

TORAH

Genesis 2:1-3

“God Rested on the Seventh Day”

“Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

The issue of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, and its relevancy for God’s people living in the post-resurrection era, very much begins by evaluating different approaches and interpretations of Genesis 2:1-3. To what extent, if any, does Genesis 2:1-3 speak about the Sabbath? Is Genesis 2:1-3 simply narrative, detailing how the Creator God gave the seventh day a special blessing as His work of creating the universe was completed? Or, does Genesis 2:1-3 anticipate the formal institution of the Sabbath in later Biblical history (Exodus 20:8-11)? Or even, does Genesis 2:1-3 establish the seventh-day Sabbath as a Creation ordinance for the universal benefit of all? Suffice it to say, varied perspectives and nuanced points of view are witnessed in both Jewish and Christian resources on this passage.

Additional factors to be weighed—which are admittedly not too easy for today’s Messianic people to consider—are different vantage points between conservative and liberal examiners. Conservative readers of the Torah or Pentateuch, affirming principal Mosaic authorship and composition, will necessarily have to consider the place of Moses in writing Genesis 2:1-3, either theologically stating the special status of the seventh day with formal delivery of the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), or with him employing pre-Israelite oral or cuneiform materials that recorded the special status of the seventh-day.¹ Alternatively, various liberal examiners, widely holding to the JEDP documentary hypothesis and that the Torah was not compiled until after the Babylonian exile of the Southern Kingdom, will precisely propose that the Sabbath did not have full significance for Ancient Israel until the exile to Babylon.² Does this at all affect one’s reading of Genesis 2:1-3, not necessarily in terms of *Shabbat* as perhaps being something founded in or anticipated at Creation—but instead of what the Sabbath signified vis-à-vis Ancient Near Eastern paganism?

Perhaps the most important issue of them all, is that if the seventh-day Sabbath was either established or anticipated from Genesis 2:1-3, then *Shabbat* being an institution given by God for the benefit of all humanity, surely finds significant support. One finds both Jewish and Christian examiners who are friendly toward the Sabbath being a universal institution, and others who conclude that it was something only intended for Ancient Israel and today’s Jewish people.

¹ Consult the entry for the Book of Genesis appearing in the workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*, for a relatively conservative summary of its composition.

² Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, revised (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp 61-63.

Genesis 2:1-3 Sabbath and Rest in the Tanach

2:1 Following the six *yamim* (יָמִים) or periods of Creation detailed in Genesis ch. 1 preceding, the narration states, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (RSV). This sentence actually begins with *v'yekullu* (וַיִּכְלֹּוּ), the verb *kalah* (כָּלָה) broadly meaning “be complete, at an end, finished, accomplished, spent” (BDB).³ More specifically, for what is in cosmic view in v. 1, is how the creation activity of God for the universe—collectively labeled as *tzavah* (צָוָה) or “host,” later in the Tanach often meaning “army, war, warfare” (BDB)⁴—is over. Victor P. Hamilton details,

“The Hebrew word for *completed* or ‘finished,’ *kālâ*, especially in the Piel stem, has two nuances, as does the English verb. To finish may mean to finish off, to destroy, to consume (as in Gen. 41:30; Josh. 24:20), or to bring to completion. This context offers no reason to apply the first nuance to Gen. 2:1-2. The point made by this verse is that the universe is no longer in a process of being created. What Gen. 1 allows for is not additional creation but procreation and self-perpetuation.”⁵

With the universe and humankind now on the scene, a Divine rest from creative work is initiated. Jewish resources on the Torah take special note of this, and explicitly connect it to the Sabbath. The Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Chumash* states, “Heaven and earth and God Himself longed for the coming of the Sabbath, which would infuse the world with holiness (*Tzror HaMor*). And the universe was created to serve as a tool for the service of God, a task that was complete with the advent of the Sabbath (*Sfas Emes*).”⁶ The more liberal *Commentary on the Torah* by Richard Elliot Friedman—even in asserting a theistic evolution perspective for the origin of human beings, and arguing that Genesis chs. 1-2 is strictly theology and lacks any embedded science—concludes that from a narrative standpoint, Genesis 1-2 “conveys a particular conception of the relationship between humans and the cosmos, of the relations between the sexes, of the linear flow of time, of the Sabbath. It sets the Bible’s story in a context of a universe that starts out as *good*...”⁷

2:2 The narration of what follows subsequent to God’s completion of the universe continues, “And on the seventh day God finished [*kalah*] his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done” (RSV). Even though there can be some slight tensions among interpreters surrounding what this means, in terms of God “resting” and the Sabbath, Meredith G. Kline correctly directs something that most are agreed upon: “Both finishing and resting are viewed positively and characterize the seventh day as a distinct state of triumphant consummation for the Creator.”⁸

Important discussion surrounds *v'yishbot b'yom ha'shevi'i* (וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי), “and-he-rested on-the-day the-seventh” (Kohlenberger),⁹ with not all English versions notably

³ BDB, 477.

⁴ Ibid., 838.

⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp 141-142.

⁶ Nosson Scherman, ed. et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 10.

⁷ Richard Elliot Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 14.

⁸ Meredith G. Kline, “Genesis,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 83.

⁹ Kohlenberger, 1:4.

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having “rested” (KJV/NKJV, NASB/NASU, RSV/NRSV/ESV, NIV, HCSB, CJB, et. al.), instead having “ceased” (NJPS, Alter, Keter Crown Bible, TLV) or “abstained” (ATS). Lexically speaking, these alternatives are entirely acceptable, as the primary meaning of the verb *shavat* (שָׁבַת), appearing in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), is “**cease, stop, be at a standstill**” (*CHALOT*).¹⁰

The issue of rendering *shavat* with “rested,” involves the degree that God’s ceasing from work, would be connected to the formal establishment of the Sabbath. It cannot be overlooked how later in Exodus 20:11, a different verb, *nuach* (נָח), is employed: “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested [*nuach*] on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.” However, both the verbs *shavat* and *nuach* are used together in Exodus 23:12: “Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease [*shavat*] from labor so that your ox and your donkey may rest [*nuach*], and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.” In the view of C. John Collins, “This allows us to say that in Genesis 2:2-3 the verb שָׁבַת is used in the narrower sense of ‘rest,’ and thus the Sabbath is properly a day of rest.”¹¹ Gordon J. Wenham similarly concludes,

“‘He rested’ שָׁבַת has three closely related senses: ‘to cease to be,’ ‘to desist from work,’ and ‘to observe the sabbath.’ It is clear that the seventh day, subsequently called the Sabbath, the sabbatical idea is also near at hand. Nevertheless it is striking that the Sabbath is not mentioned by name.”¹²

If the institution of the Sabbath is somehow involved in v. 2, why does the verse not just say, “By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He **kept Sabbath** on the seventh day from all His work which He had done”? The thought of Kenneth J. Matthews is that this is the case “probably since the number ‘seventh day’ is in keeping with the numerical format of the narrative.”¹³ More might actually be in view, given the frequent identification of the Hebrew *Shabbat* with the Akkadian *shappatu*, noted by a lexicon such as *HALOT*: “there is an etymological connection with שָׁבַת [*Shabbat*] and Akk. *šappatu*, which has a by-form *šabattu*, the fifteenth day of the month, the day of the full moon.”¹⁴ Hamilton indicates how the omission of the term *Shabbat* from v. 2, could very well have been with the intention for there not to be any sort of association with the Mesopotamian, pagan *shappatu*:

“We are of the opinion that the Hebrew noun *šabbāṭ*, the completion of the week, is to be identified philologically with Akk. *šappatu*...There is no evidence that the *šappatu* was a day of rest. It is described as the ‘day of the quieting of the heart (of the deity),’

¹⁰ *CHALOT*, 360.

¹¹ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), pp 89-90.

¹² Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, Vol 1 (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1987), 35.

He goes on to compare and contrast the Israelite *Shabbat* with the Babylonian *Šappatu*, and with various critical presuppositions in mind, draws the conclusion, “It seems likely that the Israelite Sabbath was introduced as a deliberate counter-blast...”

Consult the FAQ, “Sabbath, Originated in Ancient Near Eastern Paganism” (reproduced in this publication).

¹³ Kenneth A. Matthews, *New American Commentary: Genesis 1-11:26*, Vol 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 178.

¹⁴ *HALOT*, 2:1410.

probably by rituals for appeasement. The deliberate omission of 'sabbath' in Gen 2 may be due to a desire to avoid the possibility of uniting the seventh day with the pagan festival."¹⁵

Hamilton draws attention to the Mesopotamian creation myth of the *Enuma elish*, detailing the construction of the city Babylon,

"Let us build a shrine whose name shall be called "Lo, a chamber for our mighty rest"; let us repose in it! Let us build a throne, a recess for his abode! On the day that we arrive we shall repose in it.' When Marduk heard this, brightly glowed his features, like the day: 'Like that of lofty Babylon, whose building you have requested, let its brickwork be fashioned. You shall name it "The Sanctuary"' (6.51-58).¹⁶

For Hamilton, this signals a distinct contrast between the rest of God in Genesis, and the rest of the Mesopotamian deities:

"With man to do the menial work of the day-to-day maintenance of the earth, the gods are now free for less demanding administrative tasks in the world. In appreciation for release from this manual work, the gods promise to build Babylon and its temple for Marduk. The gods' surrogate is now man...It is not difficult to see how different the Mesopotamian concept of rest for the divine is from the biblical concept."¹⁷

One does not have to posit a post-exilic, Sixth Century B.C.E. origin of the Pentateuch, to recognize how the Genesis account was quite different than other creation accounts in the Ancient Near East. Mesopotamian religious ideas such as those seen in the *Enuma elish*, were present in "the early part of the second millennium B.C."¹⁸

What is key for v. 2, is how *v'yanach b'yom ha'shevi'i* (וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, Exodus 20:11), employing the verb *nuach* and not *shavat*—*shavat* being related to the noun *Shabbat*—could have appeared, but did not. God's ceasing from labor or resting, is indeed intended to be associated with the institution of the Sabbath rest.

In the narrative of v. 2, one does not get the impression that God "desisted from working on the seventh day" (Moffat) implies that God was at all weary. Instead, God's creative work was completed, His intention for His Creation now to be manifest. J.H. Hertz astutely interjects how, "This ascribing of human actions to God is called *anthromorphism*, and is employed in the Bible to make intellible to the finite, human mind that which relates to the Infinite."¹⁹ God stopping His work is intended to communicate something important to human beings.

Employed twice in v. 2 is the term *melakhah* (מְלָאכָה), something which is often associated with "occupation, work" (*BDB*),²⁰ also appearing in Exodus 20:9. The term *melakhah* is notably used to designate skilled labor, specifically that of constructing the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:5; 35:29; 36:1-2). V. 2 could have legitimately included *avodah* (עֲבֹדָה), "labour, service" (*BDB*),²¹ but instead has *melakhah*. Is it that big an issue? It has

¹⁵ Hamilton, pp 142-143.

¹⁶ E.A. Speiser, trans., "The Creation Epic," in James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East Volume I: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), pp 37-38.

¹⁷ Hamilton, 143.

¹⁸ Speiser, "The Creation Epic," in *The Ancient Near East Volume I*, 31.

¹⁹ J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 6.

²⁰ *BDB*, 521.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 715.

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been interjected how there could be an intended association between God's completion of the universe, and the later establishment of Ancient Israel's Tabernacle. Wenham states,

"It may be...that this word has been deliberately chosen to hint that man should stop his daily work on the seventh day. The phraseology of Exod 40:33, 'And Moses finished the work,' is particularly close to this verse and suggests that the erection of the tabernacle is being compared to God's creation of the world."²²

Matthews also concludes that there is a "tie between cosmic Creator and Israel's Redeemer who formed them at Sinai...After the construction of the wilderness tabernacle, the Sabbath was deemed the sign of the covenant."²³ Most especially favorable to the idea that God's Creation and the Tabernacle or Temple are to be compared to one another, is John H. Walton, who goes into extensive detail about it both in his *NIV Application Commentary* volume on Genesis,²⁴ and his 2009 book *The Lost World of Genesis One*.²⁵ The intended association between God's completion of work, and the later construction and completion of the Tabernacle—is how Planet Earth and the cosmos as God originally intended, was to be a place of intimate communion, fellowship, and worship between the Creator and His human creations.

Recognizing Exodus 20:11 to come, David Atkinson makes the observation, "It could not be said more clearly that the covenant purposes of God for his people (symbolized by their observance of the sabbath) are rooted in the creative purposes of God for his world. God's creative purposes and God's covenant love belong together. This is part of what the sabbath tells us."²⁶

2:3 The Divine cessation from work is now directly associated in the narrative, with God blessing and declaring holy the seventh day: "And GOD blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because in it he rested from all his work which GOD had created and performed" (Jerusalem Bible-Koren). The clause *ki b'o shavat m'kol-melakhto asher-bara Elohim l'asot* (לְעִשׂוֹת אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לְעִשׂוֹת), "because on-him he-rested from-all-of work-of-him that he-created God to-do" (Kohlenberger).²⁷ It is often observed that the differences between the verbs *bara* (בָּרָא), "shape, create" (*BDB*),²⁸ and *asah* (עָשָׂה), "do, make" (*BDB*),²⁹ is that the former concerns things created out of nothing or *ex nihilo*, and the latter involves shaping things out of pre-existent matter.³⁰ This finds support

²² Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 35.

²³ Matthews, 177.

²⁴ John H. Walton, *NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp 147-152.

²⁵ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

This has been notably cross-examined by Hugh Ross, *Navigating Genesis: A Scientist's Journey through Genesis 1-11* (Covina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2014), pp 212-214 in that Walton's view of Genesis 1 containing only a theological and functional explanation for Creation, is intended to sidestep scientific debates from Scripture entirely, fully allowing for an evolutionary origin of the human race.

²⁶ David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 48.

²⁷ Kohlenberger, 1:4.

²⁸ *BDB*, 135.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 793.

³⁰ Cf. A. Cohen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash* (Brooklyn: Soncino Press, 1983), 8.

from how the verb *bara* appears with the verb *yatzar* (יצר), “form, fashion” (BDB),³¹ in Isaiah 43:1, 7.³²

“But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator [*bara*], O Jacob, and He who formed [*yatzar*] you, O Israel, ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!...Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created [*bara*] for My glory, whom I have formed [*yatzar*], even whom I have made.’”

God’s cessation of work on the seventh day, as v. 3a details, ascribes to the seventh day a significant status: *v’yebarekh Elohim et-yom ha’shevi’i v’yeqadeish oto* (וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ), “And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy” (NJPS). The verb *qadash* (קדש) appears in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), involving to “set apart as sacred, consecrate, dedicate” (BDB).³³ What is significant about this, is how the seventh day is the first thing in the Scriptures, explicitly set-apart by God in such a way. Wenham concurs, “The piel of קדש is usually factitive, though here it may be declarative...The seventh day is the very first thing to be hallowed in Scripture, to acquire that special status that properly belongs to God alone.”³⁴ It cannot go unnoticed how the Targum Jonathan actually paraphrased Genesis 2:3 with, “And the Lord blessed the Seventh Day more than all the days of the week, and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His works which the Lord had created and had willed to make.”³⁵

In his widely Jewish philosophical work, simply entitled *The Sabbath*, Abraham Joshua Heschel describes that the first thing God specifically sanctifies is not some place, but instead time:

“It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *qadosh* is used for the first time: in the Book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time...There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness.”³⁶

Perhaps in contrast to the view that proposes how God’s finishing the work for Planet Earth is akin to His establishment of a cosmic temple, Heschel notes how God’s sanctifying of the Sabbath is a much higher priority:

“This is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that, after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is *holiness in time*, the Sabbath, which comes first.”³⁷

The debate over whether or not the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* is a Creation institution, involves differences of approach from how Exodus 20:11 seemingly quotes from Genesis 2:3:

³¹ BDB, 427.

³² Cf. Collins, 80.

³³ BDB, 872.

³⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 36.

³⁵ BibleWorks 9.0: PJE Targum Pseudo Jonathan on the Pentateuch.

³⁶ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 9.

³⁷ Ibid.

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“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested [verb: *nuach*] on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:11).

“Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested [verb: *shavat*] from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:3).

There is little doubting how at Mount Sinai, with the formal issuance of the Fourth Commandment, that the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* would finally be codified and spelled out for Ancient Israel (cf. Nehemiah 9:13-14). Disagreement can ensue as to whether Exodus 20:11 looks backward to Genesis 2:3, with Moses communicating in Genesis how God’s cessation from work is the reason for Israel’s Sabbath, *or* whether the preservation of the Creation historical traditions in pre-Mosaic and pre-Patriarchal times, included God’s unique blessing of the seventh day. If we can assume that there were preserved oral traditions and cuneiform records of Creation in Ancient Israel—which would have been employed by Moses for the composition of Genesis *and* which included a record along the lines of God resting on and blessing the seventh day—is there enough support to conclude that some pre-Mosaic Israelites and pre-Israelite God followers observed a kind of “sabbatical”? The evidence is probably not conclusive enough, aside from some kind of regular rest cycle predicated on God’s having rested.

Various commentators do see the formal institution of the Sabbath anticipated from Genesis 2:3:

- J.H. Hertz: “*God blessed*. The Creator endowed the Sabbath with a blessing which would be experienced by all who observed it...*hallowed*...The Sabbath demands more than stoppage of work. It is specifically marked off as a day consecrated to God and the life of the spirit.”³⁸
- Meredith G. Kline: “God extended the promise of entrance into the divine sabbath (cf. Heb. 4:1ff.) by stamping the creation pattern of the seven days as a recurring symbolic cycle on man’s daily existence. The sabbath day in particular was sanctified to be a constant source of blessing to man as the sign of his eternal hope. Also, by calling the royal image-bearer to follow in his Creator’s way (cf. Ex. 20:8-11), the sabbath summons man to continual re-consecration of his servant-kingship to the glory of his Creator-King.”³⁹
- Allen P. Ross: “**God blessed the seventh day and made it holy** (sanctified it) because it commemorated the completion or cessation of His creative **work**. God’s Sabbath rest became a predominant motif of Scripture. Here before the Fall it represented the perfect Creation, sanctified and at rest...”⁴⁰

³⁸ Hertz, 6.

³⁹ Kline, in *NBCR*, 83.

⁴⁰ Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), pp 29-30.

Ibid., 30 goes on to conclude, obviously holding to a spiritualized or allegorized view of the Sabbath for those in the post-resurrection era. “Today believers enter into that Sabbath rest spiritually (Heb. 4:8-10) and will certainly share in its full restoration.”

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- Kenneth A. Matthews: "Observance of a seventh day among Israel...antedates the Sinai injunction...The passage obviously anticipates the Sinai legislation, but the basis, as in the Fourth Commandment, must be the creation. For the Hebrews, then, the world had always known sabbaths from the beginning. Sabbath existed before man observed it and continues whether or not God's creatures acknowledge it."⁴¹
- *ArtScroll Chumash*: "God *blessed* the Sabbath with abundant goodness, for on it there is a renewal of physical procreative strength, and a greater capacity to reason and exercise the intellect. He *sanctified* it that no work was done on it (*Ibn Ezra*)...God would *bless* the Sabbath in the future by giving a double portion of manna on Fridays in its honor, and He would *sanctify* it by not providing manna on the Sabbath itself (*Midrash*). The plain meaning of the verse is that the Sabbath is sanctified above the normal course of physical activity in this world. Ordinarily, people must work to earn their livelihood, but on the Sabbath, work is forbidden..."⁴²
- John H. Walton: "The divine Sabbath of Genesis 2 is not simply an etiology of the human Sabbath, nor does the human observance of the Sabbath somehow help people to take part in the divine Sabbath. Instead, the divine Sabbath is seen as the cause of the human Sabbath. By observing the human Sabbath, people give recognition to the divine Sabbath."⁴³
- C. John Collins: "We...see the author's approval of the Sabbath rest...The implication is that the pious reader should likewise adore the Creator, exult in the creation, and revel in the Sabbath."⁴⁴

Representing more the view that the Sabbath is memorialized with Exodus 20:8-11 looking back to Genesis 2:3, is John E. Hartley, who comments,

"God ties his deliverance of Israel out of Egypt into the observance of the seventh day (Deut. 5:12-15). Thus, on the Sabbath Israel worshiped the God of creation who was also the God of the exodus. In worshiping this great God regularly, humans exercise the spiritual dimension of being in God's image...The term 'Sabbath' does not appear here, perhaps because this account looks at the created order before Israel's existence and the giving of the fourth commandment in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:8-11). This text nevertheless provides a foundation in the created order for the observance of the Sabbath."⁴⁵

Of course, within the text of the Torah, the Sabbath is not exclusively tied to issues involving Creation, as Deuteronomy 5:15 does rightly connect it to the Israelites remembering their slavery in Egypt, something which surely contains salvation historical themes. Collins appropriately directs, "Theologians will describe the difference by saying that Exodus 20:11 appeals to creation, while Deuteronomy 5:15 appeals to redemption....It

⁴¹ Matthews, 180.

⁴² Scherman, pp 10-11.

⁴³ Walton, *Genesis*, 153.

⁴⁴ Collins, 78.

⁴⁵ John E. Hartley, *New International Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), pp 51, 55.

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would be a mistake to contrast these...theologically...[as] one purpose of redemption is to restore man to his proper working order, which was given him at the creation."⁴⁶

Various Christians, looking at Genesis 2:3, have held the Sabbath to be a Creation ordinance, anticipated in the narrative here as something to be formally instituted in the Ten Commandments. Then, as history moved forward to the work of the Messiah, they have concluded that the Sabbath was to be transferred from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week.⁴⁷ Other Christians have held the seventh-day Sabbath as being an institution for Ancient Israel—and even a temporary Creation institution at that—but later to be abolished for the post-resurrection era, giving rise to a new "Lord's Day" commemoration on the first day of the week.⁴⁸

More broadly, with God ceasing His creation of the universe, and with Him blessing the seventh day, it is entirely fair to recognize—especially in view of passages like John 5:17 and Hebrews 4:1-10—that while God's creative acts have stopped, God's work of redemptive activity has not. The institution of the weekly Sabbath, which can be observed by human beings, is something that provides an opportunity for people, albeit partially, to experience the Divine rest and excellence which were in place at the completion of God's creative acts, and before the introduction of human sin into the world. Derek Kidner actually thinks, "Our Lord based His own constructive use of the sabbath on this understanding of the divine rest...and His double-edged saying in Mark 2:27, 28 preserves the pattern of gift...and claim...implicit in verse 3."⁴⁹

Some of the highest words of praise for the institution of the Sabbath, and what it represents, come from Walter Brueggemann:

"The Sabbath is a sociological expression of a new humanity willed by God. Sabbath is the end of grasping and therefore the end of the exploitation. Sabbath is a day of revolutionary equality in society. On that day all rest equally, regardless of wealth or power or need (Exod. 20:8-11). Of course, the world is not now ordered according to the well-being and equality of sabbath rest. But the keeping of sabbath, in heaven and on earth, is a foretaste and anticipation of how the creation will be when God's way is fully established. Sabbath is an unspoken prayer for the coming of a new sanity shaped by the power and graciousness of God."⁵⁰

Brueggemann is a liberal Protestant who undeniably has a high regard for the Sabbath principle, thought now to be widely observed on Sunday. Brueggemann's statements about the Sabbath are to be appreciated for sure, but some of his reasoning associated with the importance of the Sabbath cannot go unnoticed. As is seen, Brueggemann's positive evaluation of the Sabbath is rooted within the critical tradition of Pentateuchal composition:

⁴⁶ Collins, 90.

⁴⁷ Cf. Walton, *Genesis*, pp 160-161; Collins, pp 130, 132.

⁴⁸ Matthews, 181; specifically fn#235 which makes reference to D.A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999).

⁴⁹ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 53.

⁵⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching: Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), pp 35-36.

Genesis 2:1-3 Sabbath and Rest in the Tanach

"In the exilic period, the observance of the sabbath had special significance for the exiled Israelites...God does not spend the seventh day in exhaustion but in serenity and peace. In contrast to the gods of Babylon, this God is not anxious about his creation but is at ease with the well-being of his rule."⁵¹

Even more pronounced about Genesis 2:3 originating in the Babylonian exile, would be the comments of Gerhard Von Rad, who says, "The declarations about a Sabbath at creation...[is] one of the most remarkable and daring testimonies in the entirely Priestly document,"⁵² asserting that this material actually comes from the so-called P source. So once again, the seventh-day rest had important encouragement to the Southern Kingdom exiles in Babylon in the Sixth Century B.C.E., as opposed to the Ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai in either the Fifteenth or Thirteenth Centuries B.C.E. (depending on when one dates the Exodus). Likewise holding to the JEDP documentary hypothesis, Terence E. Fretheim draws the striking conclusion, "The divine resting concludes creation—namely, sabbath belongs to the created order; it cannot be legislated or abrogated by human beings."⁵³

The post-exilic records in Nehemiah 9:14; 10:31-34; and 13:14-22 (discussed further) do give ample, later historical testimony, to how the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* was given importance by the Southern Kingdom exiles having returned to the Land of Israel, their failure to remember the Sabbath as being one of the causes of the exile. Still, one needs to be aware of how various liberal examiners will think that the importance of the seventh day in Genesis 2:3 is not provided for the future and the Ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai, but instead for Southern Kingdom exiles in Babylon who needed hope for their predicament.

Genesis 2:1-3 application People in today's broad Messianic community generally have no issue with the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* being viewed as a Creation institution, anticipated (Exodus 20:8-11) in the statement, "God blessed the seventh day and separated it as holy; because on that day God rested from all his work which he had created..." (2:3, CJB). God's cessation from work is the basis for the human cessation from work every seventh day of the week. There is not always agreement among Messianic people, though, as to whether *Shabbat* as a Creation institution is intended only for Israel proper, or also for the nations at large. Jewish and Christian examiners, although with the latter perhaps arguing for a transfer of the Sabbath to Sunday, are also not in agreement.

Looking at a number of Genesis resources over the past three decades, Christian Old Testament commentators have been prone to emphasize the universal significance of the Sabbath, whereas Jewish commentators have preferred to instead emphasize a more focused importance of the Sabbath for Ancient Israel. Atkinson is one who asserts that the "linking of sabbath to creation indicates a pattern of universal significance. This is not just a special rule for the people of God, linking what they learned in the wilderness back to creation. All people need the rhythm of sabbath rest, for that is the way God has made

⁵¹ Ibid., 35.

⁵² Von Rad, *Genesis*, 61.

⁵³ Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:345.

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the world.”⁵⁴ Contrasting this might be Nahum M. Sarna, instead thinking, “as we read in Exodus 31:13, 16, and 17, the Sabbath is a distinctly Israelite ordinance, a token of the eternal covenant between God and Israel.”⁵⁵ And, Fretheim further contrasts, with the statement, “Exodus 20:11 and 31:17...appeal to Genesis in order to claim that sabbath observance belongs to the creation as God intended it to be; hence its importance for all peoples, not just Israel.”⁵⁶

Collins might go the farthest in referencing Exodus 31:13, 14; 31:17; Leviticus 23:23; and then Isaiah 56:6-8, making the case that “If redemptive covenants have to do with restoring the damaged creation, then it is no surprise that the Old Testament holds out the privilege of Sabbath observance to Gentiles....The Sabbath bestows its gifts upon man—all of mankind—at the deepest places of his created nature.”⁵⁷

People who affirm that the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* has significance not only as something to be observed by **all men and women of God** as a weekly means to experience physical and spiritual refreshment—but also participate in experiencing, even for a brief moment, what God intended when Creation was completed—are not at all alone in their convictions. Many examiners of Genesis 2:1-3 have concluded the same things. In our day, the Lord has uniquely been raising up Messianic congregations and fellowships of both Jewish *and* non-Jewish Believers in Israel’s Messiah, who are firmly convicted about the importance of *Shabbat*, starting in Genesis 2:1-3. They eagerly await the return of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) and His Kingdom from Jerusalem, a time when people the world over will acknowledge both the Sabbath and our Creator’s restful intention (Isaiah 66:23). Atkinson properly exclaims,

“What is our creation for? That we may be creatures of the seventh day! That we may share God’s work of bringing order in his creation; that we may grow in personal communion with him and so reflect his image; and that we may share the delight of his rest. That we may have fellowship with the Creator. That we may be caught up in praise with the sun and moon and stars, the trees and flowers and birds; with all creatures great and small, of fish and of beasts. All these look to God for their life and sustenance; all these in their silent ways sing the song of their Creator.”⁵⁸

Indeed, may our remembrance of the weekly *Shabbat* never overlook that idyllic state of Creation which existed, when our Creator God ceased from His work! **This is something into which all of His human creations are welcomed!**

⁵⁴ Atkinson, 48.

⁵⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 14.

⁵⁶ Fretheim, in *NIB*, 1:347.

⁵⁷ Collins, 91.

⁵⁸ Atkinson, 49.