literary features of these passages in their respective contexts and develops an integrated Sabbath theology from the viewpoint of the Pentateuch as a whole.

In chapter 1, an overview of literature on the biblical Sabbath introduces the topic and describes the methodology of the study. Chapters 2-5 explore specific contextual, stylistic, and linguistic elements of the pentateuchal Sabbath pericopes that contribute to the expression of their theological concepts. Chapter 2 analyzes the creation Sabbath (Gen 2:1-3). Chapter 3 investigates other narrative passages involving the Sabbath (Exod 16:1-36 and Num 15:32-36). Chapter 4 examines Sabbath laws (Exod 20:8-11; 23:12; 34:21; Deut 5:12-15). Chapter 5 focuses on the Sabbath in the context of the sanctuary (Exod 31:12-17; 35:2-3; Lev 23:3; 24:5-9; Num 28:9-10). In chapter 6, a summary of the various literary features of the Sabbath texts and their interrelatedness leads to a synthesis of theological aspects of the Sabbath. Chapter 7 presents the overall results of the study.

The Sabbath encapsulates and reveals God's presence in the world, regardless of its nature and condition. The Sabbath was introduced by divine cessation from work in order for holiness to enter the world for the benefit of all humanity. Holiness is the essence of the divine-human relationship, which enables human beings to fully become what they were created to be; i.e., in the image of the Creator. In its rhythmic recurrence, the Sabbath signifies the Creator's constant presence in the world and his care for it. Since the fall into sin, the Sabbath liberates people from oppressive regimes of man-made gods; it places them in proper relationships with each other; it relieves their attitude toward work in a society exhausted and stressed by hard labor; and it testifies to the sacred design in time and space whereby they can recognize and emulate the Maker of all. Thus the Sabbath is an important part of God's program for restoring the *imago Dei* in fallen human beings.