

The Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3

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Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. ² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Gen 2:1-3)¹

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod 20:8-11)

Introduction

In the present paper I compare two passages – Gen 2:1-3 and Exod 20:8-11. The two are closely similar in wording and in subject matter. This comparison is stated from two points of view – one minimalist, the other maximalist. In the one case I limit myself to only those elements that are nearly identical in the two passages. In the other case I list the entire text of both passages and show where there are connections between them. Almost nothing is left over after tracing all verbal and thematic parallels. Gen 2:1-3 is very closely related to what we would later know as the fourth commandment. One difference is that there is no command, spoken or implied, in the earlier passage – no restriction, no limitation. The Sabbath in Gen 2 is a gift to mankind, as is marriage.

The Parallels

There are a number of verbal parallels between Gen 2:1-3 and Exod 20:8-11. These include 15 examples from Gen 2 where words or phrases occur that are cognate with something in the other passage, and 14 from Exod 20. The word translated "do" in Gen 2:2, 2; Exod 20:9, 10 (*ʿāśâ*) is translated "make" in Exod 20:11. Similarly, the verbs translated "rest" in Gen 2:2, 2 (*wayyišbōt, šābat*) are built on the same root as the noun "Sabbath" in Exod 20:8, 9, 11 (*šabbāt*). These are verbal parallels. See table 1.

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Table 1
Verbal Parallels

Meaning	Gen 2	Exod 20
God	2, 3, 3	10
Seventh day	2, 2, 3	10, 11
Work	2, 2, 3	9, 10
Do/make	2, 2	9, 10, 11
Rest/Sabbath	2, 3	8, 9, 11
Bless	3	11
Make holy	3	8, 11

There are also cases where words or phrases in the one passage are not cognate with anything in the other, but convey a similar meaning. This occurs once in Gen 2 and twice in Exod 20. These are thematic parallels. See table 2.

Table 2
Thematic Parallels

Meaning	Gen 2	Exod 20
Labor (work)		9
Create (make)	3	
Rest		11

In addition to what is mentioned in tables 2 and 3, there are three uses of the name *YHWH* in Exod 20:8-11. This name is not used in Gen 2:1-3, but it does appear in vs. 4. So an additional parallel is available there.

In table 3 the two groups of parallels mentioned above are combined. Thematic parallels appear below their verbal counterparts and are shaded. I only include terms as thematic parallels when they exhibit a meaning that is similar to that found in a pair of words which are cognate in both passages.

Table 3
Minimalist View of Verbal and Thematic Parallels
Between Gen 2:1-3 and Exod 20:8-11

Gen 2			Exod 20		
Vs.	Hebrew	English	Hebrew	English	Vs.
Words for God					
2	אלהים	God	אלהים	God	10
3	אלהים	God			
3	אלהים	he			
Seventh Day					
2	ביום השביעי	By the seventh day	יום השביעי	the seventh day	10
2	ביום השביעי	on the seventh day	ביום השביעי	on the seventh day	11
3	את־יום השביעי	the seventh day			
Words for Working					
2	מלאכתו	the work	כל־מלאכתך	all your work	9
2	מכל־מלאכתו	from all his work	כל־מלאכה	any work	10
3	מכל־מלאכתו	from all the work			
			תעבד	you shall labor	9
Words for Doing or Making					
2	עשה	he had been doing	ועשית	and do	9
2	עשה	that he had done (vs. 3)	לא־תעשה	you shall not do	10
			עשה	made	11
3	ברא	of creating			
Words for Resting					
2	וישבת	he rested	את־יום השבת	the Sabbath day	8
3	שבת	rested	שבת	a Sabbath	9
			את־יום השבת	the Sabbath day	11
			וינח	but he rested	11
Bless					
3	ויברך	blessed	ברך	blessed	11
Make Holy					
3	ויקדש	and made it holy	לקדשו	by keeping it holy	8
			ויקדשהו	and made it holy	11

Table 4
Maximalist View of Verbal and Thematic Parallels Between
Gen 1:1-3 and Exod 20:8-11 (Transliterated)

Genesis 1:1-3			Exod 20:8-11		
Vs.		Key	Key		Vs.
1	wayəḵullû	#	-	zākôr	8
	haššāmáym wəhāʾāreṣ wəkol-ṣəbāʾām	a	f	ʔeṭ-yôm haššabbāṭ	
2	wayəḵal	#	h	ləqaddəšô	
	ʔəlōhîm	b	%	šēšet yāmîm	9
	bayyôm haššəbîʿî	c	(i)	taʿābōd	
	məlaʾkəṭô	d	e	wəʿāsîṭā	
	ʔāšer ʿāsāʰ	e	d	kol-məlaʾkəṭəkā	
	wayyišbōṭ	f	c	wəyôm haššəbîʿî	10
	bayyôm haššəbîʿî	c	f	šabbāṭ	
	mikkol-məlaʾkəṭô	d	*	lyhwh(laʾdōnāy)	
	ʔāšer ʿāsāʰ	e	b	ʔəlōheʾkā	
3	wayəbārek	g	d	lōʾ-taʿāsəʰ kol-məlaʾkāʰ	11
	ʔəlōhîm	h	-	ʔattāʰ ûbinkā-ûbittəkā ʿabdəkā waʾamāṭkā ûbəhemṭəkā wəgərəkā ʔāšer bišʿareʾkā	
	ʔeṭ-yôm haššəbîʿî	c	%	kî šēšet-yāmîm	
	wayəqaddəš ʔōṭô	h	e	ʿāsāʰ	
	kî bô	-	*	yhwh(ʔādōnāy)	
	šābāṭ	f	a	ʔeṭ-haššāmáym wəʔeṭ-hāʾāreṣ ʔeṭ-hayyām wəʔeṭ-kol-ʔāšer-bām	
	mikkol-məlaʾkəṭô	d	(f)	wayyānaḥ	
	ʔāšer-bārāʔ	i	c	bayyôm haššəbîʿî	
	ʔəlōhîm	b	g	ʿal-kēn bəraḵ	
	laʿāsōṭ	e	*	yhwh(ʔādōnāy)	
			f	ʔeṭ-yôm haššabbāṭ	
			h	wəyəqaddəšəḥû	

Table 5
Maximalist View of Verbal and Thematic Parallels Between
Gen 1:1-3 and Exod 20:8-11 (Translated)

Genesis 1:1-3			Exod 20:8-11		
Vs.		Key	Key		Vs.
1	Thus the heavens and the earth . . . in all their vast array were completed.	a	-	Remember	8
		#	f	the Sabbath day	
2	By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.	c	h	by keeping it holy	
		b	%	Six days	9
		#	(i)	you shall labor	
		d	e	and do	
		e	d	all your work,	
		c	c	but the seventh day	10
		f	f	is a Sabbath	
		d	*	to the LORD	
		(e)	b	your God.	
3	And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.	h	(j)	[On it]	11
		g	d	you shall not do any work,	
		c	-	neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.	
		h	%	For in six days	
		(j)	*	the LORD	
		f	e	made	
		d	a	the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them	
		i	(f)	but he rested	
		b	c	on the seventh day.	
		e	g	Therefore . . . blessed	
			*	the LORD	
			f	the Sabbath day	
			h	and made it holy.	

Note: For syntactic reasons the order of clauses is sometimes different between tables 4 and 5, but the letters indexing the similarities between them have been shifted to take this into account.

Differences Between the Passages

Some of the differences between the passages derive purely from the text and so we can comment on those linguistically. But some of the differences have to do with the contexts or situations in which the passages are framed. There are generally reasons for the differences.

Textual differences

In tables 4 and 5 notice that virtually every word group is drawn into the system of parallels. Generally there are thematic parallels where verbal parallels are missing. For example, in Gen 2 when the text says God "rested" the word is *wayyišbōt* or *šābat*, whereas in Exod 20 it is *wayyānaḥ*. But in both cases what God does is rest. Although different words are used the intent is the same. This is a thematic parallel.

The Hebrew words *wayyišbōt*, *šābat* (Gen 2:2, 3) and *haššabbāt*, *šabbāt*, *haššabbāt* (Exod 20:8, 10, 11) are translated variously. In Gen 2 the first two forms are used as verbs, in Exod 20 the last three are used as nouns. But all are derived from the same root (*šbt). So there is an apparent difference in English, but not in Hebrew. Note that the noun "Sabbath" in Exod 20 corresponds to the verb "rested" in Gen 2. Here the parallel is thematic in nature.

The words *kî bô* ("for on it") do not appear in the Hebrew text of Exod 20:8-11, but the idea does. At the beginning of vs. 11 the Hebrew says, "You shall not do any work" (my gloss). This cannot mean you shall never do any work, because vs. 8 says to work on all days other than Sabbath. So the intent would have to be, "[On it] you shall not do any work," and this is what NIV says, "On it you shall not do any work", . . ." (vs. 8).

In the NIV of Gen 2 the English words, "that he had done," at the end of vs. 3, correspond to a Hebrew word at the end of vs. 2 (*āšā*). For reasons of style the translators put this clause later in the passage.

Finally, in regard to the words *wayy^ekullû* ("were completed," Gen 2:1) and *way^ekal* ("had finished," vs. 2), notice that these convey a shade of meaning also included in the verbs *wayyišbōt* ("he rested," vs. 2) and *šābat* ("he rested," vs. 3). It is the idea of cessation. One meaning of the verb *šābat* is "stop," as Heb 4:9-10 makes clear. This brings us back to the familiar noun form *šabbāt* ("Sabbath") in Exod 20:8, 10, and 11. The web of words that binds Gen 2:1-3 to Exod 20:8-11 is very tightly woven.

Contextual differences

One reason why Moses, in writing down the passage from Genesis, does not mention the six days prior to Sabbath is that he has just finished writing an entire chapter which describes the first six days in detail. So there are good contextual reasons for the absence of a parallel based on the expressions *šēšet yāmîm* (Exod 20:8) and *kî šēšet-yāmîm* (vs. 11), "(for) six days."

This might be why we have two references to finishing (*way^ekullû, way^ekal*) in the Genesis passage (see vss. 1, 2), but none in Exodus. The work of the first six days had just been completed in the first case, and so that was part of the immediate context for the earlier passage. In Exod 20:8-11 no one doubted that God's work of creation had been complete long before. By then it was an important but distant memory.

This set of circumstances in turn would account for the fact that the commandment begins with the word "Remember" (*zākôr*), a word that does not occur in Gen 2. In Gen 2 the earlier events of creation week had just transpired in the immediate past. It was not a matter of remembering them. They were fresh in mind. In Exod 20:8 we are commanded to remember because there was a danger of forgetting because of the long lapse of time in the interim.

Just here there is insight into a vexed question of translation. Speaking of the Sabbath, KJV has "to keep it holy," whereas many modern versions have "by keeping it holy." Both are allowed by the Hebrew, but the one reading would be especially appropriate if what God has in mind goes forward (don't forget to keep the Sabbath holy), while the other would be especially appropriate if the memory goes back (remember what God did by keeping the Sabbath holy). A parallel would be with the Lord's Supper. "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24; see also vs. 25). Both shades of meaning are appropriate to the text. Neither sense can be excluded.

Another clause that appears in Exod 20, but not Gen 2, is "neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates" (vs. 11). There is more than one reason why this should be. First, on that first Sabbath Adam didn't have children. He may or may not have had a wife. And second, the Sabbath in Eden was not a commandment. There was nothing restrictive about it. This is an important fact to remember, and might well fall within the scope of that word's use at the beginning of vs. 8.

When all possible matches are made between the two passages, not many words remain unaccounted for. Almost every word of Gen 2:2-3 has some corresponding element in Exod 20:8-11. And where differences do occur, there are reasons for them. The earlier passage is robustly and insightfully referenced in the later one.

Discussion

The significance of the textual relationships introduced above is far reaching. It would be important to show a close relationship between the Sabbath commandment and any body of text, but so close a relationship with this particular passage is especially meaningful.

The law

While it is true that the enemy has attacked every aspect of God's program for mankind, he has focused on two points in particular – the Sabbath and marriage. These are the only human institutions that come down to us from a time before the fall. The Sabbath was made holy and set apart for human use by a perfect God in a perfect Eden, and so was marriage. Both are included in God's assessment that everything done and made during creation week was "very good" (Gen 1:31).

The Sabbath addresses primarily, though not exclusively, mankind's relationship to the Creator. (There is tangible physical and emotional benefit as well.) Marriage addresses primarily, though not exclusively, the relationship of one person to another. (There is also a spiritual component.) Thus the Sabbath contains within it a microcosm of what would eventually be stated, not only in the fourth commandment, but in the first table of the law (commandments 1-4), and marriage – as the basis and wellspring of all human society – is a microcosm of what would eventually be stated in the second table (commandments 5-10). The one represents our vertical relationship to God, the other represents our horizontal or lateral relationships with another person. The same principles that make a successful marriage, however, have things to tell us about what it takes to have a successful society.

There is another point to notice and it is an important one. Although the Sabbath in Eden points forward to the first table of the law, as marriage does to the second, there were no restrictions associated with these institutions. They are gifts to mankind rather than limitations on our freedom. The only restriction in Eden was not to eat of the fruit from one tree.

The Sabbath was a gift from God to our first parents, and when we stop to think, this was actually a gift of Himself. It was a day when they could spend time uninterruptedly with their Creator. Marriage was also a gift, but in this case the gift was Eve (if you're Adam), or Adam (if you're Eve). In both cases – the case involving God and the case involving another person – it was a considerable gift.

The cross

We have seen these factors in Eden and at Sinai. We can also see them at the cross. Two things conspired to cause Christ's death, quite apart from any desire His enemies might have had to bring it about. One was the thought of being completely and permanently separated from the Father. He had shown Himself willing, not only to suffer incredible pain on a physical level, but more than this, to cease to be – to discard His own existence – if only those He had brought into the world could live and enjoy eternity, even if it would be without Him. And the second factor was the thought that the ones crucifying Him would have no part in what He was offering them at such infinite cost.

On the cross we see Jesus undergoing a complete dismantling of the two foundational principles on which His work of creation had been predicated – love to God and love to man, the first table and the second. No one has ever loved the Father as He did, and no one has ever loved us as He did. These two sets of relationships summed up every part of what His life was about, and in allowing Himself to undergo the separation caused by human sin He was not only emptying, but nullifying Himself.² His was a truly infinite sacrifice – not to mention that if He had not come back from death the universe itself would have been immeasurably impoverished without Him.

These motifs, which begin in Genesis, are deeply theological and raise issues that run like a thread through the length and breadth of Scripture. None of this is limited to the ten commandments alone, or to Genesis.

² "In the plan of redemption there are heights and depths that eternity itself can never exhaust, marvels into which the angels desire to look." {ML 368.6}

Conclusion

Coming down to cases, rejecting the Sabbath is not a superficial thing to do. Vastly more is at issue than a set of practices or beliefs. Ultimately the principles brought to view by the Sabbath provide the foundational basis not only for worshiping God on the seventh day, but for worshiping Him at all. Throughout Scripture, worship of the true God flows from the fact that He made us. The creatorship of God is the one factor that definitively separates true worship from idolatry in its many forms. We are not dealing here with small or inconsequential issues.

For these and other reasons, any decision we make with respect to remembering or not remembering the Sabbath of the fourth commandment should be entered into with an intelligent knowledge of all factors involved.