CREATION AND COVENANT:
A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO THE CORRELATION
OF THE SEVENTH DAY AND THE BIBLICAL SABBATH

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Abstract

For centuries, scholars have debated the nature of the relationship between the seventh day (Gen 2:1-3) and the biblical Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11). While Covenant Theologians insist that the seventh day works as the theological foundation of the biblical Sabbath, New Covenant Theologians reject this relationship and insist the Sabbath is an institution given exclusively to the Israelites. This article argues that according to an exegetical-historical and theological reading of selected texts on the Sabbath, one must regard the seventh day as the theological foundation of the biblical Sabbath to sustain a consistent and coherent theological system that uses Scripture as its epistemological foundation.

Keywords: hermeneutics, epistemology, covenant, Sabbath, creation.

Introduction

The book of Genesis is, arguably, the most controversial book of the Pentateuch. This is especially true if one considers the pre-Abrahamic section of the book (Gen 1-11), which contains the accounts of the creation, fall, flood, Tower of Babel, and two genealogies. These chapters are foundational to some essential Christian doctrines, such as the creation, Sabbath, fall, redemption, atonement, and judgment. In addition, these chapters also testify of God’s exclusive attributes, like omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, and so forth. But most important is the fact that despite much theological debate surrounding the book of Genesis, scholars now recognize that the pre-Abrahamic section of Genesis contains “the interpretive foundation of all Scripture.”

Similarly, the book of Exodus is also permeated with theological significance, and though scholars may differ on how to divide its content, the central theme of Exodus—the departure of the people of Israel from Egypt—is a fairly unified concept. Most important, however, are the theological nuances that permeate the book as a whole. Sarna pointed out, that in Exodus one is able to find “the different aspects of the divine personality.” He explains,

[Exodus] expresses a conception of God that is poles apart from any pagan notions. There is but a single Deity, who demands exclusive service and fidelity. Being the Creator of all that exists, He is wholly independent of His creations, and totally beyond the constraints of the world of nature, which is irresistibly under His governance. This is illustrated by the phenomena of the burning bush, the ten plagues, and the dividing of the Sea of Reeds. As a consequence, any attempt to depict or represent God in material or pictorial form is inevitably a falsification and is strictly prohibited. The biblical polemic against idolatry appears here for the first time in the context of the Exodus.

It is in these two OT books that a hermeneutical impasse exists between Covenant Theology (hereafter CT) and New Covenant Theology (hereafter NCT). Generally speaking, proponents of CT insist on upholding the principles of God’s moral law—the Decalogue. Though there are different interpretations of how


3Sarna, Exodus, xiii.

4Ibid.

5Cairns’ definition says, “Covenant theology maintains that the Mosaic economy was an administration of the covenant of grace. God never intended the moral law to be a way of salvation for sinful Israelites. He did not teach or offer the Jews salvation by works. When He gave the Decalogue, he also gave the ceremonial sacrificial system, which plainly pointed to ‘the Lamb of God’ who alone could take away sin. Thus there is a deep sense of continuity between the OT and the NT. The differences are those between types and their fulfillment, between shadows and their substance. It is a matter of historical and spiritual development. But both OT and NT present the same redemptive purpose of God, the same way of salvation, and the same great eschatological hope. Both Testaments present these truths in terms of ‘the everlasting covenant.’ This covenant was successively proclaimed throughout the OT (Gen 3:15; Gen 9; Gen 12), afterwards becoming a
Christians should interpret the commandment on the Sabbath, most CTs are in favor of keeping the Decalogue, including the principle expressed in the fourth commandment.⁶

A particular approach is taken by Seventh-day Adventists (hereafter SDA), the largest Sabbath-keeping Christian group in the western hemisphere. Since their denominational organization on May 21, 1863, SDAs have insisted that the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is a requirement to “all people as a memorial of Creation.” They maintain that “the Sabbath is God’s perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God’s creative and redemptive acts.” SDAs claim that Gen 2:2, 3 is the theological foundation of the Sabbath, which they insist is the perpetual day of rest and worship. The fact that “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, ... [and] rested from all His work which God had created and made” gives all believers the right to enjoy the blessings of the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial of creation and redemption throughout history (Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15). Besides connecting God’s example of resting on the seventh day with the fourth commandment, CTs among SDAs also recognize the perpetuity of the Sabbath in the NT (Matt 5:17-20; Heb 4:9-11; Rev 12:17), and insist that the Sabbath is applicable to all Christians.

Though the keeping of the Sabbath ordinance finds unified support among SDAs, it finds little to no support among New Covenant Christians (hereafter NCCs). Generally speaking, NCTs tend to argue that the Sabbath belongs to the “Sinaitic Covenant” or the “Old Covenant.” They presuppose that the Sabbath is an institution used by God as a sign of the covenant he made exclusively with the people of Israel (Exod 31:16-17) in the Sinai.⁸ Presumably, “the Ten Commandments are the old covenant made with Israel at Sinai... which Christ

national covenant. According to the NT, believers are reckoned in the same covenant as OT saints (Rom 4; Gal 3; Heb 8 with Jer 31). In all cases, salvation is only on the ground of the blood and righteousness of Christ. Though the same covenant of mercy operates in both the OT and the NT, in the NT it is called a new and better covenant, because in the OT it was administered by Moses the servant, whereas in NT times it is administered personally by Christ the Son (Heb 3:5, 6).” See Alan Cairns, Dictionary of Theological Terms (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 113.


⁷General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Church Manual, 17th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 16.

annulled by His death on the cross.”

To use Moo’s words, “The content of all but one [the Sabbath] of the Ten Commandments is taken up into ‘the law of Christ,’ for which we are responsible.”

With this presupposition in mind, NCTs reject that Gen 2:2-3 is the theological foundation of the Sabbath, and reject that God’s rest on the seventh day is related to the institution of the Sabbath in Exod 20. For NCTs, Gen 2:2, 3 has no connection with the Sabbath in Exodus.

The NCT position on the interpretation of Gen 2:2, 3 is similar to that of Gerhard von Rad, in that Gen 2:2, 3 has no connection with the Sabbath. Contrasting Gen 2:2, 3 with the concluding act in the Babylonian account of creation, von Rad declares, “How different, how much more profound, is the impressive rest of Israel’s God! This rest is in every respect a new thing along with the process of creation, not simply the negative sign of its end; it is anything but an appendix.” He observes, “it is significant that God ‘completed’ his work on the seventh day (and not, as seems more logical, on the sixth—so the LXX!). This ‘completion’ and this rest must be considered as a matter for itself.” Then, von Rad concludes, “One should be careful about speaking of the ‘institution of the Sabbath,’ as is often done. Of that nothing at all is said here. The Sabbath as a cultic institution is quite outside the purview.”

Thomas Arnold, a proponent of NCT, summarizes that approach well. He insists,

The Sabbath was a “perpetual covenant” as “a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever. The Sabbath was not given as a command to Adam in Genesis 1-5 or to Noah in Genesis 9. The Sabbath was given much later as a special covenant command to Israel at Sinai [in Exod 20:8-11 and 31:16, 17].” Therefore, it is a violation of this rule to import this later Commandment for a human workweek followed by a Sabbath back into Genesis 1. The later use of the Genesis 1 example in the Fourth Commandment is legitimate and right. But the use of examples works only one way. The earlier event may serve as an example for a later command, but the later command may not be imported back into the earlier event.

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9Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 303.


12Thomas P. Arnold, *Two Stage Biblical Creation: Uniting Biblical Insights Uncovered by Ten Notable Creation Theories* (Arlington Heights, IL: Arnold, 2008), 364, 365. Arnold’s translation of Exod 31:16, 17 says: “So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for six days the LORD worked on [‘āsāh] the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day He ceased work, and rested.” See ibid., 365.
As we can see, Arnold maintains that it is hermeneutically incorrect to “import later biblical concepts into earlier events.” Even though he agrees “the ideas of work and rest are [present] in Genesis 1:1-2:4a,” Arnold insists that “Genesis has no command for a workweek for man and no mention of ‘Sabbath’ requirements for man. The first time a Sabbath for man was mentioned was to Israel at Sinai (Exod 16:23) several millennia later.” With this being said, Arnold and von Rad agree that Gen 2:2, 3 is not the theological foundation of the Sabbath.

After considering these conflicting views on the theological foundation of the Sabbath, this article attempts to answer two foundational questions: First, is the interpretation of Gen 2:2, 3 as the theological foundation of the biblical Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11) hermeneutically incorrect? Second, is the Sabbath an institution created exclusively to be a sign of God’s covenant with the people of Israel?

In this article I argue that the correlation of the Sabbath and the seventh day of the creation week is not a violation of a consistent and coherent hermeneutics. In fact, the interpretation of the seventh day as the theological foundation of the Sabbath seem to be required to sustain unity in the biblical metanarrative. With this being said, the purpose of this article is to show that a consistent exegetical-historical and theological reading of key texts on the Sabbath validates my thesis.

13Arnold, Two Stage Biblical Creation, 364.
14Ibid., 364, 365.
15Arnold’s claim also presupposes that the days in the creation week were calculated differently than the days of the Israelite workweek. He insists, “For the first several millennia of history, the standard understanding of a ‘day’ was daytime followed by nighttime. ... Several millennia after Adam was created, Israel as a new nation began celebrating Jewish holy days of Passover, Sabbath, and festivals beginning in the evening (Exod 12:6, 18; Deut 16:4). But these later holy days cannot be imported back into Genesis 1:3-5, which began with light and ended with night. The seventh day in Genesis 2:2-3 was not even designated a Sabbath. The first mention of Sabbath was for Israel in Exodus 16, several millennia later.” See Arnold, Two Stage Biblical Creation, 360, 384-392. This interpretation is based on the so-called “morning theory” and has attracted the attention of some prominent scholars like A. Dillman, U. Cassuto, J. Milgrom, and N. Sarna. See G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 6:25 fnrs. 180-182. Scholars who oppose this view and favor the “evening theory” include Richard Davidson, Roy Gane, and Jacques Doukhan. For an insightful article from an exegetical perspective see J. Amanda McGuire, “Evening or Morning: When Does the Biblical Day Begin?” Andrews University Seminary Studies 46, no. 2 (2008): 201-214.
16According to Wolters, “the term ‘metanarrative’ has been appropriated in biblical hermeneutics to refer to the overall story told by the Christian Scriptures, which is not totalizing or oppressive (Middleton and Walsh), and which makes possible the ‘redemptive-historical’ level of biblical interpretation (Wolters). In this usage, the term has been given a positive rather than a negative valuation, and it has close links with the idea of ‘worldview.’” See Albert Wolters, “Metanarrative,” DTIB, (2005), 506, 507.
In order to accomplish this task, I will adopt an interdisciplinary approach to biblical interpretation, which I call an exegetical-historical and theological reading of the text. In short, this approach maintains that in addition to exegesis, consistent interpretation of Scripture requires the use of the historical and the theological components, working together within the entire scope of the biblical metanarrative. Thus, the correct biblical interpretation requires an understanding of how the text was interpreted by the church in the past, to help bridge the gap between the exegete and the theologian. Next, it requires an explanation of how an exegetical-historical and theological reading of the text can impact practical, devotional, homiletical, and pastoral tasks in the church.

With this in mind, and to verify whether the thesis in this article might be authenticated by an exegetical-historical and theological reading of the text, I will describe the hermeneutical principles guiding the interpretation of Scripture in this discussion, followed by an application of these hermeneutical principles to the interpretation of Gen 2:2, 3, and Exod 20:8-11 and 31:16, 17.

Defining the Hermeneutical Approach

Scholars have noticed that every method of interpretation includes three distinct levels: the material level (ML), the teleological level (TL), and the foundational level (FL). Together, these levels form—epistemologically speaking—the “rationality and formal structure” of every method of interpretation.

17Kaiser argues that the best way to interpret Scripture is to adopt a three elements hermeneutic. I will call this an exegetical-historical and theological reading of the text. The exegetical component seeks to expose the meaning of the text for the original author and for his immediate audience; the historical component deals with the interpretation of the text throughout history independently of tradition; and the theological component deals with the relationship of the exegetical and the historical components of the text. For the purpose of this paper, to limit its size, and to address the gap between exegetes and theologians, I have chosen to use existing exegetical material and focus on the historical and theological components of the method I am using. For more information see Walter C. Kaiser, Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 15-40.


With this in mind, the hermeneutical approach of this article affirms—on the ML—the authority of Scripture as the source of theology, and presupposes the actuality of all events recorded in the OT and the NT. Consequently, it maintains that it is ultimately through Scripture that one should seek to understand Scripture, and that knowledge about the relationship of the natural and the supernatural realms coalesces intelligibly. Thus, divine actions in the natural realm—like creation and resting—should be interpreted in light of Scripture as a whole. Hence, on the TL, the hermeneutical approach of this article wants to uphold scriptural authority and promote theological consistency in the biblical metanarrative. Also, on the FL, the hermeneutical approach of this article adopts philosophical presuppositions that are in line with Scripture. Here, there are three sublevels that require attention (ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology). The theological method of this article adopts “critical realism” as its view of reality (i.e., ontological view). “Critical realism” maintains that the natural world is the reality that can be experienced by sensory perception, but that a holistic view of
reality—Reality—must account for the supernatural world and common-sense knowledge, which cannot be objectively experienced. Thus, the ontological view discussed here presupposes the existence of God (i.e., the supernatural realm) and the reality of creation (i.e., the natural realm).

Consequently, in order for this ontological view to succeed and have meaning to the interpreter of Scripture, it requires a metaphysic that connects the existence of God with the reality of his creation in time. This principle of articulation (i.e., metaphysical view) rejects the timelessness of God, and adopts what Fernando Canale calls “the infinite analogical temporality of God.” In a nutshell, “the infinite analogical temporality of God” means that in his everlastingness, God can experience time in order to interact with his creation without being affected by time like humans are (i.e., God does not grow old). In Scripture, this is possible because “God’s time does not have exactly (univocally) the same meaning that time has for creation. Likewise, what time means for God is not completely different from what it means for man (equivocally). Instead, biblical thinking assumes that God’s time and created time are similar (analogue).” Since the discussion assumes that God interacts supernaturally with his creation in time, this principle of articulation places the biblical metanarrative with all of its components (e.g., God, angels, creation, and sin) in direct connection with human reality, which impacts practical, devotional, homiletical, and pastoral tasks in the church.

Finally, I suggest that the principle of knowledge (i.e., epistemological view) used by the interpreter of Scripture must be committed to the sola scriptura principles. Here, I am suggesting that it is ultimately through Scripture that knowledge about the relationship of the natural and the supernatural realms coalesces intelligibly. Hence, this research presupposes the reality of the natural and supernatural realms. It sustains that Scripture alone can settle the disagreements between the interpretations of these two realms, and allows for a supernatural relationship between God and humankind that transcends the prevailing naturalistic view of reality in science in the early twenty-first century. In this view, each verse should be interpreted within the scope of the biblical metanarrative, because consistent biblical interpretation can only be obtained within a protology to eschatology scope (i.e., metanarrative). Thus, each passage in Scripture should be read, analyzed, and interpreted starting with the passage itself,

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22 To simplify: natural realm (i.e., reality) + supernatural realm = Reality.
23 For more information see Canale, Basic Elements of Christian Theology, 40-53.
24 Ibid., 72-73.
25 Ibid., 70.
26 For information on the philosophical reasoning guiding the naturalistic approach to reality, see Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Francis Haywood (London: Pickering, 1848).
its immediate context, the inner biblical-historical context, and then the broader biblical context.

Besides these philosophical presuppositions, this research approaches the topic of covenant in Scripture as the study of one everlasting covenant, instead of multiple covenants. Thus, the covenants made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David are seen as temporal expressions and reaffirmations of YHWH’s everlasting covenant.\(^{27}\) According to LaRondelle,

The divine covenants with Adam (Gen 2:2-3, 15-17), Abraham (Gen 12; 15; 17), Israel through Moses (Exod 19-34), and David (2 Sam 7), along with the promised “new covenant” to Israel (Jer 31; Ezek. 36), can be viewed as successive stages of God’s single covenant of redeeming grace that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul pointed to this aspect: “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Cor 1:20).\(^{28}\)

For these reasons, the distinction between the “new covenant” and “old covenant” is portrayed here as experiential rather than historical,\(^{29}\) meaning that the “new covenant” was never intended to nullify the “old covenant” as some have suggested.\(^{30}\) Commenting on Jer 31:31-33 and the new covenant promised to Israel, Hafemann explains:

\(^{27}\)Similarly, Pink states: “The first germinal publication of the everlasting covenant is found in Genesis 3:15. ... The continual additions which God subsequently made to the revelation He gave in Genesis 3:15 were, for a considerable time, largely through covenants He made with the fathers, covenants which were both the fruit of His eternal plan of mercy and the gradual revealing of the same unto the faithful. Only as those two facts are and held fast by us are we in any position to appreciate and perceive the force of those subordinate covenants.” See Arthur W. Pink, The Divine Covenants (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973), 15, 16. Roy Gane explains it this way: “Cumulative phases of God’s unified ‘everlasting covenant’ bring wave upon wave of gracious divine initiative throughout Old Testament times and on into the New Testament, where the comprehensive culmination in the ultimate revelation and only truly effective sacrifice of Jesus Christ washes over the human race with a tidal wave of grace.” See Roy E. Gane, The Role of God’s Moral Law, Including Sabbath, in the “New Covenant,” Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2003, https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Gane%20Gods%20moral%20law.pdf (accessed December 28, 2014).


\(^{29}\)For a detailed exposition on how the “old” and “new covenant” differ, see Skip MacCarty, In Granite or Ingrained? What the Old and New Covenants Reveal About the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2007), 57-142.

\(^{30}\)Strickland, for example, says: “The Mosaic law naturally ended when God suspended his program with Israel (Rom. 9-11) and inaugurated his program with the church.” See Wayne G. Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View,” in Five Views on Law and Gospel, ed. Stanley N. Gundry,
The movement of thought from Jeremiah 31:32 to 33 makes clear that the covenantal relationship between God and his people is maintained by keeping the law in response to God’s prior act of redemption (cf. Jer 31:1ff.). This is no less true of the new covenant than it was of the Sinai covenant before it (cf. Deut 6:20-25). Rather than suggesting that the law is somehow negated in the new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-33 emphasizes that it is the ability to keep the law as a result of having a transformed nature, not its removal, that distinguishes the new covenant from the covenant at Sinai. Nor is there any indication in this text, or in Jeremiah as a whole, that the future eschatological restoration will entail the giving of a new law, or that the “law” of the new covenant will be merely an abstract revelation of the general will of God quite apart from the specifics of the Mosaic-code. (The LXX manuscript tradition which reads the plural “laws” for the singular “Torah” in Jer 38:33 [MT 31:33] underscores this latter point). For Jeremiah, the “law written on the heart” is the Sinai law itself as the embodiment of God’s will. The contrast between the two covenants remains a contrast between the two different conditions of the people who are brought into these covenants and their correspondingly different responses to the same law. The former broke the Sinai covenant, being unable to keep it due to their stubborn, evil hearts; the latter will keep the new covenant as a result of their transformed nature.31

Altogether, this approach to CT seems to strengthen the hermeneutical claims of the ML, the TL, and the FL, while advancing theological consistency by interpreting Scripture from a protology to eschatology scope, or in light of the biblical metanarrative.32

Having defined the hermeneutical principles, the next section will provide an interpretation of Gen 2:2-3, Exod 20:8-11, and Exod 31:16, 17 guided by these standards. The goal is to show the evidence for and against the thesis of this article.

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32 This may be called the *tota scriptura* principle. Bartholomew explains, “Theological interpretation is concerned with reading the Bible for the church today. In that process it inevitably assumes an understanding of the Bible as a whole. In this respect biblical theology connects not only with *sola scriptura* but also *tota scriptura*. Scripture as a whole is confessed to be God’s word. The major contribution of biblical theology is to deepen our understanding of the shape, complexity, and unity of Scripture on its own terms. Barr (Concept) calls this type of biblical theology ‘panbiblical’ and says that we should not focus on it at the expense of all the biblical theological work done on smaller parts of the Bible. However, the intuition that motivates comprehensive biblical theology stems from the gospel itself, so that discernment of the inner unity of the Bible must remain the goal and crown of biblical theology.” See Craig G. Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology,” *DTIB*, (2005), 88.
Applying the Hermeneutical Principles to the Text

A Descriptive Analysis of Genesis 2:2, 3

These verses describe the seventh day of the creation week: “And on the seventh day God ended 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.” In the hermeneutical impasse between CT and NCT, the question associated with this text is whether the seventh day of the creation week should be regarded as the theological foundation of the Sabbath, as prescribed in Exod 20:8-11 and Exod 31:16, 17. The answer to this question depends on the hermeneutical method used to interpret these texts. When following the exegetical-historical and theological principles described above, I suggest that a more consistent theological system emerges from Scripture by interpreting Gen 2:1-3 as the theological foundation of the biblical Sabbath. I have found exegetical, historical, and theological evidence to support this claim.

Exegetically speaking, I have observed that some contemporary scholars recognize the unique character of the seventh day of the creation week. There is a distinctiveness to the seventh day in the literary structure of the creation account, which seems to point to a special purpose for the seventh day in the order of creation. Westermann agrees: “The concluding verses, Gen 2:1-3 are very different from what has gone before. They are not part of the day-by-day succession which forms the framework of the first chapter. They do not describe the work of a day and the former structure is no longer there.” I have found four supporting evidences associated with the literary structure of Gen 2:1-3.

First, in contrast with the other six days, the seventh day is the only day that does not require a twofold divine action to be finished (see Table 1). While all the other days show the same divine pattern of action to transform the condition of the planet earth in Gen 1:2 (“the earth was without form and void”), on the seventh day God simply “rested . . . from all His work which He had done” (Gen 2:2b).


34Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 167.
A second distinction is, this is the only time during the creation week that creation occurs by divine example instead of divine command, suggesting that from the early stages of the history of human life the Creator designated the seventh day to be distinguished from all the other days of the week.

A third distinction is that the seventh day is the only one that lacks the summary model, which is systematically used to conclude the descriptions of days one through six. Without exception, the words “there was evening and there was morning, the ‘X’ day” are used to delimit the time involved in the course of the six days in Gen 1. Again, this also points out the uniqueness of the seventh day in the creation narrative.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First day</th>
<th>Fourth day</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>light &amp; darkness</td>
<td>“sun” &amp; “moon”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sky &amp; water</td>
<td>Fifth day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earth &amp; seas</td>
<td>fish &amp; birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third day</td>
<td>Sixth day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vegetation</td>
<td>animals &amp; humankind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventh day

“God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it”

The fourth distinction and perhaps the most striking, is the fact that “the seventh day is the very first thing to be hallowed in Scripture, to acquire that special status that properly belongs to God alone.” Similarly, Mathews writes:

Of the creation week’s days, this “seventh day” is uniquely “blessed” and “sanctified” by the Creator. The specific explanation in the text for the seventh day’s special hallowedness is that God ceased from his work. God has already

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36*Summary model* is the term I am using to refer to the words “And there was evening and there was morning, the ‘X’ day.” These words are used throughout Gen 1 to describe the period of time involved in days one through six of the creation week.

“blessed” the created order, enabling it to propagate (1:22, 28); but here the dimension of time, the “seventh day,” is said to be “blessed” of God. This “blessing” is explained by the subsequent act of consecration that is the first in the Bible. When God “sanctified” (qādaš) the day, he declared that the day was especially devoted to him.38

Westermann highlights the aspect of separation associated with the seventh day. For Westermann, this reveals that since the creation of structured time, God purposefully design the seventh day to be the apex, or, the goal of the work days of the week. He says:

Creation is set out on a time scheme comprising days of work and of rest. This is stated explicitly in 2:3. The root שַׁבָּת has the meaning of separation. When God sanctifies the seventh day (i.e., declares it holy), he sets it aside from the works of the six days as something special. The sanctification of the seventh day determines the time which begins with creation as structured time, and within which one day is not just the same as another. The days each have their goal in a particular day which is different from the rest—a day which is holy and apart. Days of work are not the only days that God has created. The time which God created is structured; days of work have their goal in a day of rest.39

Thus, the seventh day “introduces both the rest of God and the word שַׁבָּת, and most certainly has been shaped to serve this purpose. Both sentences [i.e., “(1) And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and (2) He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.”] echo the Sabbath command; both serve to comment and to emphasize.”40

From a historical perspective, I observed that the discussion over whether the seventh day of the creation week is the foundation of the biblical day of rest caught the attention of both Calvin and Luther. On one hand, Calvin recognized the principle of rest and holiness associated with the seventh day in Gen 2:1-3, and suggested that all humanity should use this weekly cycle (six days of work and one of rest) to maintain a closer relationship with God.41 Nevertheless, Calvin

38K. A. Mathews, Genesis, NAC 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 179 (emphasis supplied).
39Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 171.
40Ibid., 169.
41Commenting on God’s example of resting and blessing the seventh day, Calvin says: “This is, indeed, the proper business of the whole life, in which men should daily exercise themselves, to consider the infinite goodness, justice, power, and wisdom of God, in this magnificent theatre of heaven and earth. But, lest men should prove less sedulously attentive to it than they ought, every seventh day has been especially selected for the purpose of supplying what was wanting in daily meditation. First, therefore, God rested; then he blessed this rest, that in all ages it might be held sacred among men: or he dedicated every seventh day to rest, that his own example might be a perpetual rule. The design of the institution must be always kept in memory: for God did not command men
went on to make a distinction between the seventh day of the creation week and
the Sabbath. He insisted that only “in the Law, a new precept concerning the
Sabbath was given, which should be peculiar to the Jews, ... a legal ceremony
shadowing forth a spiritual rest, the truth of which was manifested in Christ.
Therefore the Lord the more frequently testifies that he had given, in the Sabbath,
a symbol of sanctification to his ancient people.”

Luther, on the other hand, did not differentiate the seventh day in Gen 2:1-3
from the Sabbath. He maintains that “God blessed the Sabbath and that He
sanctified it for Himself. ... [Only] the seventh day He did sanctify for Himself.
This has the special purpose of making us understand that the seventh day in
particular should be devoted to divine worship. For 'holy' is that which has been
set aside for God and has been removed from all secular uses.” And he concludes,
“Therefore from the beginning of the world the Sabbath was intended for the
worship of God.”

Like Calvin and Luther, post-Reformation scholars have debated how to
interpret the seventh day of the creation week (Gen 2:1-3). Groves, for example,
acknowledges the fact that YHWH “blessed the seventh day and sanctified it,”
and that the divine prescription attaches a special blessing and gives a unique
character to the seventh day, “as a day to be set apart to sacred purposes.” Likewise, Murphy argued that in Gen 2:1-3 “we have the institution of the day of
rest, the Sabbath (שַׁבָּת), on the cessation of God from his creative activity.”
Murphy affirms, “the Sabbath therefore is founded, not in nature, but in history.
Its periodical return is marked by the numeration of seven days.”

simply to keep holiday every seventh day, as if he delighted in their idleness; but rather
that they, being released from all other business, might the more readily apply their minds
to the Creator of the world. Lastly, that is a sacred rest which withdraws men from the
impediments of the world, that it may dedicate them entirely to God. But now, since men
are so backward to celebrate the justice, wisdom, and power of God, and to consider his
benefits, that even when they are most faithfully admonished they still remain torpid, no
slight stimulus is given by God’s own example, and the very precept itself is thereby
rendered amiable. For God cannot either more gently allure, or more effectually incite us
to obedience, than by inviting and exhorting us to the imitation of himself. Besides, we
must know, that this is to be the common employment not of one age or people only, but
of the whole human race.” See John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called

42Ibid., 1:106.

George V. Schick (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1958; repr., Logos Research System, 1999),
1:79, 80.

44Henry C. Groves, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1861),
33.

45James G. Murphy, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Genesis
(Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1863), 76, 78.
Late in the twentieth century, Sarna agreed that the “seventh day” in Gen 2:1-3 is “an integral part of the divinely ordained cosmic order, [and] it cannot be abrogated by man. Its blessed and sacred character is a cosmic reality entirely independent of human effort.” Nevertheless, he insists—like Von Rad—that “the human institution of the Sabbath does not appear in the [Genesis] narrative.” Among other reasons, Sarna says, that is because “the Sabbath is a distinctively Israelite ordinance, a token of the eternal covenant between God and Israel. Its enactment would be out of place before the arrival of Israel on the scene of history.”

Similarly, Strickland writes: “the institution of the Sabbath rest comes with the travel to the promised land (Exod 16:23) and the Sinai legislation (Exod 20:11).” Consequently, NCTs maintain that the Sabbath is not theologically founded on creation, and NCCs are not required to observe the Sabbath.

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The descriptive analysis of Gen 2:1-3 in Table 2 includes evidence in favor of and opposed to the interpretation of the seventh day as the theological foundation of the Sabbath. On one hand, the evidence in favor includes the literary structure of Gen 1:3-2:3 and arguments from historical theology. On the other hand, the opposing evidence includes the absence of the English word Sabbath prior to Exod 16:23 and 31:16, 17, which says “the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath . . . It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever.”

46Sarna, Genesis, 14.


48Arnold, Two Stage Biblical Creation, 364, 365.
Before proceeding to a descriptive analysis of Exod 20:8-11, it is essential to respond to NCTs which claim that the absence of the English word *Sabbath* before Exod 16:23 indicates that the biblical Sabbath is not theologically founded in the creation account. In response, I suggest that the interpreter’s epistemological view, which is foundational to any hermeneutical method, is essential in addressing this question. Earlier, in defining the hermeneutical approach I suggested that—because I presuppose that all Scripture is divinely inspired—a consistent hermeneutical method should embrace biblical metanarrative as its principle of knowledge. This approach allows for the use of passages years later in the interpretation of a given passage, without violating hermeneutical principles. In other words, the interpreter must remain committed to the protology to eschatology scope (i.e., from Genesis to Revelation), and consider all possible exegetical-historical and theological connections in Scripture. When this epistemological approach is taken, the correlation of the Sabbath ordinance into the seventh day of the creation week is not a hermeneutical violation. In this case, the seventh day must be regarded as the theological foundation of the Sabbath to sustain the unity of Scripture.

However, the correlation of the Sabbath principle or its rejection, should not be arbitrary. It should come from the text and be either theological or exegetical in nature. For instance, when NCTs argue that the absence of the English word *Sabbath* indicates the fourth commandment is not founded in creation, they seem to overlook the fact that the Bible was written in Hebrew and that its message was inherent in its language. In short, they overlook essential exegetical information that can justify the absence of the word *Sabbath* prior to Exod 16:23 in the English Bible. This seeming arbitrary action, seems to compromise their interpretation of biblical text.

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber explains that “contrary to the ore from which it is possible to extract the metal, it would be vain to try to separate the content of the Bible from its recipient [i.e., the Hebrew writer], every idea is one with the word which expresses it; it is an indissoluble totality.” Buber continues, “With regards to the Bible, any attempt to dissociate the content from the form would be artificial and pertain to a pseudoanalysis.” He concludes that “the alliterations, assonances, the repetition of the words, the structure of phrases, are not to be understood as esthetical categories, but rather as a part of the content of the message itself.”


In addition to Buber’s remarks on the holistic structure of the biblical message, scholars have also observed that contrary to the Hellenistic mindset, in the Hebrew mindset the action precedes the thought. This suggests that for the Hebrew-oriented society described in Scripture, it would be perfectly normal that the seventh day was known—and even kept—before the commandment was given to formalize the divine ordinance about the Sabbath.\(^{53}\) Doukhan emphasizes the same point when he says, “Hebrew thought does not construct the truth as a philosophical system; rather it is essentially the response to an event. Thus, in Hebrew, it is the thought that follows the event and not the reverse.”\(^{54}\) He continues, “In Hebrew, the verb seems to have preceded the noun. This observation ... tells us something about the mechanism of Hebrew thinking: the dynamics of the action prevails over the deliberations of the designation.”\(^{55}\)

If we apply Buber’s and Doukhan’s insights to the use of the Hebrew רשת in Scripture, we will discover that the Hebrew רשת occurs five times in its verbal form prior to Exod 16:23.\(^{56}\) Out of these five occurrences, three are actions directly related to the seventh day (Gen 2:2, 3; Exod 5:5). Thus, even though the noun Sabbath does not appear in the English translation prior to Exod 16:23, there is strong evidence that the actions associated with the Sabbath (rest, contemplation of God’s work, worship, etc.) are present in Scripture since creation, and throughout the history of the people of Israel.

Particularly important is Exod 5:5. Here we find a record of Pharaoh’s discontent with the people of Israel resting: “And the Pharaoh said, ‘Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!’”\(^{57}\) Pharaoh’s comments follow what appears to be Moses’ attempt to promote spiritual reform among the people (Exod 4:28-31).\(^{58}\) Upon arriving in Egypt, 

\(^{53}\)Keil and Delitzsch disagree that the Sabbath was kept before Exod 20:8-11. They say: “The Fourth Word, ‘Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy,’ presupposes an acquaintance with the Sabbath, as the expression ‘remember’ is sufficient to show, but not that the Sabbath had been kept before this. From the history of the creation that had been handed down, Israel must have known, that after God had created the world in six days He rested the seventh day, and by His resting sanctified the day (Gen 2:3). But hitherto there had been no commandment given to man to sanctify the day.” See Keil and Delitzsch, *On the Old Testament*, 1:398.

\(^{54}\)Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians*, 192.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., 48.

\(^{56}\)Gen 2:2, 3, 8:22; Exod 5:5, 12:15.

\(^{57}\)A literal translation of Pharaoh’s words to Moses—יَا יְהֹוָא אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ קָרָאִים תָּשָׁבְתוֹת 미ָּסְבְתָא׃—renders them as “you [i.e., Moses and Aaron] cause them to stop.” Osborn and Hatton say, “And you make them rest is literally ‘and you [plural] cause them to stop.’” See *A Handbook on Exodus*, 111.

Moses told Aaron about his encounter with God, who told the elders and the people about Moses’ experience. Once the report was given, Moses “did the signs in the sight of the people. So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped” (Exod 4:30b-31). This interaction of Moses with the people of Israel seems to have led them to worship God and to “shabbat” (Exod 5:5) according to his example (Gen 2:2-4a).

Nevertheless, if NCTs like Arnold want to say the word Sabbath in its substantive form does not appear in the English translation before Exod 16:23, nothing can be done to stop them. But since the Bible was not originally written in English, NCTs should seek to recognize that both the theological foundation of the Sabbath and the concept of a six-day working week followed by a day of rest, are present in the Hebrew text since creation and were well-known by God’s people.59 To use Henry’s words: “The setting apart of one day in seven for holy work, and, in order to that, for holy rest, was a divine appointment ever since God created man upon the earth, and the most ancient of positive laws.”60

Having looked at the evidence from both sides, I suggest that the evidence in favor of the seventh day as the theological foundation of the Sabbath spearheads a stronger theological system than the one embraced by NCTs. As noticed by Jamieson:

The institution of the Sabbath is as old as creation, giving rise to that weekly division of time which prevailed in the earliest ages. It is a wise and beneficent law, affording that regular interval of rest which the physical nature of man and the animals employed in his service requires, and the neglect of which brings both to premature decay. Moreover, it secures an appointed season for religious worship, and if it was necessary in a state of primeval innocence, how much more so now, when mankind has a strong tendency to forget God and His claims261

Westermann agrees with Jamieson that Gen 2:2, 3 “introduce[s] expressly the rest of God with echoes of the Sabbath command. The conclusion of creation has

59Ellen White states, “In their bondage the Israelites had to some extent lost the knowledge of God’s law, and they had departed from its precepts. The Sabbath had been generally disregarded, and the exactions of their taskmasters made its observance apparently impossible. But Moses had shown his people that obedience to God was the first condition of deliverance; and the efforts made to restore the observance of the Sabbath had come to the notice of their oppressors.” See ibid., 258.


its effect in the history of humankind because the rest of the Creator has given rise to a day which has been sanctified and blessed.” 62 Kline adds, “By means of his Sabbath-keeping, the image-bearer of God images the pattern of that divine act of creation which proclaims God’s absolute sovereignty over man, and thereby he pledges his covenant consecration to his Maker. The Creator has stamped on world history the sign of the Sabbath as his seal of ownership and authority.” 63

Altogether, the evidence in favor is not just consistent with CT in general and the SDA approach to CT in particular, but most importantly, it advances theological consistency by interpreting Scripture within its protology to eschatology scope, or biblical metanarrative, without falling into interpretations founded primarily on extrabiblical sources (e.g., tradition, secular philosophy, religious experience, etc.). Thus, I am convinced that the seventh day should function as the theological foundation of the Sabbath, 64 to preserve the unity of the protological, soteriological, and eschatological message of Scripture.

Having shown that the Hebrew word שַבָּת occurs five times in its verbal form prior to Exod 16:23, and that both the Sabbath and the concept of a six-day working week plus a day of rest are found in Scripture prior to those events, I want to turn to a descriptive analysis of Exod 20:8-11 and Exod 31:16, 17. I suggest that when the hermeneutical approach described above is used to interpret these other passages, the evidence will support the thesis of this article and advance a stronger theological system that functions consistently within the biblical metanarrative.

A Descriptive Analysis of Exodus 20:8-11

Generally speaking, the Decalogue is divided into two groups of laws: the first group deals with humankind’s obligations toward YHWH, and the second group deals with humankind’s obligations toward their neighbors. 65 In a sense, the

62 Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 169.


64 For detailed studies favoring the seventh day of creation as theological foundation of the Sabbath, see Mathilde Frey, “The Sabbath in the Pentateuch: An Exegetical and Theological Study” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2011), 14-72. See also Cole, “The Sabbath and Genesis 2:1-3,” 5-12.

65 Calvin agrees with this division, saying, “Indeed, the reason is so obvious as not to allow us to remain in doubt with regard to it. God thus divided his Law into two parts, containing a complete rule of righteousness, that he might assign the first place to the duties of religion which relate especially to His worship, and the second to the duties of charity which have respect to man.” See John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Henry Beveridge (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), 2:8.11. See also Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, Commentary, 1:62.
fourth commandment of the Decalogue functions as a springboard text. It points back to the first group of laws and forward to the second group of laws, including both the moral and religious obligations humankind should seek to fulfill to honor YHWH and their neighbors.

Though these observations reveal the internal connections of the Sabbath within the Decalogue, scholars have also found external connections—intertextual and theological—between the fourth commandment and the seventh day. I am proposing here that these connections extracted from Scripture alone strongly indicate that the biblical Sabbath is theologically founded on creation.

On the biblical hermeneutical component of Exod 20:8-11, Sarna, signals the intertextual connection between the institutionalization of the Sabbath and the seventh day of the creation week. He states,

Already implied in [Exod] 16:23–30, the Sabbath (Heb. shabbat) is not established by the Decalogue as a fixed, weekly institution. With the Creation as its rationale (as also reiterated in Exodus 31:13–17), the seventh day of each week is invested with blessing and holiness. It is an integral part of the divinely ordained cosmic order and exists independent of human effort. For this reason it is described here [in Exo 20:8] as “a sabbath of the LORD Your God.”

Douglas Stuart, also notices the intertextual connection involving the Sabbath and the seventh day. Even though he recognizes that the English word Sabbath does not appear in Scripture prior to Exod 16:23, Stuart points out that in Exod 16:4, 5 the biblical writer clearly acknowledges that YHWH had already instituted a law related to the seventh day. In Exod 16:4, 5, the biblical writer describes how YHWH required the people to collect a double portion of manna on the sixth day, similar to the collecting of the manna before the Sabbath in Exod 16:23. Stuart says:

This rule [i.e., the fourth commandment] looks both forward and backward in testing Israel’s faith in God’s provision. It looks backward to the creation account, which specifies that God himself rested on the seventh day [now called the Sabbath]; it looks forward to the revelation of the fourth commandment, establishing Sabbath observance as part of the covenant, a commandment which itself looks back to the creation order.

Like Sarna and Stuart, Henry argued that the Sabbath prescribed in Exod 20:8 is intertextually connected to the seventh day of the creation week in Gen 2:2, 3. Henry maintains that Exod 20:8-11 “was not the enacting of a new law, but the

66 A “springboard text” functions as the conclusion of a section and at the same time provides an introduction to the section that will follow.

67 Sarna, Exodus, 111 (emphasis supplied).

reviving of an old law”60 instituted by YHWH. In the proclamation of the fourth commandment, Henry says,

it is intimated that the Sabbath was instituted and observed before; but in their bondage in Egypt they had lost their computation, or were restrained by their task-masters, or, through a great degeneracy and indifference in religion, they had let fall the observance of it, and therefore it was requisite they should be reminded of it. Note, Neglected duties remain duties still, notwithstanding our neglect.70

If Henry is right, the fact that the Israelites lost the computation of the days during their bondage in Egypt implies that they kept the Sabbath not only immediately after the exodus (Exod 16:23), but also before arriving in Egypt during Joseph’s government (Gen 46:28-47:12). The point is that one cannot lose something that did not exist before. So, how could the Israelites have lost track of the observance of the Sabbath—call it the seventh day if you wish—if there was no command to observe the seventh day prior to the institutionalization of the Sabbath at Sinai? What Henry, Sarna, and Stuart seem to be aware of and what NCTs seem to ignore is that the behavior requirements surrounding the Sabbath and the seventh day throughout Scripture are not just similar, but identical (e.g., preparation, rest, worship). For theologians like Henry, Sarna, and Stuart, this seems to point to a theological connection that is found nowhere else in Scripture in relation to a day except in relation to the seventh day and the biblical Sabbath.

Theologically speaking, some scholars have also observed the connection between the fourth commandment and the seventh day. In relation to the hallowedness attributed to the seventh day and the Sabbath, for example, Wenham observes how the biblical concept of hallowedness connects past and future events involving a hallowed day in Scripture. Commenting on this point, Wenham notes that “it is unusual for a day to be ‘hallowed,’ that is, made or declared holy.” Though Wenham recognizes that the Piel form of the Hebrew verb קָדַשׁ may be declarative, he explains that in most cases קָדַשׁ “is usually factitive.”71 This being said, he concludes, “Places, people, and religious objects may be hallowed, but apart from the Sabbath [and the seventh day in Gen 2:1-3], only in Neb 8:9, 11 is a festival day called holy” by God in all of Scripture.72


70Henry, Commentary on the Whole Bible, 125.

71Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 36. For more information on how the factitive takes priority over declarative approach in the Hebraic mindset, see ibid., 19-22.

In agreement with Wenham, Skip MacCarty insists that Exod 20:8-11 in itself presents answers regarding its universal scope and everlastingness. When addressing the question of the universality and everlastingness of the Sabbath, MacCarty suggests that “the commandment itself points to the answers.” He calls attention to the Sabbath’s “universal application to servants, animals, and ‘the alien within your gates,’ and its universal reference to the Lord who made ‘the heavens ... earth ... sea ... and all that is in them.’” According to MacCarty, “in the Sabbath Moses recognizes not merely a human law but a universal law.”

Arguing in favor of the seventh day as the theological foundation of the biblical Sabbath, MacCarty says that the absence of the English word Sabbath in Scripture prior to Exod 16:23 and the Sabbath’s use as a symbol of God’s covenant with Israel in Exod 31:16, 17 do not indicate that the Sabbath was not observed prior to Exod 16:23. He observes that prior to Gen 9:9-6, while no explicit command against murder is recorded in Scripture, “Cain was held accountable for the murder of Abel” (Gen 4:6-11). Similarly, while no command against adultery is recorded in Scripture prior to Exod 20:14, “Joseph knew that adultery was ‘sin against God’” (Gen 39:9). He adds,

Instructively, the early chapters of the Bible do not explicitly state that God loves people, is merciful or compassionate, or will forgive sins; that was all revealed in the covenant He made and the Law He gave at Sinai (Exod 20:6; 34:6-7). Those characteristics, as well as the continued observance of the Sabbath by God’s people, were all assumed in those early chapters of the Bible that cover at least 2,500 years of human history.

In essence, Wenham’s and MacCarty’s observations about the theological connection of Exod 20:8-11 and Gen 2:1-3 seem to support the thesis of this article. That is, in order to obtain a consistent and coherent theological system that stems from Scripture alone and operates in the context of the biblical metanarrative, the seventh day must be regarded as the theological foundation of the biblical Sabbath. Further discussion indicates that this approach should impact not only the interpretation of Exod 31:16-27 (which says the Sabbath was the perpetual sign of God’s covenant with the Israelites), but also the interpretation of every passage on the Sabbath, which I suggest is a sign of the everlasting covenant of YHWH with humankind in all ages.

A Descriptive Analysis of Exodus 31:16, 17

Generally, the book of Exodus is divided into three main sections. The first main section (Exod 1:1-12:36) describes the life of the Israelites in Egypt; the second

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74Ibid., 12.

75Ibid.
(Exod 12:37-18:27) describes the journey of the people of Israel from Egypt to the Mount Sinai; and the third (Exod 19:1-40:38) presents the covenant and the laws given by YHWH at Sinai. Sarna points out that Exod 31:16, 17 belongs to “the concluding—and, appropriately, the seventh—literary unit within the pericope of the instructions for the Tabernacle.” Similar to the seventh day in the creation week, this concluding literary unit in Exodus “is devoted to the observance of the law of the Sabbath.” Here, an intertextual connection is established. Sarna affirms, “Quite deliberately the present unit features Creation as the rationale for the Sabbath (v. 17), as is found in the Decalogue (20:8-11), rather than the Exodus, as in the version in Deuteronomy (5:12-15). It is in the Creation narrative of Genesis that the first occurrence of the idea of the holy is encountered, and it relates to time—the Sabbath.”

Besides this intertextual connection, there is another component that supports the thesis of this article and is frequently neglected by NCTs. Following the exegetical-historical and theological reading, it is in the immediate context of Exod 31:16, 17—which begins in verse 12—that YHWH (the “Whom?”) specifically addresses the primary reason he wants to use the Sabbath as a covenantal sign. Verse 13 says, “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you’” (emphasis supplied). Here, YHWH begins his instructions about the Sabbath by claiming authority over this day. He chooses to use the Sabbath because it belongs to him. Though YHWH used the Sabbath as a covenantal sign with Israel, he never surrendered his authority over the Sabbath to Israel. Osborn and Hatton


77 Henry, Commentary on the Whole Bible, 138.

78 Sarna, Exodus, 201.

79 Ibid.

80 The “Whom?” is a question related to the author of the text—YHWH in this case. Although Moses is generally recognized as the author of the book of Exodus, it is clear in the text that the words in vv. 13-17a are a transcription of the words dictated by God to Moses, who then announced them to the people. “Whom?” is one of the five most common questions (Whom? What? When? Where? Why?) used by scholars to determine the meaning of a biblical text. For information on hermeneutics, see J. Scott and J. Daniel Hays Duvall, Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005); Grant R. Osborne, The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); Moisés Silva, ed., Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).
understood the significance of this point. The phrase “My Sabbaths you shall keep” means “literally ‘Surely my Sabbaths you [plural] will guard.’”

Osborn’s and Hatton’s declaration results in two positive insights on Exod 31:13. First, because YHWH uses the plural instead of the singular to claim ownership over the day, verse 13 is a reference to the weekly biblical Sabbath and not the sabbatical festivals. Keil and Delitzsch came to the same conclusion more than a century before; the divine claim in Exod 31:13 is not about “sabbatical festivals, since the words which follow apply to the weekly Sabbath alone.” Second, this declaration implies that though the Israelites were to keep the Sabbath as a sign of God’s covenant with them, it was not their own day to keep. YHWH explicitly says the weekly Sabbath belongs to himself. It is a divine claim of ownership over the Sabbath, which is strengthened in verse 15: “but the seventh [day] is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD.” Hence, the Sabbath is not given to Israel as a covenental sign; it is only used as a perpetual sign of God’s covenant with the Israelites. Notwithstanding, the Sabbath remains the property of the Creator.

Commenting on this passage, Sarna observes how YHWH’s ownership of the Sabbath is also reflected in his control over the seventh day as “an integral part of the cosmic order ordained by God.” Similarly, Kline explains that at creation, “the Creator has stamped on world history the sign of the Sabbath as his seal of ownership and authority.” According to Kline, this suggests that fundamentally “the Sabbath [in Exod 31:12-18] is related to God’s eternal covenant (v. 16), as a sign of the relationship between himself and his people.” Most important for the purpose of this article, Campbell concludes that Exod 31:16 “is not telling us that the Sabbath was merely an institution for ethnic Israel, for we know that its significance was wider than that. It was made for all men (Mark 2:27), not just for Israel. But it has especial significance for those who are in a covenant relationship with the Lord.”

Conclusion

How should one respond to claims that the Sabbath is not theologically founded on creation; that the Sabbath is an institution created much later than the seventh day of creation; that it is hermeneutically incorrect to import the concept of the Sabbath back into the creation account; and that the Sabbath should be regarded as a covenant sign between YHWH and the people of Israel?

83Sarna, *Exodus*, 201.
84Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 18, 19.
After surveying literature by both CTs and NCTs, and completing a descriptive analysis of Gen 2:2, 3, Exod 20:8-11, and Exod 31:16, 17, I conclude that there is strong and reliable evidence to support the claim that the seventh day should function as the theological foundation of the Sabbath. This evidence was shown through an exegetical-historical and theological reading of the text, using a hermeneutical approach—ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology—that derives from Scripture. In short, the ontological principle is based on critical realism; the metaphysical principle is based on the infinite analogical temporality of God; and the epistemological principle is based on the protology to eschatology scope in Scripture, or biblical metanarrative. When applied to the interpretation of Gen 2:2, 3, Exod 20:8-11, and Exod 31:16, 17, these hermeneutical approaches led me to conclude the following.

First, the biblical Sabbath is theologically founded on the seventh day of the creation week, and it was not used only as a sign of YHWH’s covenant with the people of Israel. This is indicated exegetically in the literary structure of the creation account, which shows the uniqueness of the seventh day in relation to the other days of the creation week. It is indicated theologically by the hallowedness of the seventh day; no other weekly day is called hallowed in Scripture but the seventh day and the biblical weekly Sabbath. In addition, it is indicated by the use of the Hebrew שַבָּת in its verbal form five times prior to Exod 16:23, which suggests that the principles of rest, contemplation of God’s creation, and possibly worship on the seventh day were followed by God’s people before the fourth commandment was given.

Second, Exod 20:8-11 begins with the presupposition that God’s people were familiar with the observance of the Sabbath. While it is possible for Exod 20:8 to be a reference to Exod 16:23, the linkage of the fourth commandment with the seventh day promotes the biblical metanarrative, and therefore, it should be preferred.

Third, restricting the divine commandment in Exod 31:16, 17 to the people of Israel is inconsistent with the overall context of the passage (verses 12-18). Here, before telling the Israelites that the Sabbath is a sign of his covenant with them, YHWH claims ownership of the Sabbath, emphasizing that the Sabbath was “holy to the LORD” (Exod 31:15) before it was holy for the people of Israel. The English words “My Sabbaths” are a reference to the weekly Sabbaths and not the sabbatical festivals given to the people of Israel.

All things considered, I am convinced it is not hermeneutically incorrect to interpret the seventh day of the creation week as the theological foundation of the biblical Sabbath. In fact, the theological echoes of the Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11, 31:16, 17) can and should be linked consistently to Gen 2:2, 3, as a sign of God’s ownership and authority over all creation and history. Hence, I suggest that because there is no explicit command revoking the Sabbath ordinance,

Warfield, “Foundations of the Sabbath,” 76ff.
observance of the fourth commandment is required of all humans who are part of God’s everlasting covenant.