

# The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XIII : GENESIS 2:1-3 – PARAGRAPH SEVEN: THE SEVENTH DAY (END OF THE SECTION)

*“The story of God’s work in the six days of creation has come to an end, and there now stands before us the complete picture of the heavens and the earth and all that they contain in their harmonious perfection.” [Cassuto, 61]*

*“God, therefore, did not cease from the work of the creation of the world till he had completed it in every part, so that nothing should be wanting to its suitable abundance.” [Calvin, 103]*

*“The number seven in Hebrew culture frequently symbolizes the fulness and the completion of a matter (see, for instance, Genesis 4:24; 29:18; cf. Matthew 18:21-22). The seventh day marks the consummation and finality of the creation week. But it also represents mankind’s first full day upon the earth. Humanity spends the first day of existence in God’s Sabbath, worshiping and enjoying him.” [Currid, 92]*

*‘And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”’ (Mark 2:27, 28)*

## **The Seventh Day:**

*‘<sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.’ (Gen 2:1-3 NKJV)*

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

**v. 1 – Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, / and all the host of them.**

**v. 2 – And since God was finished on the seventh day / with His work which He had done, He abstained on the seventh day / from all His work which He had done.**

**v. 3 – So God blessed the seventh day / and hallowed it, because on it God abstained from all His work / which He had creatively made.**

**v. 1 – ‘Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.’ — ‘All the host of them’ usually indicates the sun, moon and stars (and sometimes to the angels). “As a rule the word ‘host’ is not associated with the ‘earth’, but here, since the verse employs the term ‘host’ in connection with the heavens, it is used also in relation to the earth.” [Cassuto, 61] “**The passage in Genesis 2:1-3 is, of course, a marvelous assertive summary that God had now completed His work of creating and making all things. Four times it is emphasized that God had finished His work, and three times it is emphasized that this included all His work. These points are stressed because it is vitally important for man to realize that the present processes of the cosmos are not processes of creating and making, and therefore it would forever be impossible for him to understand about the origin of things apart from divine revelation.**” [Morris, 80]**

**v. 2 – ‘And since God was finished on the seventh day’** — Vv. 2,3 contain four lines, the first three of which are parallel and each possessing seven Hebrew words, with the midpoint of each line having the same phrase, ‘*the seventh day.*’ A literal translation displays the structure:

*‘So God finished by **the seventh day** his work which he did,  
and he rested on **the seventh day** from all his work which he did,  
and God blessed **the seventh day** and sanctified it,  
because on it he rested from all his work which God created to do.’*

**DID THE LORD FINISH ON THE SIXTH OR SEVENTH DAY?** — The translation used in this study is that of Rabbi Cassuto, ‘*And since God was finished on the seventh day,*’ but note most Bible versions say something along the lines of, ‘*And on the seventh day God ended*’ (NKJV), or ‘*And on the seventh day God finished*’ (ESV). ***So did the Lord complete His work of creation on the sixth or the seventh day? “Ostensibly this is difficult; for God did not finish His work on the seventh day but on the sixth! Hence the present-day tendency is to amend the text and to read the sixth instead of the seventh on the basis of the Samaritan Version, the Septuagint, the Peshitta and the Book of Jubilees ii 1, 16. But careful study of the passage will convince us that the correct reading is ‘on the seventh day.’ Our verse consists of three consecutive, parallel lines, each of which contains seven words and is divided into two parts, the first part ending in every case, like a threefold refrain, with the words – the seventh day. Only one who is insensitive to the beauty and majesty of these lines could conceive the possibility of omitting the first mention of ‘the seventh day’ and of substituting for it ‘on the sixth day.’*** Other attempts that have been made to solve the problem by textual emendations have been equally unsuccessful. ***This is not surprising, because the problem does not inhere in the text, but stems from the erroneous interpretation put upon it.***” [Cassuto, 61] Rabbi Cassuto compares this with similar sentences:

*‘And he finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham’* (17:22; lit. rendering of the Hebrew). The clause, ‘*And He finished talking with him*’ does not signify ‘*And He spoke His concluding words to him*’, for God’s final words were cited in the preceding verse. The meaning is, ‘*Having finished talking with him, He went up from Abraham.*’

*‘And she finished giving him a drink, and she said’* (24:19; lit. rendering of the Hebrew). The same applies to this verse, ‘*And she finished giving him a drink*’; in the previous sentence it is stated ‘*and she gave him a drink*’, thus the completion of the giving of the drink has already been described. The meaning of the verse is therefore ‘*Having finished giving him a drink, she said...*’, etc.

*‘And Jacob finished charging his sons, and he drew up his feet into the bed’* (49:33; lit. rendering of the Hebrew). We can understand these words as above, ‘*And Jacob finished charging his sons*’; since the whole of Jacob’s charge to his sons was already given in the preceding verses, the sense of this sentence is, ‘*Having finished charging his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed.*’

Closer to our text because the passage speaks specifically of *work*: ‘*And he erected the court round the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. And Moses finished the work, and the cloud covered the tent of meeting*’ (Exod 40:33, 34; lit. rendering of the Hebrew). It is clear the clause ‘*And Moses finished the work*’ does not refer to the completion of the work, since the preceding clauses have already spoken of the completion of the final tasks; but the meaning is, ‘*Moses being in the position of one who had already finished the work, the cloud thereupon covered the tent of meeting.*’

Cassuto: Other verses commencing with the expression, ‘*And it came to pass when he finished*’ or ‘*And it came to pass when they finished*’ (27:30; 43:2; lit. rendering of the Hebrew) could be cited but there is no need to prolong the list of quotations.

**“They clearly establish that the meaning of our verse is: ‘Since God was on the seventh day in the position of one who had already finished His work, consequently He abstained from work on the seventh day’ etc.”** [Cassuto, 62; see also Kelly, 330] “To say that God finished work on the seventh day might seem to imply that he was working on that day... Elsewhere in the Pentateuch ... the phrase indicates that the action in question is past, and a pluperfect is used in English translations [‘*had finished*’]. There is no implication in the Hebrew of 2:2 that God was working on the seventh day before he finished.” [Wenham, 1:35]

**‘with His work which He had done,’** — The words ‘*His work*’ also occurs three times in this paragraph. Likewise we find three times, ‘*which He had done – which He had done – which He had created*’ (the full text is rendered, ‘*creatively made*’). These each emphasize the principal ideas involved. **Creation was ‘God’s work’ alone.**

**‘He abstained on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.’ – IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT GOD ‘RESTED’ BUT RATHER ‘HE DID NO WORK NOR DID HE ADD TO CREATION’** — ‘*And He abstained from work*’ is one word in the Hebrew and is often translated ‘*and He rested*’ but according to Cassuto this is incorrect. It has a negative connotation, ‘*not to do work.*’ Many examples could be given to show the implication found in this verse:

‘*Six days you shall DO YOUR WORK, but on the seventh day*’ (Exod 23:12; note ‘*on the seventh*’ is the Hebrew word sh<sup>e</sup>vî‘ith, from the root sh<sup>e</sup>vî‘î, which is the masculine form for the ordinal number, ‘*seventh*’; the feminine form of this word is sh<sup>e</sup>vî‘îth).

‘*Six days YOU SHALL WORK, but on the seventh day*’ (Exod 34:21)

Therefore according to Cassuto the *Sabbath* (shabāth) is simply the opposite of ‘*you shall do your work, you shall work.*’ This may be further shown in Exod 20:9, 10, ‘*Six days you shall labour and DO ALL YOUR WORK; but the seventh day ... YOU SHALL NOT DO ANY WORK.*’ **The point Cassuto is making may be found in the following verses:**

‘*but on the seventh day; that your ox and your ass may have REST, and the son of your bondmaid, and the alien, may be REFRESHED*’ (Exod 23:12)

‘*on the seventh day he RESTED and was REFRESHED*’ (Exod 31:17)

**Clearly rest and refreshment are only the outcome of the Sabbath.** “**In our section there is no mention of either rest or refreshment. Although elsewhere the Bible does employ such concepts in reference to God** (Exod 20:11, ‘*and He RESTED on the seventh day;*’), **nevertheless in this section, which avoids all possible use of anthropomorphic expressions in order to teach us, particularly in the account of creation, how great is the gulf between the Creator and the created, such notions would have been incongruous; hence the Bible uses only a term that signifies ‘abstention from work.’”** [Cassuto, 63] “**Where ‘rest’ or ‘refreshment’ is applied to God in other passages, it would seem to mean that while the heavenly Father could not have been literally weary (for ‘he fainteth not, neither is weary’ – Isa 40:28), still ‘refreshment’ is properly attributed to Him in the sense of His receiving joy and delight in the contemplation of the beauty of what He had created.... God, therefore, makes the day holy by abstaining from work during it, since His creative activity has now been completed by the end of the sixth day....**

*God's abstaining from work causes the seventh day to be holy. It is 'cut off' or elevated above the previous six days. Thus, it is made to be different.*" [Kelly, 330f] Why is the seventh day different from the succeeding days? "[T]hat the difference consists in the novel character of the seventh day; after a series of six days on each of which some work of creation was wrought, came a day on which God did not work or add anything to his creation; hence the remembrance of this abstinence from labour remained linked with the day on which this situation first arose." [Cassuto, 64]

**THE ACTUAL WORDS 'SABBATH DAY' IS NOT USED HERE** — The terms Moses uses here is not '*Sabbath Day*' which is mentioned elsewhere in the Pentateuch only in connection with the commandment to keep the Sabbath which was given to Israel. *Here the hallowed day is called only 'the seventh day.'*

**THE BASIS FOR THE DECALOGUE SABBATH** — *Note Israel's observance of the seventh day antedates the Ten Commandments.* After leaving Egypt, Israel was on their way to Mt. Sinai when Moses gave these instructions concerning the gathering of the manna: '*And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. Then he said to them, This is what the Lord has said: Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.*' (Exod 16:22,23a). *The passage obviously anticipates the Sinai legislation but the basis must be creation. "The Torah laid here the foundation for the precept of the Sabbath; this day was already sanctified by God at the beginning of the world's history, and its greatness is not dependent on any other factor.... Every seventh day, without intermission since the days of creation, serves as a memorial to the idea of the creation of the world by the word of God, and we must refrain from work thereon so that we may follow the Creator's example and cleave to His ways. Scripture wishes to emphasize that the sanctity of the Sabbath is older than Israel, and rests upon all mankind."* [Cassuto, 63f] Thus in the Ten Commandments it is said, '*REMEMBER the Sabbath Day to keep it holy,*' and not, '*know there is a Sabbath in the world.*' That was already known. "By the commemoration of 'Sabbath,' God and his creatures share in the celebration of the good creation, and God's people are enjoined to enter into the rhythm of work and joyful rest. Embracing God's sabbath rest meant experiencing the sense of completeness and well being God had accomplished at creation in behalf of all human life." [Mathews, 1:180]

**v. 3 – 'So God blessed the seventh day'** — This is the third time an expression of blessing occurs in our section (the first were the fish to be blessed with physical fertility, v. 22; the second was mankind to be blessed with both fertility and spiritual elevation, v. 28). *Threefold repetition indicates emphasis, and the emphasis has again an optimistic significance: not only is the world 'very good,' but it received from God a threefold blessing.*

**'and hallowed it,'** — All the preceding days the Lord called either '*good*' or '*very good*' but this day alone He sanctified. Nothing in the creation context that is connected with space is called '*holy*' but the seventh day is '*set apart, holy.*' The verb used here is the basic stem that means '*to be holy, to be set apart, unique, distinct.*' *The meaning here is the Lord elevated this day above the usual level; the seventh day was lifted up above the plane of the other days.* [Cassuto, 65] *When God 'sanctified' the day, he declared that the day was especially devoted to Him.* [Mathews, 1:179] *"The seventh day is the very first thing to be hallowed in Scripture, to acquire that special status that properly belongs to God alone. In this way Genesis emphasizes the sacredness of the Sabbath. Coupled with the threefold reference to God resting from all his work on that day, these verses give the clearest of hints of how man created in the divine image should conduct himself on the seventh day."* [Wenham, 1:36] "He declares it to be [holy] for

the benefit of mankind, His image-bearers, in order ‘to promote a special relationship to God and to His service.’” [Kelly, 332]

**THE POLEMIC NATURE OF THE SABBATH DAY** — Israel’s pagan neighbors also had what might be referred to as their ‘Sabbath.’ The Babylonians and Assyrians used to call the fifteenth of their months *sabattu* or *sapattu*, the day of the full moon, which was especially dedicated to the worship of the moon god, Sin-Nannaru, and the gods related to it. Other pagan cultures likewise had a day or days of the month which were specifically dedicated to their gods (see Cassuto, 63-69 for details). *“The Torah, it seems to me, purports to say this: Israel’s Sabbath day shall not be as the Sabbath of the heathen nations; it shall not be the day of the full moon, or any other day connected with the phases of the moon and linked, in consequence, with the worship of the moon, but it shall be the seventh day (this enables us to understand why this particular name, the seventh day, is emphasized here), the seventh in perpetual order, independent and free from any association with the signs of the heavens and any astrological concept. It shall not be a day appointed for the worship of the hosts of the heavens, but one sanctified to Him who created the heavenly hosts and the universe as a whole (cf. ‘but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God’ in the Decalogue), as a memorial to the work of creation; not a day of self-affliction and misfortune, but one of blessing; not a day intended to propitiate the angry godhead, but one on which the Divine work was not done, thus a day that is worthy of serving as an example to humanity upon whom devolves the duty of imitating the ways of God, and that, consequently, is fitted to become a day of rest for mankind, who are weary and weighed down by the yoke of hard toil, and also for the brute creatures; hence a day that will serve as a memorial to the liberation of the children of Israel from the house of bondage (Deut 5:15).”* [Cassuto, 68f]

**‘because on it God abstained from all His work’** — “The atheistic French Revolution, for example, in order to abolish every vestige of Christianity from the land, forbade Sabbath observance by making the work-week longer. But the well-being of the population suffered to such a degree, that the radical revolutionaries had to reinstate the Sabbath.... *The reason for this is that the Creator made us to exist as creatures who need to rest one day out of seven. To go against our creaturely limits tends to cause disintegration in both personality and body (and relationship).*” [Kelly, 333f]

**“A WELL SPENT SABBATH WE FEEL TO BE A DAY OF HEAVEN UPON EARTH.”** — Robert Murray M’Cheyne:

*“It is a type of heaven when a believer lays aside his pen or loom, brushes aside his worldly cares, leaving them behind him with his weekday clothes, and comes up to the house of God. It is like the morning of the resurrection, the day when we shall come out of great tribulation into the presence of God and the Lamb, when the believer sits under the preached Word and hears the voice of the Shepherd leading and feeding his soul. It reminds him of the day when the Lamb that is in the midst of the Throne shall feed him, and lead him to living fountains of water. When he joins in the psalm of praise, it reminds him of the day when his hands shall strike the harp of God, ‘where congregations ne’er break up and Sabbaths have no end.’ When he retires and meets with God in secret in his closet, or like Isaac in some favourite spot near his dwelling, it reminds him of the day when he shall be a pillar in the house of our God and go out no more. This is the reason why we love the Lord’s Day. This is the reason why we call the Sabbath a delight. A well spent Sabbath we feel to be a day of heaven upon earth. For this reason we wish our Sabbaths to be wholly*

given to God. *We love to spend the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship except so much as it taken up in works of necessity and mercy. We love to rise early on that morning and to sit up late, that we may have a long day with God.*" [Kelly, 336f; quoting from A. A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne*, 539]

***'which He had creatively made.'*** — "The verb 'āsāh betokens, among its other meanings, the making of something that did not exist before. As regards the construction of our clause, which contains two synonymous verbs, ... the second verb comes to elucidate the particular sense in which the first is to be understood.... *[In our verse, 'to make' comes after 'He created'] to specify the kind of creation of which the verse speaks, namely, an act of creation that is also a 'making', that is, a wondrous work implying the making of things that never existed before.*" [Cassuto, 70]

**BRINGING THE SECTION TO THE CLOSE** — "The closing verse corresponds to the introductory sentence of the section; in both it is written: '*God created.*' But whereas the word [*'create'*] alludes to the first verse, [*'made'*] recalls all the '*makings*' mentioned in the rest of the section. Just as the prologue announces at the outset the main subject-matter of the account that follows, so the epilogue looks back and epitomizes within the limits of one short sentence the content of the preceding narrative, re-awakening in the heart of the reader, by means of this synthesis inherent in its words, the sentiments that were aroused within him in the course of his reading. *A truly majestic conclusion to the section.*" [Cassuto, 70]