GENESIS 1:1-2:3 AS A PROLOGUE TO THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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Summary

The creation narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:3 is characterised by three fundamental ideas which are linked to each other by the theme of man's work: creation in six days, man as the image of God, and the Sabbath. This theme is sustained in the main body of the book of Genesis, as one would expect with material which was intended to serve as a careful prologue to the rest of the book.

I. The Six Day Structure of the Creation Narrative

In the seven-day structure that the author has used for his presentation of creation and the Sabbath, God's resting on the seventh day is plainly presented as a pattern for man to follow.[1] It would be difficult therefore to maintain that his working on the previous six days is not presented as a pattern for man to follow.[2] A day of rest makes no sense unless it is preceded by days of work. A command to rest on the seventh day is fairly explicit: the relevant paragraph has three consecutive sentences, each of which consists of seven words and each of

[1] *Cf.* U. Cassuto, *Genesis*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978) Vol. I, 68: 'a day that is worthy of serving as an example to humanity upon whom devolves the duty of imitating the ways of God'. Similarly C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (London: SPCK, 1984) 170-71; G. von Rad, *Genesis* (London: SCM, 1961) 160. *Contra* W.H. Schmidt, *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1967) 157, who says: 'The rest, like the whole of creation, remains simply a work of God'. But even Schmidt admits that God's stopping work on the seventh day is a 'Vorbild des Sabbats' (159).

[2] *Cf.* G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word, Texas) 1987, 40: 'By speaking of six days of work followed by one day's rest, Gen. 1 draws attention to the correspondence between God's work and man's and God's rest as a model for the Sabbath'.

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which contains in the middle the expression 'the seventh day'; and it is stated that God blessed and hallowed that day. A command to work on the six previous days is at least implied.

This implication is strengthened by a surprising use of a particular word. The work which God has done on the six days is referred to in Genesis 2:2-3 three times as מְלָאכָה, the word for ordinary human work (*e.g.*, Gn. 39:11): 'Joseph went into the house to do his work'). Of 155 occurrences of מְלָאכָה in the OT only these three and one other refer to God's work; whereas מַעֲשֶׂה is frequently used of either God's work or man's. The use of this word is surprising, since one of the author's emphases throughout the chapter is on the uniqueness of the work of creation; the most probable reason for its use is that it was intended to emphasise the correspondence between God's work and man's.

I therefore suggest that the author's purpose in giving a six-day structure to his creation narrative (a structure unknown in any other ancient creation narrative) was to set forth a pattern, for man to follow, of working for six days.

It should be noted that it is not only the literary structure (*i.e.*, the six-day arrangement of the material) that relates to the theme of man's work. The *content* of 1:1-25, that all things have been created by God, in a very interesting way clears the ground for man's work; because a good God has made the world and because it is 'good' (vv 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), man can go to work on the world without fear, something those lacking this knowledge could not:

> All and everything that is to be found in the world is revealed as being God's creation; consequently, for the man who has grasped this, there is neither a divine earth, nor divine beasts, nor divine constellations, nor any other divine spheres basically inaccessible to man. The whole demythologised world can become man's environment, his space for living, something which he can mould.[3]

Therefore, both the form and the content of the six-day-creation narrative serve as kind of work-mandate.

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[3]H.W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1974) 162.

II. 'Image of God'

Consideration now needs to be given to the reference to the 'image of God' in Genesis 1:26-27. The Hebrew word translated by 'image' is צֶלֶם, which occurs 17 times in the Old Testament; on 10 occasions it means a physical image (*e.g.* an idol, as in Nu. 33:52); on 2 it compares man's existence to a shadow (Ps. 39:6 [39:7); and the other 5 are the Genesis references to man being (in) the image of God (1:26, 27; 5:3; 9:6).

Down through the centuries there has been an enormous amount of debate as to the meaning of the image of God.[4] The 'spiritual qualities' explanation was for long the dominant one, although the 'man as God's counterpart' explanation advocated by Barth and Westermann has been influential in the twentieth century.[5] However, the 'functional' interpretation has now become the majority view:

> The image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function.[6]

And on this view that function is exercising dominion over the natural world. This interpretation originated with H. Holzinger in 1898 and J. Hehn in 1915.[7] It found little support for more than forty years, but in the last twenty years or so it has become the interpretation supported by the overwhelming majority of Old Testament scholars, with the most powerful and detailed advocacy coming from D.J.A. Clines, W.H. Schmidt, W. Gross,

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[4]*Cf.* the thorough survey of G.A. Jonsson, *The Image of God* (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988). Easily accessible shorter surveys are in Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 148-58; and J.M. Miller, 'In the Image and Likeness of God', *JBL* 91 (1972) 289-304.

[5]Those who have suggested that spiritual qualities constitute the image of God in man include Philo, Augustine, Calvin, Procksch, Dillmann, Rowley, and B. Jacob. K. Barth's position can be found in *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 182-85; and Westermann's in *Genesis 1-11*, 150-51.

[6]D.J.A. Clines, 'The Image of God in Man', *TynB* 19 (1968) 101.

[7]H. Holzinger, *Genesis erklärt* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Mohr, 1898) 12; J. Hehn, 'Zum Terminus Bild Gottes', *Festschrift E. Sachau*, (Berlin: 1915) 36-52.

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E.M. Curtiss, and B. Ockinga.[8] H.W. Wolff, G.J. Wenham, W. Brueggemann, W.J. Dumbrell, R.W. Klein, W. Janzen, J. Goldingay, B.W. Anderson, N.H. Snaith, and W. Zimmerli are also convinced.[9] To this list one could also add G. von Rad, H. Wildberger, and E. Jacob,[10] who believe the dominion is not the image but is the immediate consequence of the image; I think Schmidt and Clines are correct in insisting there is no real difference here.[11] This interpretation differs from the others in turning to extra-biblical material for the key to the riddle of the meaning of 'image of God'. In the Ancient Near East it was widely believed that a god's spirit lived in any statue or image of that god, with the result that the image could function as a kind of representative of or substitute for the god wherever it was placed. It was also customary in the ANE to think of a king as a representative of a god; obviously the king ruled, and the god was the ultimate ruler, so the king must be ruling on the god's behalf. It is therefore not surprising that these two separate ideas became connected and a king came to be described as an image of a god. This actually occurs frequently

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[8]Schmidt, *Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 197; W. Grosse, 'Gottesebenbildlichkeit des Menschen im Kontext der Priesterschrift', *TQ* 161 (1981) 244-64; E.M. Curtis, *Man as the Image of God in Genesis in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parallels* (UMI Dissertation Informaion Service, 1984) 207; B. Ockinga, *Die Gottebenbildlichkeit im Alten Ägypten und im Alten Testament*, (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1984).

[9]Wolff, *Anthropology*, 160-61; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 30-32; W. Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Westminster: John Knox, 1982) 31-32; W.J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984) 34; R.W. Klein, *Israel in Exile. A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 127; W. Janzen, *Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology* (Winnipeg: Faith and Life, 1982) 51-60; J. Goldingay, 'The Bible and Sexuality', *SJT* 39 (1986) 175-87, esp. 175; B.W. Anderson, 'Creation and Ecology', in B.W. Anderson (ed.), *Creation in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1984) 169; N.H. Snaith, 'The Image of God', in *ExpTim*, 91 (1979-80) 20; W. Zimmerli, *I Mose 1-11* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1967) 79.

[10]Von Rad, *Genesis*, 57; H. Wildberger, 'Das Abbild Gottes: Gen. 1:26-30', *TZ* 21 (1965) 245-59, 481-501; and 'צֶלֶם', *THAT* 2:555-63; E. Jacob, *Theology of the OT* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1974) 169-70.

[11]W.H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament: A History* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1983) 198; Clines, 'Image of God', 96.

in contemporary Assyrian and Egyptian texts.[12] This background makes it likely that when the author of Genesis 1 claimed that man was made as the image of God, he meant that man was to be God's representative on earth, ruling, or having dominion, on God's behalf, like a king. In other words, the idea of the image of God was 'democratised'—the Egyptian and Mesopotamian concept of a king being the god's image was broadened to make mankind in general such an image:

> The OT has generalised and assured everyone...of what once was basically only assigned to the king, that they would exercise dominion as 'image of God'.[13]

The biblical data support this understanding which has been drawn from the extra-biblical material. Largely as a result of the semantic studies of James Barr[14] and others, scholars increasingly look for the meaning of a word in its context, and many are convinced on purely grammatical and linguistic grounds that the phrase which immediately follows 'image of God', namely 'and let them have dominion over...the earth', is the explanation of its meaning.[15] This is even clearer if, as many believe, the phrases 'let us make man in our image' and 'let them have dominion' are joined not, as in most translations, by the word 'and', but by 'so that'. A simple ו followed by an imperfect, such as וְיִרְדּוּ, usually expresses the purpose of the

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[12]The Egyptian, Babylonian, and ANE (Gilgamesh Epic) texts which describe a king as an image of a god are cited fully by Schmidt, *Faith of the Old Testament*, 194-98; *Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 136-41.

[13]Schmidt, *Faith of the Old Testament*, 197. Equally exhaustive arguments that 'democratisation' is found in Genesis' treatment of the 'image of God' have been advanced by Wildberger. Wildberger points out that a few Egyptian and Babylonian texts had already carried out this democratisation, *i.e.*, applied the image to man in general; but the vast majority use 'image of god' only for the king ('צֶלֶם', *THAT*).

[14]J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: OUP, 1961) *e.g.*, 269; *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1973).

[15]Already in 1898, without the benefit of modern linguistic theory or of extra-biblical evidence, Holzinger had understood the text in this way: 'Was mit *betsalmenu, kedemuthenu* gemeint ist, sagt die zweite Hälfte des Verses...das göttliche Ebenbild besteht darin, dass der Mensch über die übrigen Lebewesen auf der Erde herrscht, ähnlich wie Gott über das Ganze' (*Genesis*, 12).

preceding verb.[16] So the correct translation may well be 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, so that they may have dominion over... the earth.'[17] In either case 'having dominion over the earth' is the meaning the author attaches to the image of God—and is, he asserts, the purpose for which man was created.

Additional biblical evidence that this is the correct understanding of the image of God is found in Psalm 8, which Humbert calls 'an actual commentary on Genesis 1:26ff':[18]

> What is man...? Thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour. Thou has given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea.

In this poetic treatment of the theme, man's royal rule over the natural order, and also his status as God's representative ('thou hast given *him* dominion over the work of *thy* hands') are emphasised. This psalm does not mention the image of God; but it does confirm that Israel applied royal ideology to mankind in general: an important plank in the argument for a functional interpretation of the image.

This interpretation involves translating the preposition ב by 'as' rather than 'in', but this is equally possible: the *beth essentiae* is quite common.[19]

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[16]*Cf.* S.R. Driver, *Hebrew Tenses* (Oxford: OUP, 1892) 64-65: 'This weak ו is used with the imperfect...in order to express the design or purpose of a preceding act, which it does in a less formal and circumstantial manner than לְמַעַן, בַּעֲבוּר, *etc.*, but with greater conciseness and elegance'. The grammar of Gesenius-Kautsch (ET; Oxford: OUP, 1910) 322-34, gives many examples of a jussive (which וְיִרְדּוּ may be) 'depending (with ו) on a...cohortative to express an intention...of a contingent purpose.'

[17]*Cf.* esp. Schmidt, who translates: 'Wir wollen den Menschen nach unserem Bilde machen, damit er über die Tiere herrsche' (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 142). So also NEB; Revised English Bible; Wolff, *Anthropology*, 161; Snaith, 'Image of God', 20; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 4.

[18]P. Humbert, *Etudes sur le Récit du Paradis et de la Chute dans la Genèse* (Neuchatel: Université 1940) 170: 'un véritable commentaire de Gen. 1:26 suiv'.

[19]The ב of essence is described in Gesenius-Kautsch, 379; he says the classic example is Ex. 6:3: 'I appeared to Abraham...*as* El Shaddai' That in

The use of the word 'likeness' (דְּמוּת) alongside the word 'image' in Genesis 1:26 might seem at first sight to present a difficulty to the functional interpretation, by suggesting that the main content of the word 'image' is a resemblance between man and God. I do not believe there is any difficulty. The functional interpretation does not dispute that an image of a god was thought to resemble the god. But the functional interpretation believes that it was the other idea associated with an image, namely that it was thought of as a representative of or substitute for the god, which led to a king being called an image of a god and which is the main point when man is called the image of God in Genesis 1. I suggest that the word 'likeness' adds very little to the meaning of the verse; it merely affirms that an image was thought to be like the god it represented. It is more or less synonymous with 'image'.[20] (Interestingly, the inscription on a recently discovered 9th century BC statue describes the statue as an 'image and likeness' of a god, using the Aramaic equivalents of דְּמוּת and צֶלֶם.[21] (If צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת are synonyms this also neatly explains their interchangeable use in Genesis 5:1 and 9:6).

Genesis 5:3, which refers to Seth being the image and likeness of his father, used to be thought to favour the 'physical resemblance' theory; but Schmidt has argued convincingly that the biblical writer was hardly interested in the child's appearance; he was saying something about the father

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Gn. 1:26 we have a ב of essence is argued by Hehn, *Bild Gottes*; Clines, 'Image of God', 75-80; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 4; von Rad, *Genesis*, 56; N.W. Porteous, 'Image of God', *IDB* 2.683-685; Wildberger, *THAT*.

[20]*Cf.* the careful discussion of the connotations of these words by J. Barr, 'The Image of God in Genesis: A Study in Terminology', *BJRL* 51 (1968-69) 11-26. Schmidt has also argued that there was no difference in meaning between צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 143); so also Wildberger, *THAT*, 559. B. Jacob had argued similarly, *Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934) 58. The use of the two different prepositional particles (ב with צֶלֶם and כ with דְּמוּת) is of no significance; the two are often interchangeable: in Gn. 5:1 ב is used with דְּמוּת. A very thorough case for their interchangeability is made by T.N.D. Mettinger, 'Abbild oder Urbild? Imago Dei in traditionsgeschichtlicher Sicht', *ZAW* 86 (1974) 403-424, esp. 406-7.

[21]*Cf.* A.R. Millard and P. Bordreuil, 'A Statue from Syria with Assyrian and Aramaic Inscriptions', *BA* 45 (1982) 135-41.

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reappearing in the son and being perpetuated in him—which is very close to the meaning the functional interpretation ascribes to 'image' in Genesis 1:26-28.[22]

It should also be noted that the functional interpretation of the image of God would be very much in line with the polemical aspect of so much of the chapter.[23] In the Sumerian creation myth and in the Babylonian Atrahasis epic and the Enuma Elish man was created to relieve the gods of the heavy burden of work.[24] Such material placed a low value on both man and his activity. This 'image of God' text, on the contrary, elevates man to the level of a vice-gerent of God, and his task to the level of exercising royal dominion.

If the functional interpretation of the 'image of God' is the correct one, as I believe it is, much of the theological reflection which over the years arose from the dominant spiritual and 'counterpart' interpretations of the image was going in the wrong direction. The weight of the 'image of God' theologoumenon is now seen to fall not on man's inner spiritual qualities or his communion with God but on his position and task of having dominion over the natural world. The text is saying that exercising royal dominion over the earth as God's representative is the basic purpose for which God created man. And it is this which deserves thorough reflection.

When one tries to define 'kingship' or 'dominion' one quickly realises there are two aspects to it: the privilege and also the responsibility, or, the authority the king enjoys and also the actual task he has to do. Ancient kings were certainly expected to benefit their subjects; Psalm 72 for example gives a long list of ways in which the king should care for his people and contribute towards their well-being. And indeed the author of Genesis 1 is at pains to emphasise that the royal authority given to man carries with it a responsibility for diligent work.

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[22]Schmidt, *Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 144: 'Der Sohn wiederholt sozusagen den Vater.'

[23]The polemical aspect of Genesis 1 was emphasised by A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1954) and G.R. Hasel, 'The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology', *EQ* 46 (1974) 81-102.

[24]*Cf.* especially T. Frymer-Kensky, 'The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for an Understanding of Genesis 1-9', *BA* 40 (1977) 147-55.

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The command to 'have dominion' (רְדוּ, vv. 26, 28) is not merely a declaration that man will enjoy kingly rank; it is the apportioning of a task, an ongoing task which would be well translated by the more modern word 'manage'. (רדה is used of Solomon's peaceful rule over a wide area (I Ki. 5:4; Eng. 4:24) and therefore can mean something very close to 'manage').[25] כבשׁ ('subdue', v. 28) also emphasises that there is a job to be done; it is only used of the earth itself, not the animals, and must mean 'to work' or 'to cultivate'. Cultivation is 'subduing' because it is making the soil produce what you need it to produce, rather than simply taking what happens to grow there.[26]

It might also be pointed out that the Israelite ideal of the shepherd-king (*e.g.*, Dt. 17:14-20; 1 Sa. 8:11-16) has overtones of both management of the country's resources for the benefit of all and manual work.[27] It also demonstrates that in Israelite thought royal authority was in no way incompatible with manual work. Elsewhere too in the Old Testament it is striking that no tension is perceived to exist between royal nature and manual work:

> [T]he later writers of the sacred books did not deem it necessary to expunge the account of Saul's ploughing with his oxen (I Sam. 11:5) in order to enhance his royal dignity; it does not demean a king to work with his hands. Similarly David, the ideal King, had been a shepherd-lad.[28]

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[25]*Cf.* B.W. Anderson, 'Creation and Ecology', 163: 'Made in the image of God, human beings are God's representatives, entitled to manage the Creator's earthly estate...to rule benevolently over the works of the Creator's hands'.

[26]So J. Barr, 'Man and Nature: The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament', *BJRL* 55 (1972-73) 9-32. Discussing כבשׁ, he writes: 'what is intended is tilling; it corresponds with the "working" or "tilling" of the ground in the J Story'. It is also worth noting that J. Moltmann has argued that Gn. 2:15 indicates that man's dominion was to be like the cultivating and protective work of a gardener—for the God whom man represents/deputises for is not only the Creator but also the Preserver of all things; see *God in Creation* (ET; London: SCM, 1985) 30.

[27]K.W. Whitelam, *The Just King* (JSOTS 12: Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979) 70.

[28]A. Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* (London: SPCK, 1952) 22.

I therefore think that the 'image of God' text in Genesis 1:26-28 could be summed up thus: man is appointed king over creation, responsible to God the ultimate king, and as such expected to manage and develop and care for creation, this task to include actual physical work. If I am right in this, then the 'image of God' text is linked thematically with the 'six days of creation' structure: both have work as a component.

III. The Significance of the Sabbath

I would now like to argue that the Sabbath idea, introduced in Genesis 2:1-3, also links closely with the theme of man's work.

The author does not merely present the seventh day in a matter-of-fact way as one day out of the seven for rest. Rather, he presents it as the climax or goal of all that has preceded. He conveys this by a variety of methods:

First, there has been 'a gradual ascent—toward the creation of human beings'[29] in Genesis 1; in the sixth day we are aware of a climax, with the triple announcement of the divine word 'And God said', the double occurrence of the approval formula ('God saw that it was good'), the solemn, lengthy divine decision, and the climactic phrase 'image of God'. By going on to a further stage after the apparently climactic sixth day, the author is saying: 'But even more important than this...'

Secondly, God blesses the seventh day, whereas he has not blessed any of the others; and he hallows it, which he has not done to anything else so far.

Thirdly, the reappearance in 2:1-3 of the key words of 1:1, 'heaven and earth', 'God', and 'create', gives a sense of climax or goal; the three seven-word sentences, each containing the phrase 'the seventh day', also suggest that something of ultimate importance is being described.

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[29]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 177.

If the seventh day is in some sense seen as the 'climax'[30] or 'goal'[31] of the week, the 'capstone'[32] and not merely the last day of the series, isolated from the others, then it says something about the meaning or significance of the week as a whole. It 'hints at'[33] something holy in the week as a whole. The content or meaning of the seventh day 'permeates'[34] the other days.

In the search for greater clarity in this matter, and even for solid evidence that there is such a meaning in the Sabbath at all, I will now examine material relating to the Sabbath in the wider Old Testament context. For the author of Genesis 1:1-2:3 is likely to have brought his own prior understanding of the Sabbath to his composition. I will not concern myself with the numerous divergent theories as to the origin of the Sabbath,[35] but press on towards its significance, a matter on which there is some measure of agreement.

G. Robinson has recently argued, with great thoroughness, that the Sabbath or seventh-day-off in the Old Testament has nothing to do with resting.[36] (Tsevat had earlier argued similarly).[37] He points out that the verb שׁבת which is sometimes translated by 'to rest', is more often translated by 'to cease', and argues that it should always be so translated. He says the other word which is sometimes translated as 'to rest', נוח, should be translated as 'to settle down' (after movement or wandering); so, in Exodus 20:11, God completed his work of creation and went back to Zion and 'settled down' (*cf.* 2 Ch.

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[30]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 171.
[31]*Ibid.*, 90.
[32]H.H.P. Dressler, 'The Sabbath in the Old Testament', in D.A. Carson (ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 29.
[33]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 90.
[34]Dressler, 'Sabbath', 29.
[35]A thorough survey of the various theories as to the origin of the Sabbath is given by G. Robinson, *The Old Testament Sabbath* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1988) 27-37; a briefer one by B.E. Schafer, 'Sabbath', *IDBS*, 760-2.
[36]Robinson, *Old Testament Sabbath*; also his earlier article 'The Idea of Rest in the Old Testament and the Search for the Basic Character of the Sabbath', *ZAW* 92 (1980) 32-42.
[37]M. Tsevat, 'The Basic Meaning of the Biblical Sabbath', *ZAW* 84 (1973) 447-57.

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6:41). Robinson finds no evidence in the Old Testament for any preoccupation with time or rest, such as people have today, and is critical of those who anachronistically attribute modern notions of time and rest to early Israelites without any prior inquiry whether there is any evidence that they ever thought along these lines. He believes there are only two biblical references to 'rest' with relation to the Sabbath (Ex. 23:12; 31:17) and he argues that these are late post-exilic, so the 'basic character' of the Sabbath has nothing to do with rest.

In my judgment Robinson has gone too far. His devaluation of any material he regards as post-exilic is debatable,[38] and in any case his datings would be disputed by many and the allegedly late texts may contain much earlier material. These two texts specify the need for an actual rest from work, and so from the point of view of the theology of the whole Old Testament, the Sabbath is intended to provide this. But at least Robinson has made clear that the Old Testament does not lay any great stress on this aspect. Its most important meaning must lie elsewhere. Tsevat is more persuasive when he points out that in the entire Old Testament rest is never mentioned as an aspect of the Sabbath for Israelites, but only for God (Ex. 31:17) and for animals, slaves, and foreigners (Ex. 23:12); rest is therefore unlikely to have been the basic character of the Sabbath for Israel.[39]

What then was the basic meaning of the Sabbath? There are hints in several texts that the Sabbath was a day on which worship took place. The bread of the Presence was set out on the Sabbath (Lv. 24:5-9). Numbers 28:9-10 specifies additional sacrifices on the Sabbath: two extra lambs as a burnt offering after the usual morning sacrifice.[40] This suggests, but does not prove, that the Sabbath had special liturgical activities; Ezekiel 45:17 carries the same suggestion. Isaiah 1:13 implies 'solemn assemblies' on the Sabbath. 2 Kings 16:18, though its precise

[38]For severe criticism of the widespread tendency to write off material deemed to be post-exilic, *cf.* J. Barr, 'Biblical Theology', *IDBS*, 104-111.
[39]Tsevat, 'Basic Meaning'.
[40]*Cf.* G.J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Leicester: IVP, 1981) 200. Similarly P.J. Budd, *Numbers* (Waco: Word, 1984) 316.

meaning is uncertain (RSV 'covered way'; Gray 'barrier'),[41] implies the king's attendance in the temple on the Sabbath. Ezekiel 46:1-2 probably refers to the same structure, and to the prince passing through it into the temple on the Sabbath. These texts do not make sense unless there were special activities in the temple on the Sabbath. Again, Lamentations 1:10 and 2:6 are most easily understood if 'the congregation' was normally in the 'sanctuary' on the 'Sabbath'. The same thing is assumed in Ezekiel 23:38-39. Leviticus 19:30, referring in the same verse to both Sabbath and sanctuary, also suggests assembly for worship on the Sabbath. Psalm 90:1, which forms the superscription in the English, also assumes collective worship on the Sabbath.

However, the confessional or cultic aspect of the Sabbath does not rest upon this slender foundation of a few references to worship taking place on it. It rests rather upon a mass of indirect evidence that observing the Sabbath was a way of making a theological statement.

It seems a fair assumption that there was some link or analogy between the observance of the sabbatical year and the observance of the seventh day. (The seventh year involved leaving the land fallow, Ex. 23:10-11; and releasing debtors from their debts, Dt. 15). The sabbatical year is actually called 'a Sabbath' in Leviticus 25:2; and the two institutions are mentioned in successive verses in Exodus 23:10-13. Some even think the Sabbath was a practice which actually developed out of the sabbatical year practice.[42] But whether this is so or not, the meaning of the sabbatical year is likely to be helpful to us in trying to discover the meaning of the Sabbath.[43] What, then, can be said about the meaning of the sabbatical year? There would be widespread agreement with von Rad's understanding of it as 'an act of confession by means of which Jahweh's original right of ownership of the soil was to be

[41]*Cf.* J. Gray *I and II Kings* (London: SCM, 1964) 578; similarly G.H. Jones, *Kings II* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984) 542.
[42]So Robinson, *Old Testament Sabbath*, 51-3.
[43]So H.-J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) 80; also Robinson, *passim*; von Rad, *Genesis*, 16; Tsevat, *Basic Meaning*, 452-4.

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demonstrated'.[44] There is clear textual evidence for this in Leviticus 25: the passage in which the sabbatical year is set out climaxes with the statement: 'the land is mine' (v. 23).

How exactly the fallow year conveyed the meaning that God was owner of the land is never explained; perhaps through the symbolism of *pars pro toto*:[45] by giving to God one seventh of the land-use, his ownership of it all was acknowledged.

Robinson[46] and Kraus[47] would add that this demonstration of Yahweh's absolute sovereignty over the land was made against the claim made for other gods; they see this polemical or counter-balancing aspect clearly expressed in the repeated emphasis that the Sabbath is a 'Sabbath to the Lord', שבת ליהוה (Ex. 16:25; 20:10; 35:2; Lv. 23:3; 25:2; Dt. 5:14). This would also explain the frequent references to non-observance of the sabbatical year in Leviticus 26, a chapter entirely taken up with the subject of idolatry: observance of the sabbatical was a conscious repudiation of other gods.

Now, is there any confirmation that this meaning which attached to the sabbatical year attached also to the Sabbath?

Firstly, it is interesting how often the Sabbath is mentioned in a context whose subject is allegiance to Yahweh and warnings against the worship of other gods. This is so in the Decalogue (the fourth commandment may be deliberately grouped with the three previous ones because all four are related to worship of the one true God and oppose idolatry). It is also so in Exodus 23:12; 34:21; and Leviticus 26:1-2.

Secondly, if the Sabbath indeed bore this cluster of ideas, that Yahweh is sovereign owner/alone to be

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[44]Von Rad, *Genesis*, 16. M. Noth says the same: '[The sabbatical year] rests on the understanding that Yahweh is the true owner of the land, and that the directness of this relationship ought to be restored every seventh year, without the land having its rest disturbed by the intervention of men to whom it has passed'; *Leviticus* (London: SCM, 1965) 166. This understanding goes back at least as far as A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften*, I (Munich: Kaiser, 1953) 150.

[45]For an analysis of how metonymy functions in ritual, *cf.* E.R. Leach, *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976).

[46]Robinson, *Old Testament Sabbath*, 138.

[47]Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 72.

worshipped, then it is much easier to understand why the Sabbath is so often referred to as a 'sign' of the covenant, or even as the covenant itself. For example, Exodus 31:13, 16, 17:

> You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you... Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel...

The Sabbath is also called a sign of the covenant in Ezekiel 20:12,20.

If the Sabbath had this meaning of a statement of Yahweh's sovereignty and a rejection of other gods, this also helps us to understand both the emphasis that is placed upon it in the Old Testament and the severity of the punishment prescribed for Sabbath-breaking.

But there is of course a difference of referent between the sabbatical year and the Sabbath day. The sabbatical year makes a confession of Yahweh's sovereignty with reference to the land which has been producing crops for the previous six years. The Sabbath day then would make a confession of Yahweh's sovereignty with reference to the work of the six days, which is stressed in almost every Sabbath commandment. On the *pars pro toto* principle of symbolism the giving to God of one of the days confesses that the other six are his too. As the sabbatical year gathers up the whole seven year period and brings it into connection with God, so the Sabbath day brings the whole week's work into connection with God. The Sabbath sets the week's work within a framework of worship; it says that the whole week's work is directed towards God. As Tsevat puts it, the way a unit of time is structured says something about its content. If a unit of time is structured by the lunar cycle or by the seasons, that conveys the message that man's life is in harmony with nature. The seventh day is completely independent of any such natural rhythm; the Hebrew week is structured or defined by a day which speaks of God's sovereignty. The message this conveys is that the six days also are under the sovereignty of God; they are set in the

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context of God's sovereignty; man's working life is set in a framework which expresses the sovereignty of God.[48] We can rightly speak of a 'seven-day complex which takes its meaning from the seventh day'.[49] The Sabbath indicates the 'goal' of it all.

Therefore it is not quite correct to say that the Sabbath 'becomes the source of man's ethos of work';[50] rather, the Sabbath will serve as a reminder to man that the work he is doing six days a week is a task he is doing in obedience to God and on behalf of God as God's represent-ative, service rendered to God; a reminder of what has already been specifically taught in the 'image of God' text.

It is concluded that three matters which are strongly emphasised in Genesis 1:1-2:3, the six-day creation, the image of God, and the Sabbath, are intrinsically linked—by the 'work mandate'.

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[48]Tsevat, *Basic Meaning*, 456-9. Kraus's understanding of the meaning of the Sabbath is close to the one I have set out: 'It may be possible to draw the conclusion from the close link between the sabbatical year and the Sabbath day in Exodus 23:10ff. that just as the sacral fallow proclaimed the fact that the earth belonged to Yahweh, so the Sabbath was a sign of Yahweh's lordship over man's time... on the seventh day man gives back to Yahweh a 'normal day' kept free from all dissipation, and so acknowledges God's 'rightful claim' to every day' (*Worship in Israel*, 80). For arguments that the sabbatical year and the Sabbath both speak of God's sovereignty *cf.* also G. Agrell, *Work, Toil, and Sustenance* (Lund: Hägersten, 1976) 18.

[49]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 172; he cites Ex. 24:16 as a further example of a seven-day period taking its meaning from the seventh day, and concludes that the concept goes back earlier than P.

[50]Robinson, *Old Testament Sabbath*, 359. W. Bienert overstates the point: *Die Arbeit nach der Lehre der Bibel*, (Stuttgart: 1954): 'The biblical teaching about work begins with the teaching about rest. Therefore the biblical ethos of work has its roots in the biblical ethos of rest, *i.e.*, in man's awareness of God' (cited by Robinson, *Old Testament Sabbath*, 359; my translation). The influence of K. Barth on Bienert at this point is obvious: *cf. Church Dogmatics* III/4, 51: 'Can we understand the working day, the day of labour in relation to our fellow-men, or any of its commands, before we have understood the holy day?'

IV. Man's Work in the Remainder of Genesis

If Genesis 1 was indeed written as a prologue for the remainder of the book, and if I have correctly identified in Genesis 1 the theme of man's God-given kingship involving management and work, then one would expect to find this theme followed up in the ensuing chapters of Genesis. Is this so? As I consider how this theme is followed through in the remainder of Genesis, I will deal with the 'royal authority' aspect and the 'work' aspect separately, always remembering that they are two sides of the same coin.

1. The 'Royal Authority' Aspect

2:19-20 describes man naming the animals and birds, and 'name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command'.[51] Indeed the theme of royal status runs right through Genesis in a surprising way. Abraham appears as 'a prince of God' (נְשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים, 23:6) as he meets and talks to four kings (chs. 12, 14, 26) and also defeats four kings (ch. 14); his son Ishmael is the father of twelve princes (17:20; 25:16). Jacob blesses the Pharoah (47:7); Joseph becomes 'a father to Pharoah, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt' (45:8); and Jacob's blessing includes the statement that 'the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet' (49:10). This broad theme of royal status which begins in 1:26 and continues through the book makes Genesis an appropriate royal genealogy of David (*cf.* ch. 38, where the focus is on Tamar giving birth to Perez, an ancestor of David).[52]

The kingship promised in Genesis 1:26-8 is therefore strikingly fulfilled in the remainder of Genesis.

2. The Work Aspect

2:5-6 state that without man to irrigate and work the land, the available water was useless;[53] so here the focus is on man as a

[51]Von Rad, *Genesis*, 81.
[52]For the suggestion that Genesis forms part of a royal genealogy of David I am indebted to Dr Desmond Alexander, Queen's University, Belfast.
[53]So Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 59.

worker. The account of the creation of man and land of the Garden of Eden then follows (2:7-9). Almost immediately (there is a short geographical note, vv. 10-14) we have a statement about the work God gave the man to do: he 'put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it' (2:15). Here the fact that the man is immediately set to work is in line with the Genesis 1 work-mandate. This verse was deleted by Budde, who thought work (or at least manual work) incompatible with paradise and concluded this verse was a later insertion.[54] (Logically he should have deleted 2:5b also). Cassuto completely changed the meaning of the verse: he believed, on the basis of 3:23, that work was not imposed on man until after he was banished from the Garden, so he claimed that the verbs translated 'to till' and 'to keep' (עבד and שמר) must have their liturgical meaning, 'to serve' and 'to observe'.[55] These meanings are well attested in liturgical contexts such as numbers 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6, but in Genesis 2-3 the context is not liturgical, and עבד has been used with the meaning 'till' just a few verses earlier. It is therefore best, with most commentators, to take the text as meaning that even before the Fall man was expected to work. This comes as no surprise if Genesis 1:26-28 has been understood in the way I have explained it above. Man had been created with a task for him in mind; a life with no work to do would not have made sense. Again, in 1:26-28 such activity has high, even royal, dignity, and paradise would have been demeaned by its absence. It is wholly consistent with this, of course, that the Old Testament includes manual work in its descriptions of the eschatological paradise: *e.g.*, Micah 4:3; Isaiah 2:4; Isaiah 65:21-25; Ezekiel 36:9, 34; Amos 9:13-14.

The words עבד and שמר are significant, though not in the way Cassuto argues. The correct significance, I believe, is as follows. There are many hints in the narrative that the Garden of Eden is comparable to the later Tabernacle: it is a place of God's presence, where God speaks to man and man to God; it has an east-facing entrance with cherubim on guard (*cf.* 1 Ki. 6:23-28); people are excluded on grounds of uncleanness (*cf.*

[54]Cited by Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 220.
[55]Cassuto, *Genesis*, 122.

Nu. 5:2-4); note also the references to water, gold, jewels as symbols of God's presence (*cf.* Ps. 46:5; Ex. 28:9-14); and the use of the verb שׁכן (3:24; Ex. 25:8).[56] Given this sustained allusion to the Tabernacle, the words עבד and שׁמר most likely also allude to service in the Tabernacle; hinting that man's ordinary work is service rendered to God and comparable to the work of those serving in the Tabernacle:

> Man is placed in the garden to till it and guard it, just as in later days the Levites were instructed to guard the tabernacle. Man's labour in the garden is indeed a kind of divine service, for it is done for God and in his presence.[57]

This suggestion in the use of this pair of verbs is fully in line with the Genesis 1 teaching that work is service of God.

The theme of work as man's fundamental purpose continues with the account in 3:17-19 of the punishment which is imposed upon Adam. In 3:16 Eve's punishment targets *her* fundamental purpose. She had been created to be a 'helper' (2:18) for Adam. Since the only help she gives to Adam, according to the text, is with the 'Be fruitful and multiply' mandate, this must mean she was to find her main fulfilment as a mother.[58] Her punishment then 'struck at the deepest root of her being as wife and mother'.[59] Her child-bearing will be accompanied by suffering. Similarly, Adam's main purpose, according to Genesis 1, was work; and God's punishment 'strikes at the innermost nerve of his life: his work, his activity...'[60] His work will be accompanied by hardship and frustration. Previously Eve's childbearing and Adam's working

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[56]This parallel is emphasised by Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, passim*, esp. 86.
[57]*Ibid.*, 87. Westermann sees a broader meaning in the two words, עבד and שׁמר: they represent the two main categories into which most work falls: creating and maintaining: 'It can be said that every human occupation shares in some way in this "tilling and keeping"' (*Genesis 1-11*, 221). I suspect this is over-subtle.
[58]For a thorough advocacy of this point, see D.J.A. Clines, 'What Does Eve Do to Help?' in *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTS 94; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 25-48.
[59]von Rad, *Genesis*, 93-94.
[60]*Idem.*

had been under God's blessing (1:28); from now on humankind will be in a 'mixed' situation (so to speak): the blessing is not totally cancelled out by the curse, but the curses seem to have reversed the general expression of blessing; the world is no longer perfect.

That the blessings of fruitful labour and of fruitful child-bearing continue to be operative is stated explicitly in God's promises to Noah (Gn. 9:1-3). That the curse now qualifies or limits the blessing is also clear (8:21, 'I will never again curse the ground', does not, as Rendtorff believes, announce the lifting of the curses of Genesis 3; it lifts the threat of another flood):[61] with regard to fruitful childbearing Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel are barren and only have children as God provides for them in a special way—he 'blesses' them (17:16). It is similar with regard to the blessing of fruitful labour. Abraham and his descendants have to be rescued from three famines (12:10; 26:1; 42:5); and it is frequently emphasised that the patriarchs' labour is fruitful because and only because they are blessed by God: 24:35 and 26:12-14 specifically mention God blessing Abraham's and Isaac's crops, but in total there are some 16 references to God blessing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (An awareness that the blessing of God upon one's work was no longer automatic or general is also evidenced in other parts of the Old Testament).[62]

The theme of man's work is also prominent in the story of the sacrifices brought by Cain and Abel (Gn. 4:1-5). They were conscious that they were bringing the fruit of their labour, and they were also conscious that God had blessed their work.

> There is no divine institution of sacrifice; it grew and continues to grow out of human labour in which the people

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[61]R. Rendtorff, 'Gen. 8:21 und die Urgeschichte des Jahwisten', in *Kerygma und Dogma*, 7, 1961, 67-78 (cited by Wenham, *Genesis 1-14*, 190); for the opposite interpretation, *cf.* Frymer-Kensky, Atrahasis Epic; J.G. McConville, 'The Shadow of the Curse: A Key to Old Testament Theology', *Evangel*, Spring, 1985, 2-6; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 190.

[62]The appeal to God to 'bless the work of our hands' is frequently recorded in Deuteronomy (2:7; 14:29; 15:10; 16:15; 24:10; 28:12; 33:11). The same perspective is present in the Wisdom literature: *e.g.*, Ps. 90:17; 127:1-2; Jb. 1:10.

> themselves create, but the utterly amazing growth and blessing of which they must ascribe to a higher power. They feel themselves under pressure to express this in the offering of sacrifice.[63]

The account of how men developed new skills in Genesis 4:17-22 ties in closely with the duty assigned to man in chapters 1-2.[64] Genesis 1:26, 28 had said that God created man to master the earth and its resources, and now it is recorded how this command continued to be obeyed on down through succeeding generations.[65] We read how Enoch built a city (following the reading supported by Cassuto, Westermann, and Wenham);[66] how Jabal herded not only צֹאן, 'flocks', *i.e.*, sheep and goats, as Abel had done, but מִקְנֶה 'herds', which includes also cattle, asses, and camels;[67] how Jubal played the lyre and pipe; and how Tubal-Cain launched metal working. By placing this technical and cultural progress within the genealogy of Cain, the biblical writer is certainly suggesting that all of human culture is in some way tainted by sin, a taint emphasised by the ferocity of Lamech (vv. 23-24), but he is fundamentally favourable to these advances in man's rule over the natural world: '...a shadow falls over the potentialities of people; but they are still there and they lead them further'.[68]

This passage sustains the polemic already contained in Genesis 1:26-28: man was created not to minister to the gods, but to master, cultivate, and preserve the earth. In fact a further ANE idea is also being contradicted: whereas Mesopotamian sources spoke of seven sages who rose from the sea and taught men writing, agriculture and city-building,[69] Genesis talks of

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[63]B. Jacob, *Genesis*, 136 (my translation).

[64]So W.H. Schmidt, *Einführung in das AT* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979) 60-61: he argues that the insistence in Gn. 4:17-22 that technical advance was a human discovery, contrary to other ANE myths that it was provided by the gods, shows that this passage is tied closely to the duty assigned to man in 1:26-28 and 2:15.

[65]So Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 56, 60-61, 330.

[66]Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 111; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 327; Cassuto, *Genesis*, 230.

[67]Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 113.

[68]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 61.

[69]Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 110; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 341-2.

human achievement: new ways of working which set forward human dominion over the earth.

Noah, the obedient patriarch with whom God starts all over again, is portrayed as tilling the soil, and indeed as responsible for developing new skills in this area:[70] 'Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard' (9:20).

I would even like to suggest that there is an allusion to fruitful labour in the major Genesis theme of land.[71] The word אֶרֶץ occurs 59 times in the Abraham cycle, and the modern reader tends to sense nationalistic overtones in this. But in the context of Genesis the overtones are in fact of food and work: 'The land is not only a promise or a gift; fulfilled responsibility is integral to land tenure.'[72]

Genesis of course closes with the lengthy Joseph cycle. In this detailed narrative of how Joseph, the ruler of Egypt, managed the resources of the land of Egypt for the benefit of 'all the earth' (Gn. 41:57) the author/editor presents a remarkable fulfilment or exemplification of the theme of dominion and work set out in Genesis 1.

The presence of this material in the body of the book of Genesis is exactly what one would expect in the light of the importance of the theme of 'work' in the carefully written prologue.

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[70]The RSV's translation of this verse is 'unwarranted' according to F.D. Kidner, *Genesis* (London: Tyndale, 1969) 103. For the translation I have given, *cf.* Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 487; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 155.

[71]J. McKeown considers 'land' to be one of the 3 main themes of Genesis: 'A Study of the Main Unifying Themes in the Hebrew Text of the Book of Genesis' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, Belfast) 1991, 104.

[72]E.A. Martens, *Plot and Purpose in the Old Testament* (Leicester: IVP, 1981) 108 (referring to Dt. 12:1; also 11:31-32; 4:5, 14; 5:31; 6:1).

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