

Der Sabbat im Alten Testament und im altjüdischen religiösen Aberglauben  
Friedrich Bohn  
*The Princeton Theological Review* 4:406. [1906]

The main purport of this treatise is to compare the analogies of the Sabbath, outside of the sphere of special revelation and the post-revelation Judaistic development of the Sabbath, with the Old Testament law and Old Testament observance of this sacred day. The author at the outset establishes the fact that the Old Testament references to the Sabbath move along large lines and are practically the same throughout. He takes strong ground against the Wellhausian construction, which would artificially make out a development even here, and finds it symptomatic of the fundamental fault of the Wellhausian method in general: "The objection that must be made to this historical method is that it goes too far in unnaturally generalizing what is only a peculiar subjective mode of representation in the several documents, and applying this to the development of the institution in the life of the people and in the popular conception" (p. 10).

The writer's own standpoint is that of belief in a primeval revelation and a revelation in the patriarchal period, although he does not quite seem to have the courage to say that the Sabbath was instituted by God at creation (p. 49), but contents himself with pointing out how in the statement of Gen. 2:3, the two important theological principles of the close conjunction of God's life and that of man, and of the sharp distinction between creation and further development, are laid down (p. 52). Instead of from evolutionistic constructionism, he expects progress in the field of Old Testament science from the study of the Assyrio-Babylonian inscriptions and of the Rabbinical literature. This, however, does not lead him to rashly posit a direct historic connection between the Assyrian Sabatu and the Assyrian "seventh-days" of the month Elul on the one hand and the Old Testament Sabbath on the other. Besides reminding the reader that the "seventh-days" have as yet been established for the month Elul only, which as an intercalary month may have had this peculiar feature to itself, he carefully points out the difference between this Assyrian institution and the Sabbath of Israel. The former applied to certain classes, the latter to the whole people. In Assyria we meet with detailed concrete prohibitions of a superstitious character, in Israel with the large suspension of all work. In Assyria all religious activities were interrupted, in Israel religious activities were intensified on the Sabbath. The day was bound to the phases of the moon in Assyria, in Israel it was independent of these. And the most important difference of all, these days were *dies infausti* in Assyria, in which by quietism and self-effacement man sought to appease the Deity; in the Old Testament the Sabbath is a day of joy and of fellowship with God. It should be remembered, however, that in regard to some of these points Assyriologists differ among themselves. Most interesting is that part of the treatise in which the author shows how the Rabbinical development of later Judaism more and more assimilated the Sabbath to the superstitions of paganism, by introducing into its observance the principles of quietism and asceticism, and that to a remarkable extent this development bears the identical features that meet us in the religious calendars of Assyria, Egypt and other nations. To be sure, even in the midst of this retrograde movement the inherent force of the revelation-truth regarding the Sabbath continued to assert itself, as may be seen from this, that the Talmudic regulations tend in some respects to modify the rigor of extreme quietism. Thus until the very end the contact and comparison of the Old Testament institution with human superstition bears eloquent witness to the superiority and divine origin of the former.