

**Genesis 2:1-3**  
*The Meaning of the Sabbath*

As some of you know, I grew up in a religious home

- Not a Christian home
- But a religious home

My parents were both moral and upright individuals

- However, neither one was a follower of Christ

As a matter of fact, some of my earliest memories are with me sitting on my Dad's lap listening to Southern Gospel quartets on Sunday morning

- I would sit with him and listen to the music, not really paying attention to the words

Then we would watch one or two church services where the Word of God was proclaimed

- But it never seemed to penetrate our hearts

When I was around 10 or 11, I began attending a local Baptist church in Rock Hill, South Carolina

- It was a good church that taught me many things about the Word of God

As I think back upon those early years, the issue of the Sabbath as a day of rest was ingrained into my thinking

- I am not sure whether I heard this from my Dad or from the church
- But it was part of my thinking early on

Somewhere along the line, I learned that Saturday was the Sabbath

- Yet, I was confused because on most Saturdays, I would be out working with my Dad in construction

It also confused me that it seemed that Sunday, not Saturday, was the time when everyone seemed to rest and relax from their labor

To get a proper understanding of the Sabbath, we have to turn back to the book of Genesis

- It is here in God's Word that we gain a right knowledge of the meaning of the Sabbath
- What we will discover may surprise you!

But before we look at the Sabbath, let's back up and realize what we have seen thus far

For the past few weeks, we have been studying the opening chapter of the book of Genesis

There is a remarkable order and symmetry in the first chapter of Genesis

- It points to the Divine design of creation

Genesis 1:1-2 serve as a summary or snapshot of creation, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters."

- The condition or status of the Earth is "formless and void" (1:2)

These two Hebrew words aptly describe the condition of the Earth after God's initial act of creation

- "formless" – the Earth was uninhabitable; unfit for life
- "void" – the earth was uninhabited; no life forms existed at that time

The rest of verse two describes a snapshot of the earth at that time, “darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”

- The earth was a dark, watery quagmire
- It might be described as a swampy area – dark, moist, watery

In order for life to exist on Earth, there had to be some drastic changes

- Herein is where the six days of creation come into the picture

The six days of creation will take this dark watery mass and make it fit for life

- The first three days of creation will cause the Earth to become habitable or livable – formless to form
- The second three days of creation will cause the Earth to become inhabited with life – void to life

These six (6) days of creation described in chapter one have a wonderful correspondence or parallelism

- Days 1 & 4 – creation of lights in the heavens
- Days 2 & 5 – creation of an expanse to separate the waters and the creation of animals to populate the air and water
- Days 3 & 6 – creation of land out of the water and the creation of animals to populate that land

There is also the fact that each of the six days has at least one act of creation

- Days three and six, however, each have two (2) acts of creation

But this morning, we need to look at the seventh day of the creation week

- This day is very special
- This day is very different from the other six days

### Let's read Genesis 2:1-3

We want to look at the issue of the Sabbath in its original setting so that we can know how it applies to Israel and to the Church

#### I. The Sabbath in Genesis

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.

Just a casual reading of these three verses show us that God is the clear subject

- As a matter of fact, of the ten (10) verbs in these three verses, eight of them have God as the subject
  - o God completed (2:2)
  - o God made (2:2, twice)
  - o God rested (2:2)
  - o God blessed (2:3)
  - o God sanctified (2:3)
  - o God rested (2:3)
  - o God created (2:3)

There is an emphasis on repetition that we cannot miss

- “work” is repeated three times (2:2<sup>2</sup>, 3<sup>1</sup>)
- “all” is repeated three times (2:1, 2, 3)
- “the seventh day” is repeated three times (2:2<sup>2</sup>, 3<sup>1</sup>)
- The verb “do” or “made” is repeated three times (2:2<sup>2</sup>, 3<sup>1</sup>)
- The verb “rested” is repeated twice (2:2, 3)

Strangely enough, this written account of day seven omits some repetition that we would expect<sup>1</sup>

- First, there is no reference to the phrase, “and God said”
- Second, there is no reference to the phrase, “and there was evening and there was morning, the \_\_\_\_\_ day”
- Third, the seventh day is the only one blessed and sanctified by God
- Fourth, the number of the “seventh” day is repeated three times
- Fifth, the seventh day has no corresponding day in the creation week<sup>2</sup>

As you remember, there was a parallelism between the six days

- Days 1 & 4 Lights in the heavens
- Days 2 & 5 Water & air; fish and fowl
- Days 3 & 6 Land and animals

But for the seventh day, there is no corresponding day

- It is a day unlike the other six

Moses wrote very carefully, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts”

- This sounds a note of completion and achievement
- The work was done

We notice the scope of completion extends to all of creation

- “The heavens”
- “The earth”
- “All their hosts”

The totality of beings that were created are lumped in this one verse<sup>3</sup>

Genesis 2:1 sounds much like Genesis 1:1

- 2:1, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts”
- 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”

The difference lies in perspective

- 1:1 describes the Earth before creation
- 2:1 describes the Earth after creation

The work of creation was “completed”

- It was finished
- It was accomplished
- There was nothing else to do!<sup>4</sup>
- No problems to fix<sup>5</sup>

*In six, 24-hour periods of time, God brought to completion all that is*

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Genesis*, 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Genesis 1-11:26*, 176.

<sup>3</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Genesis*, 42.

<sup>4</sup> Mathews, 178.

<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning*, 180.

The Earth was no longer “formless and void” (Gen 1:2)

- It now had form and was full of various life forms

Just like Genesis 1:1-2, Genesis 2:1 records stillness and silence

- No noise
- No speaking<sup>6</sup>

It is unfortunate that our English versions begin a new chapter with day seven

- This creates confusion instead of continuity

<sup>2</sup> And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done;

The first six days of creation were days of work and accomplishment

- The seventh day is a day of completion and cessation from work
- No exertion of energy was spent on the seventh day<sup>7</sup>

In Exodus 20, after the giving of the Law, Moses writes, “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (20:11)

- This is a summary statement of the early part of Genesis
- After His creation, God “rested on the seventh day”

This is now the second time that God is said to have “completed”

His work of creation

- Contrary to evolution and other humanistic thinking, the world is not still being created<sup>8</sup>

Look at verse two, and realize that Moses emphasizes the work of creation as “His work” – speaking of God Himself

- As a matter of fact, this second verse contains *two* references to creation being “His work”
- As if chapter one is not clear enough, Moses includes this dual reference to God’s activity in creation<sup>9</sup>

The word here for “work” denotes that which is done by a skilled artisan or craftsman

- It is “the finesse and professional skills of God’s work”<sup>10</sup>

If you look at verses 2 & 3, you will notice a repetition of the phrase “the seventh day”

- “And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done” (2:2a)
- “and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done” (2:2b)
- “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (2:3a)

This is one way by which Moses brought attention to the importance of this seventh day<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 1-17*, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 80.

<sup>9</sup> Hamilton, 142.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>11</sup> Mathews, 177.

and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Having completed His work of creation, God “rested”

- This was not due to exhaustion or fatigue

The prophet Isaiah records these powerful words, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired” (40:28)

The psalmist exhorts us, “Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (121:4)

Speaking of this Sabbath rest, Moses wrote in the book of Exodus, “It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed.” (31:17)

- Israel’s obedience to the Sabbath was an expression of their loyalty to God as their Creator-Covenant Lord<sup>12</sup>

What is interesting is that God not only “*ceased from labor*” – He also “was refreshed” according to Exodus 31

God is not like us

- He does not need rest and sleep due to being tired

Quite the contrary, being “refreshed” implies delight and satisfaction

- You might say that God took pleasure in His work<sup>13</sup>

Remember how the sixth day of creation ended?

- “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day” (Gen 1:31)
- There were no defects or mistakes – only perfection

You will search in vain to find the word “Sabbath” in the book of Genesis

- The generic “seventh day” is used to denote the ending of a typical 7 day week

<sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day

In bringing creation to completion, God did two things

- He ceased from the work of creation
- He blessed and sanctified the work of creation

We have already seen how God “blessed” some things in Genesis 1

- 1:22 – the fish and the fowl, “And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’”
- 1:28 – humans, “And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

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<sup>12</sup> Mathews, 178.

<sup>13</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, 42.

But this is the first time that God blesses a day

- This seventh day was different from the other six
- God created on six days and rested on the seventh

and sanctified it.

Because the seventh day was blessed, God “**sanctified it**”

- This word for “**sanctify**” implies being set apart
- It is the root word from which we get words such as: holy, sanctify, set apart, sanctification, and holiness

When something is sanctified, it is set apart

- But it is set apart *for God*
- It is specially devoted to Him<sup>14</sup>

The Sabbath was a special day set aside to honor God for what He had done

because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

We have to keep in mind that God ceased only from His *creative* activities

- This verse cannot be used to say that God has ceased working altogether

God is still actively involved in His creation

- He sustains it
- He governs it

Thousands of years after Genesis 2, Christ told the Jewish leaders, “**My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working**” (John 5:17)

- The Christ affirms that God has been working since the beginning

A religious group referred to as the Deists teach that God is like a clock maker, winding up creation and then stepping away

- But that cannot be justified from Genesis or the overall teaching of Genesis<sup>15</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, the characteristic phrase, “and there was evening and there was morning the \_\_\_\_ day” is strangely absent on the seventh day

- This was the case for the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth days of creation
- But not for the seventh<sup>16</sup>

The seventh day has no end

- It is viewed as being eternal since the work of creation is finished<sup>17</sup>

*We have seen the meaning of the Sabbath in Genesis 1*

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<sup>14</sup> Mathews, 179.

<sup>15</sup> MacArthur, 185.

<sup>16</sup> Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Mathews, 181.

## II. The Sabbath as it applies to Israel

For Israel, there was to be no work performed on the Sabbath

- “For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy *day*, a sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.” (Ex 35:2)

It was not merely a day of rest and relaxation from activities

- It was a special day that was a time of reflection and remembrance
- An opportunity to ponder and to meditate on the power and majesty of creation

There are many restrictions placed upon Israel that would have made no sense to Adam and Eve<sup>18</sup>

- Israel was told to remain in their dwelling places on the Sabbath
  - o Adam and Eve had no home – they were free to roam all over Eden
- Israel was forbidden to do any work on the Sabbath
  - o Adam and Eve are not given these same restrictions
  - o As a matter of fact, they had no toil and labor from which to rest!
- Israel was told to delight in the Lord on the Sabbath
  - o Adam and Eve delighted in the Lord with perfect fellowship, even walking with God Himself

The Sabbath was designed to show what was lost in the Fall of man

- It was a reminder and rebuke to Israel of what God’s original design was for humanity

Remember how the seventh day doesn’t have the repeated phrase, “and there was evening and there was morning the \_\_\_\_ day”?

- That rest that God enjoyed could have continued for humanity indefinitely if it has not been for Adam’s sin<sup>19</sup>
  - o There was no decay
  - o There was no sickness
  - o There was no pain
  - o There was no death
  - o There was no labor
- Adam and Eve could have lived in a perfect state of rest forever!

God’s work of creation was completed

- But due to sin through Adam, God began the work of redemption
- He would bring that work to completion as well

Adam’s sin caused major ramifications

- This extended even to the celebration of the Sabbath

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<sup>18</sup> MacArthur, 186.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 187.

Israel had to set aside a day of remembrance because of the work that was part of the curse

- A day of rest and relaxation gave them time to focus on the creation<sup>20</sup>
- As they meditated on the work of creation, their hearts would have been drawn to worship God
  - o For His power
  - o For His mercy
  - o For His sovereignty
  - o For His majesty

For the nation of Israel, the Sabbath was a sobering reminder of many important truths

- They, too, were God's creation
- God has completed His work of creation
- Celebrating the Sabbath is a reminder of their loyalty to God
- God is gracious in providing a day of rest from the demands of hard labor
- The Sabbath is a sign that God Himself has set Israel apart for a special covenant relationship with Himself<sup>21</sup>

But we are wrong if we try to institute the Sabbath for Israel in the book of Genesis

- The nation of Israel was not even in existence at the end of the creation week
- The only people alive were Adam and Eve
- It would be another 2500 years before anyone was required to keep the Sabbath

Let's keep something very basic in mind

- On the seventh day, *God* rested
- Nothing is said about Adam and Eve resting

Remember, the focus of this passage is on God

- Not Adam
- Not Eve
- Not Israel

The Sabbath is first and foremost about God's actions

- On a secondary level, the nation of Israel was exhorted to set aside the day as a time of worship and reflection on God as their Creator

This is why when we read in the Gospels and the book of Acts, the Jews gathered on the Sabbath

- They gathered to worship God
- They gathered to read the Scriptures

*We have seen the original meaning of the Sabbath in Genesis 1*

- *We have also seen the application of the Sabbath to Israel*
- *But how does the Sabbath apply to believers in the Church?*

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<sup>20</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 114.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, 71-73.



### III. The Sabbath as it applies to the Church

As Christians, we can pause on any given Saturday and thank God for His work of creation

- This is perfectly acceptable and would help us to meditate on God's powerful work of creation
- But we have something greater to celebrate

The Sabbath is celebrated every Saturday

- But we gather as a church on Sunday

In Matthew 28:1, the Bible states, "Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave."

- The day after the Sabbath is Sunday, here called "the first *day* of the week"

The book of Acts describes how the believers were gathered to break bread "on the first day of the week" (20:7)

- This is Sunday, not a Saturday Sabbath

Paul exhorted the believers at Corinth, "On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come" (1 Cor 16:2)

- The assumption is that the church at Corinth gathered on Sunday, not Saturday, for worship

What made the change?

- Why did the Church worship on Sunday instead of Saturday?
- *The sacrifice of Christ on the cross of Calvary made the difference*

Follow me on this point

- Saturday is the Sabbath – a day to remember creation
- Sunday is the Lord's Day – a day to remember redemption

For the Christian, we are not bound by the Mosaic Law

- We are not bound to keep the Sabbath
- We don't have to rest from our labor on Saturday

Of the 10 Commandments, every one of them is required of believers, except for the Sabbath

- You will search in vain to find a verse for the Church to keep the Sabbath

The book of Hebrews informs us of a Christian perspective regarding the Sabbath

- Hebrews 3:7-4:11 exhort us to enjoy the rest that we have because of Christ
- Of course, this rest is a future hope, not a present possession

The apostle Paul wrote that we are not to be bound by the Old Covenant ceremonies, including the Sabbath, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day – <sup>17</sup> things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." (Col 2:16-17)

- The apostle Paul is writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and affirms that the Sabbath is a "mere shadow of what is to come"
- In other words, the Sabbath was designed to point to a greater reality

The Sabbath was a day for the nation of Israel to ponder the power of creation

- But for Christians, the Lord's Day is Sunday, a day in which we remember the Lord's resurrection from the dead
- This is the greater reality that should be in our minds

Yes, God is our Creator

- But He is also our Savior and Redeemer

For the believer, we can celebrate who God is and what He has done

- On Saturday – His creation
- On Sunday – His redemption

We look forward to enjoying heaven

- Eternal fellowship with God
- Unbroken pattern of holiness
- Cessation from death, sickness, and sin

This is, in essence, what Adam and Eve gave up in sinning against God

- At one point, creation was perfect
- At one point, man enjoyed perfect fellowship with God

But that perfection didn't last long

- Sin entered the picture and destroyed everything

For Israel, the Sabbath was a painful reminder of this pristine creation that was lost

- Their hope was that a future time of restoration would come
- A time when they, too, could enjoy God's presence forever
- They would look forward to the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.""

But we know that Christ has provided a way for you to have redemption

- There is a way for you to enjoy God's presence forever
- There is a way for your sins to be forgiven

I would exhort you to repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ

- Ask Him to deliver you from your sin
- Ask Him to change you

God is the awesome Creator

- But God is also the gracious Redeemer
- He has made it possible for you to enjoy redemption

The Sabbath is first and foremost about God

- Yes, it does have application to Israel and to the Church
- However, the original use of the Sabbath pertains to God ceasing His work of creation in Genesis 2

We are not bound by the Old Covenant rules and restrictions regarding the Sabbath

- Through the power of Christ, we are no longer subject to them

This does not, however, mean that we have to miss the bigger point of the Sabbath

- In Genesis 2, God rested since His work of creation was finished
- There was nothing else for Him to do!

But when Adam and Eve sinned, they forfeited their blessed state of perfection

- God then began to set in motion the work of redemption

As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that He has also completed the work of redemption

- We praise Him for providing salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ