

## **Dr. Meredith Kline, Prologue, Lecture 19**

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### **Genesis 2:2-4 Sabbath as a Creation Ordinance**

“And on the seventh day, God finished the work he had been doing and the seventh day he rested from all his work.” No question about Genesis 2 verse 2. Verse 2 is talking about God’s own seventh day experience—the upper register.

Now the question comes up as to what verse 3 is talking about when it says, “and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it he rested from all the work of creating.” So now in verse 3 is this still talking about what God did with his seventh day, or is verse 3 saying that because he did it that way that now he is appointing this Sabbath as this ordinance for man to be observing and to secure a blessing from? In favor of the latter interpretation is Exodus 20:11. Because in Exodus 20:11, citing this passage, it takes the word “seventh day,” and now that’s where it’s ambiguous here, when it says: “God blessed the seventh day,” or is his seventh day the Sabbath ordinance. In Exodus 20:11 the word “Sabbath” is plugged in instead of “seventh day,” and that gives you the interpretation. Because in Exodus 20 it is clearly talking about the Sabbath ordinance. So when it quotes Genesis 2:2 and then says that “God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy,” clearly Exodus 20:11 is interpreting Genesis 2:2 as referring to the Sabbath ordinance. So that is one point that we can make. Other things I won’t try to go into but that’s the traditional position on that in any case.

All right, so it’s a creation ordinance. Let me say right away that if I didn’t believe that it was creation ordinance, then I’d have a hard time believing the Sabbath was still an ordinance that had validity for us today. I think because it was a creation ordinance, that it has validity as long as we human beings experience time as a succession of days. So until the real Sabbath comes, and it hasn’t, I’m told that it doesn’t come until we enter into God’s seventh rest with him at last, but until that time, there is a place within the experience of God’s people for this wonderful prophetic representation and promise of where it’s all heading. So because it’s a creation ordinance, I say it belongs to the whole process of the created order until we come to the consummation. So on that point, fine.

### **Other features of the Sabbath**

Now there are other features about it that have to be noted. Let's see where I might start reading... page 51. For man to observe the Sabbath, in obedient imitation of the paradigm of work and rest established by his creator, was an acknowledgement that he was the creator's servant-son. It was a confession of God as his father and Lord. Okay what I'm trying to do here, I'm first analyzing what does Sabbath observance mean from man Godward as we observe the Sabbath. What are we doing, what are we saying? What does the Sabbath mean as observed by us? What does the Sabbath mean from man toward God? I think that what we are doing when we observe the Sabbath then is that we are acknowledging that we are God's the creator's servants and sons, we are confessing that he is our Father and Lord. He is the one whom we are following. Our Sabbath observance is a confession of faith. It is a public statement to the world that we are the disciples, the followers of the living creator God and the way that he walked, we are going to walk as well. We are wanting to imitate him. So Sabbath observance, thus, is a recurring reaffirmation of our covenantal commitment to the Lord. We are his covenant servants.

#### **Sabbath reinstated in Israel: sign of the covenant, confession**

This aspect of the Sabbath's meaning surfaces prominently when it was formally reinstated in Israel. All right, the Sabbath was not first instituted in Israel; it was first instituted in Eden. But it was reinstated in Israel. When it's reinstated we get some further information about the Sabbath, not only in the Exodus 20 passage, but also you should study the Exodus 31, which draws very much on the meaning of the Sabbath as well. So this aspect of the Sabbath's meaning comes out prominently here, for the Lord identifies it, the Sabbath, as "a sign between me and you," you covenant people throughout your generations. "It's a sign that you may know that I, Yahweh, sanctify you." Get that now? The Sabbath is a sign of holiness, it is stamping holiness on those to whom it is given. Those to whom God assigns the Sabbath to Israel because he says, "I am sanctifying you that's what it signifies, I'm not giving it to the Babylonians. I'm not giving it to the Egyptians. I'm calling you out from that profane non-holy world out there

to be holy unto me. It's because I separate you from the common to holy status that I give to you the sign of holiness which is the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant. That's what it is, a sign. It's not just a duty here. It's found in the ten commandments. The other ten commandments are various duties, but they are not signs of the covenant. But here is one that's a sign of the covenant. In fact, the language in Exodus 31 is that it is a *berith olam*. It is an "everlasting covenant." This Sabbath is the so much identified here with the covenant reality, it's like circumcision or it's a sign, a sign of the covenant itself, a *berith olam*. He calls it a perpetual covenantal. This terminology is also applied to circumcision, the sign of covenant discipleship.

Now if it is a sign of man's discipleship, the Sabbath is by the same token a sign of God's lordship. So the Sabbath then is the sign that I am the Lord, that I am sanctifying you, that I'm consecrating you unto myself, you are disciples, I am the Lord. It's a sign of this holy relationship. If it is an acknowledgement by man that his own kingship is only a vassal kingship, the Sabbath signifies the corollary truth that God is the Great King, sovereign over man and over the land that is man's royal realm and stewardship. The Sabbath signalizes the theocratic order. It's a sign of this whole covenantal theocratic reality. It's a sign of the covenant.

### **Sabbath as consecration and consummation**

Now something we're going to draw from that in a moment is the question: who therefore can properly observe the Sabbath? Let's just make one more point, we said that from man toward God, Sabbath is the sign of, we'll sum it up by the word "consecration." We observe the Sabbath because we are consecrated to the Lord and we are following him. So it's a sign that I am sanctifying you, consecrating you to myself. That's what it means.

Now, let's take the other aspect of it, here is an ordinance that God gives to man, and so from God man-ward, what is the Sabbath saying? What is God saying to us by giving us this ordinance? Well here, it is a sign of consummation. From man, God-ward, it's a sign of our consecration to him, from God to us, it is a sign, it's a prophetic sign of his promise of consummation. He is saying to us in the way of your covenant obedience,

the way of your following as disciples to me as expressed in this whole Sabbath ordinance of the covenant in this way, you are on your way toward my Sabbath rest. So from God man-ward, the Sabbath ordinance is a prophetic promise and sign of the goal of the whole covenant.

The Sabbath is a sign of personal relationship. It's a wonderful sign because it sums up everything, it's not just that the covenant involves personal relationship. It also involves the whole kingdom program in history and the Sabbath expresses it all. It's a sign of our personal relationship to God, and being consecrated to him. It's a sign of the whole historical program, because it's a sign of this history which is leading toward consummation. It is saying these two things that the Sabbath ordinances are therefore a covenantal privilege as well as a covenantal duty because it's always a divine promise as well as a divine demand. It's a demand for you to do something, to be consecrated to me, but it's also a promise that in terms of this, that you are bound for heaven, and that's a privilege. It's a sign that you are holy unto me, and that you are going to enter into the inheritance of my seventh day.

### **Sabbath and the Ten Commandments**

Now this is with the first point that I differ from the traditional approach. The traditional approach to the Sabbath ordinance is that this is something for everybody, everywhere, at all times to observe. This is not true. Where this notion comes from is from an inadequate view, for one thing, of what we have and what we call the Ten Commandments. Now those formal studies that we made of the Ten Commandments the other day now has some direct hermeneutical relevance here. What are the Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments, we found, were not some general moral code that God issued to the whole world out there. They were the particular stipulations of a specific covenant that God made with a particular people whom he called out of the world and sanctified to himself and to whom he says to you I am giving you the Sabbath because I sanctified you and separated you from those other people out there who are not my people and to whom therefore I do not give the Sabbath. So the Sabbath is not just a duty you see for someone to perform but it's always attached to it, the promise of heaven

and the statement that this thing to which the Sabbath sign is applied is holy. The Sabbath identifies that it bears the stamp as holy kingdom of God stuff. It conveys to that holy kingdom of God stuff the promise that it is bound for consummation.

### **Sabbath everywhere associated with a covenant**

Now there is no Sabbath in the Bible anywhere that is not that. Now in the fourth commandment it is a sign of God's covenant to Israel, that particular covenant arrangement because they were a sanctified people, they were a covenant people. Wherever the Sabbath appears in the Bible, it's in terms of a covenant. In the beginning it's given, it is a creation ordinance, but one that was given to Adam as this is not to mankind universally apart from the fall and everything else, as we've seen. We're talking about a covenant. There never was some general law order of nature that was there. It was only the covenant that was given right from the beginning that was a covenantal order. The Sabbath was given as part of that covenant order right from the beginning. It was a covenant privilege. When God gives it to Israel, it's something that is given to the covenant community as a covenant privilege.

Should the Babylonians and the Egyptians and today all the nations of the earth be observing the Sabbath day? No. Yes, yes and no. Yes they should do it in the same way that you asked the question should everyone be baptized. Should everyone be baptized? Yes, in the sense that not right away, in the sense that they fulfill the biblical obligations. They're getting into the covenant that we believe that there's children today that we should just make this point but in terms then of adults being called into the covenant, they shouldn't be baptized before they have fulfilled the proper conditions and find themselves within the covenant. Once they're within the covenant, then they have a right to the sign of the covenant. But meanwhile, no. So yes that they should do what's necessary to get into the covenant and be baptized, but meanwhile, no. With the Lord's supper there is a "no," not everyone is in their right position to observe, but no, if you are not in the right position you're eating damnation and judgment to yourself. Likewise with the Sabbath. Yes, everyone should observe the Sabbath in the sense that they should get within this right, holy relationship with God where they are his people and are identified by him as

holy and have his promise that they are bound for heaven. But meanwhile no. They shouldn't be encouraged in their godless ways that they are bound for heaven. God is not promising to people outside this arrangement where they are sanctified by the blood of Christ that they are bound for heaven. That would be a damnable lie, that would be encouraging them on their way to hell to say that they have the promise of God that in their unbelief they are bound for heaven and here's the sign of it. So Sabbath, as I see it, is a creation ordinance. Therefore it is of perpetual duration, but it's a covenant sign always. Therefore it is a privilege that pertains exclusively to covenant people, all right?

So there's something for you to consider, as to whether then you can agree with the usual position on that subject or have rethink that as well. Then the next point in the discussion is even more difficult. Here is one of those points where I said that several places along the line tonight we have to sort of have some knowledge about common grace--non-holy.

### **How to observe the Sabbath**

All right. So there's the common grace line. Here's the holy covenant redemptive line up here with it's theocratic situations. Now, here the question is: are covenant people, are they the only ones then that have a right to observe the Sabbath? How should covenant people observe the Sabbath? So Exodus 31 points out, it is a sign of holiness, it is a thing that is fashioned in this particular way there's God's promise that this program, or whatever, is part of his holy kingdom, and it is about to be consummated in glory.

Now the traditional view of how you observe the Sabbath involves negatively the idea that you refrain from all general cultural activities on the Sabbath day. Then you devote the whole day to the cultic, let's see here, to the activities of worship. But definitely any kind of unnecessary cultural activity is a no-no, and a scruple and a violation of the Sabbath.

All right? Now here's my thinking, I used to be as strict along that line as anyone else. When we were raised our kids we didn't even want them listening to the radio on a Sunday because somebody had to be made to work even if it were a religious program. We shouldn't be having a religious programs broadcast because someone has to do the

work of running the station and everything. So that had been my position and meanwhile in lecturing on Old Testament theology I'd been presenting this kind of an analysis that I've been trying to present to you about a what is the nature of common grace which is where the whole cultural activity of our lives is bound up. Here then this being the holy sphere which is associated then with the cultic. I came to a point where I was saying then, at least to myself, "Kline, you're not being consistent any more with your biblical theology that you're teaching in class and your views of the Sabbath." What I can't get around now is how you can take the sign of holiness and holy kingdom activity and stamp it on our common culture. To do that is to say that our common cultural activity is the kingdom of God and that it is bound for heaven. Whereas the actual fact is that our common cultural activity is bound to be terminated in order to make way for heaven.

So it's only this other holy stuff that is going to be terminated in heaven. So that's where the impasse I came to for what it's worth. As I've said think this thing through yourself don't follow my conscience, follow yours. Inform yours from the study of the Scripture. But from where I'm standing, I have to say then that what we do in the area of culture is irrelevant to the Sabbath because the Sabbath has to do with that which is holy and our culture is not holy. So that's the fundamental idea that you have to chew on and think through whether that's valid or not.

As to how it comes out and actually how you observe or think of the Sabbath day, and what covenant people should be observing this sign and how do they observe it, my understanding would be that you observe it in terms of the official meeting of the covenant assembly. He should be under the authority of its appointed eldership who greet the congregation in the name of the covenant God and authorized and set aside this particular occasion of worship as an official covenantal meeting in God's presence. That kind of worship of God whether it be once or twice or three or four times, or whatever, there's room there for difference of opinion among Christians. None of us is able to engage all 24 hours of the day in these cultic activities of one sort or another. Just how many do count it enough to be a proper Sabbath worship. I would say, there's room for charitable difference of opinion. But certainly the necessary ingredient is, that it is the

distinctive identifying ingredient that constitutes that particular day as the Sabbath day. In fact, I would think that most of us would like if God's providence so arranged it, we would like to dispose of our time on the Sabbath to the grace so that we could engage in what constitutes proper Sabbath observance as fully as our hearts desire. So that we would like to be free from these other activities if we might. But God's providence doesn't always arrange that in the lives of his people. The early Christian slaves couldn't. They would have a meeting in the evening when the Eutychus could fall asleep at Paul's preaching at midnight so that the slaves could be there and so on. But all I'm saying is that it should not be a matter of church discipline, if someone within the congregation in God's providence finds himself engaging in cultural activities, whether working at this or that employment which you might not think are absolutely necessary. It shouldn't be a matter of church discipline.

#### **The change of day from the seventh day to the first day**

There are other aspects of this thing going on. The change of day from the seventh day to the first day certainly falls under traditional position on that. Ours is a different position within the history of eschatology now. Within the Old Testament period before Christ came and before Christ ascended into the seventh day rest in heaven at the right hand of the majesty on high, until Christ came mankind hadn't yet attained to that status of God's heavenly Sabbath day at all. So it was appropriate that the Sabbath should be at the end of the week as something toward which we are looking forward, all right? But now, Christ has come, and we, in Christ, in the spirit are up there, in the body, we are still on earth. Because in the body we are still on earth, there is room still for the Sabbath ordinance as I've said because we've gotten the seventh day. But because Christ is there, and because of our union with Christ and the heavenlies, we must take account of that. I think it would be now a denial of Christ to continue to worship on the Sabbath on the seventh day, because that would be saying that Christ has not yet come and he's not there and we are not there yet even in our spirit. But Christ has come. So I think it's in recognition of that that now the Sabbath day is on the first day of the week. Then so our Christians lives are lived out of that experience as something which is already realized in



Christ. So that whole issue then I would agree with the traditional position. But especially on the two points of who was to observe it. It's supposed to be a covenantal observance, and as to how it is properly to be observed and with the irrelevance of cultural activity and that connection those are positions which are more peculiar to myself and which, as I say, you should not buy into too fast. This is something you should study on your own. If you're going to be ordained or licensed in some Presbyterian and you have to adapt these views, you're going to find yourself in trouble as other students of mine who have been stupid enough to follow me in this regard have found to their dismay.

I don't know, I haven't given you anytime for discussion. It's after the hour, but maybe if you wanted to discuss that for a few minutes you may.

Student Question:

Kline's response: Not within here, because this is Kingdom Prologue and we haven't gotten up to it.

Student Question:

### **Sabbath as the Day of the Lord**

Kline's response: What was in your mind? Expand it. Yes... I would imagine that they are just expanded expressions of the same basic themes and especially the Jubilees as the ultimate Sabbath as an experience then of ultimate redemption. I also didn't read or deal with the last paragraph or two under this discussion, but I've tried to point out then that with the Sabbath, as we develop in here, the Sabbath has always been the Lord's day. The notion that you don't have the Sabbath until you come to the New Testament then you've got something else, the Lord's day, as a substitute for it is completely wrong-headed because the Sabbath has never been anything else but the Lord's day.

As we said, it's a manifestation of our consecration to the Lord as we are his disciples and therefore it is an acknowledgment of God's Lordship. It is also a prophetic picture of the final judgment and glorification--consummation. It is an anticipation of the final judgment of the wicked, the vindication of God's people, it's the day of the

vengeance of our God and so on, the Jubilee thing. So the Sabbath has always been the day of the Lord and the day of the Lord is a two-sided thing in terms of blessing for God's people, and judgment for their enemies. In fact, it is only as the enemy is judged and destroyed that God's people are liberated from the hostility of Satan and so on. So the Sabbath is all of those things, and these other Sabbath expansions bring them up.

Guess you want to go home. Do you want to stay until midnight tonight? No.

Transcribed by Ashley Haden  
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt