

WHAT IS THE “SABBATH” OF HOS. 2:11 AND COL. 2:16?
A RESPONSE TO DU PREEZ

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In 2008, Adventist scholar Ron du Preez published *Judging the Sabbath: Discovering What Can't Be Found in Colossians 2:16*.¹ Some Adventists have since hailed this book as a definitive argument that the “sabbaths” mentioned in Col. 2:16 cannot be the seventh-day Sabbaths. This essay will challenge that thesis.

I. Evidence from Ezek. 45:17

In his book, du Preez argues that the term “sabbath” in Hos. 2:11 (and consequently, Col 2:16, a text apparently adapting the language of Hos. 2:11) does not refer to the seventh-day Sabbath. I must respectfully take exception to this claim.

The passage most similar in language to Hos. 2:11 is Ezek. 45:17. All and precisely the same terms appear in both texts (“feast. . .new moon. . . sabbath. . . all appointed times”), arranged in precisely the same order.² However, unlike Hosea 2, Ezek. 45-46 actually elaborates upon this catalogue of terms. Subsequent verses describe the prince's offering of sacrifices

1. du Preez, Ronald, *Judging the Sabbath: Discovering What Can't Be Found in Colossians 2:16* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2008).

2. The minor differences distinguishing the wording of Ezek. 45:17 from that of Hos. 2:11 include: use of the plural, prepositional prefixes (“on”), and one less conjunctive prefix (“and”). Although du Preez stresses these differences when analyzing certain passages, I do not believe they are of critical concern. Denotation rarely hinges on number or case, even less so when the linguistic similarity between these two texts is so profound. In any case, Col. 2:16 can be distinguished from Hos. 2:11 insofar as it lacks pronominal indications, as well as the absence of the closing construction “all appointed times.”² Significantly, the omission of “all her appointed times” makes the link between Hos. 2:11 and Ezek. 44:17 that much stronger than that existing between Hos. 2:11 and Col. 2:16.

on the sabbaths (46:3-4), the new moon (46:6), and feasts (45:21-25). The term “sabbaths,” used in 45:17; 46:3, is clearly equivocal with “the sabbath day” (46:1,4,12), a construction du Preez notes unquestionably refers to the seventh day (p. 18-20). In 46:3, “sabbaths” appears beside “new moons”—a juxtaposition also consistently used in scripture to refer to the weekly and monthly celebrations, respectively (and clearly evocative of 45:17, though reversed). Significantly, in his analysis of Ezek. 46, du Preez identifies every instance of *sabbaton* and *sabbatois* in Ez. 46:1-15 as a reference to a “Weekly” celebration.³ Since all other references to a “sabbath” in these two chapters have the seventh day Sabbath in view, the “sabbath” in view in Ezek. 45:17 must also be the seventh-day Sabbath. One would expect a natural and consistent use of this term.

Accordingly, I submit that the word “sabbath” in the combination of terms “feast. . . new moon. . . sabbath. . . all appointed times” refers to the seventh-day Sabbath. The only passage that elaborates upon this catalogue of observances (i.e., our best source of data) argues strongly for this point. Consequently, Col. 2:16 also undoubtedly refers to the seventh-day Sabbath, if it is to be interpreted against Hos. 2:11.

II. Responding to Objections

A. Relevance of Ezek. 45:17

On pp. 62-65, du Preez cites various differences between Ez. 45:17 and Col. 2:16, establishing that Col. 2:16 does not directly adapt the language of Ezek. 45:17.⁴ He thereby dismisses the relevance of Ezek. 45:17 to the interpretation of Col. 2:16. However, even if Col. 2:16 does not directly cite Ezek. 45:17, the text is still useful in understanding Col. 2:16 if it helps us illuminate the meaning of the terms used in Hos. 2:11 (which text du Preez believes Col. 2:16 does adapt). The essential question is: what is the meaning of the specific terms appearing in Hos. 2:11, and can Ezek. 45:17 assist us in the pursuit of those definitions?

When one considers the text in those terms, it becomes clear du Preez has too readily dismissed Ezek. 45:17. He rightly observes: “the focus [in Ezek. 45:17] is on the sacrifices per se, and not on the days as such (as is the case in Col 2:16 [and Hos. 2:11]).” However, this nuance does not alter the meaning of these terms. Hosea 2:11 uses the *same technical vocabulary in the same sequence* as Ezek. 45:17. A biblical scholar pursuing a word study would be required to uncover the meaning of this specific combination of terms, in *whatever* context they might occur. Furthermore, the sacrificial obligations of many of these holy days were integral to their

3. du Preez, 64.

4. du Preez, 62-3.

celebration or meaning. Ezek. 45:17's focus of "sacrifice" hardly even constitutes a different context, and certainly not one in which one would expect a different denotation for those terms identifying these various feasts.

Ron du Preez also dissociates Ezek. 45:17 from Hos. 2:11; Col 2:16 by observing that Ezek. 45:13-16 apparently refers to the "daily" sacrifices, a cycle of sacrifices unmentioned in the latter texts. However, this reference to the daily is removed from 45:17. It is certainly *not* part of the formulaic sequence of terms of interest to this study, which forms its own distinct unit, and is the basis for a link between Hos 2:11 to Ezek. 45:17. It is also quite different from that sequence in that the occasion of the daily offering is never explicitly stated in Ez. 45:13-17. Certainly, there is no reason to believe a reference to the daily sacrifices in preceding verses would alter the meaning of the formulaic sequence of terms in 45:17.

Moreover, the fact that the Hebrew terms appear in the plural in Ezek. 45:17 and in the singular in Hos. 2:11; Col. 2:16 is less relevant, as denotation rarely hinges on number. Whether rendered in the singular or plural, one would expect a consistent denotation for these terms, so strikingly reproduced in each passage.

Finally, du Preez' observation that Ezek. 45:17 and 46 does not represent or contain a "real calendar sequence" (instead constituting a chronologically disordered "collection of sacred times") is irrelevant to this argument. All that is necessary is to identify the "sacred times" each term encompasses. The issue is denotation.

B. General Objections to the Weekly Sabbath in Hos. 2:11

Du Preez also pursues several general arguments to dissociate the "sabbaths" of Hos. 2:11 from the weekly Sabbath.

1. "Her" Sabbath

A particular linchpin in du Preez' argument is the suggestion that the qualifier "her" eliminates the possibility that "her sabbath" encompasses the seventh-day Sabbath (p. 110). In the Old Testament, he observes, the Sabbath is exclusively referred to as "my Sabbath" and never "your Sabbath" (applied to the annual solemnities). However, 1 Macc. 1:39-45 evinces a stage in Judaism when "her sabbaths" could refer to the seventh-day Sabbath.⁵ It is quite possible Paul himself, who lived centuries

5. The passage pairs references to "her Sabbaths" (v. 39) || "the Sabbaths" (v. 45) with references to the "feasts." (As du Preez notes, the definite article is one of the most common linguistic markers for the seventh-day Sabbath.) Talk of profaning "sabbaths" in v. 45 is detailed in 1 Macc. 2:32,34. Among scholars, there is no question the seventh-day Sabbath is in view in all of these texts.

after the author of 1 Macc., would have read Hos. 2:11's reference to "her sabbaths" as a reference to the weekly sabbath, as the majority of biblical scholars continue to today. There is simply no certainty that Paul *assumed* a usage du Preez exhausts 208 pp. *attempting to demonstrate*.

More generally, the question must be asked: are we to read an implicit contrast between "my sabbaths" and "your sabbaths" every time we encounter either expression, let alone the expression "her Sabbaths"? These pronouns may not be mutually exclusive in every or any usage. For instance, God appropriates the annual festivals to himself by the expression "my appointed festivals" in Lev. 23:2. However, in Num. 29:39, Yahweh refers to them as "your appointed festivals." Interestingly, Ezek. 44:24 cites "my appointed festivals" beside "my sabbaths," suggesting that the dichotomy between the annual observances and the sabbaths is not a question of "my" day vis-à-vis "your day."

Also of note, Lev. 23:32 demonstrates the construction "your sabbath" is equivalent to the expression "a sabbath. . . to you." It may be significant, then, that Lev. 25:2 identifies the septennial sabbaths (which du Preez believes *are* in view in Hos. 2:11) as a "sabbath to the Lord" (cf. the seventh day as Sabbath in Ex. 16:25). More distantly, the Sabbath is called "holy to you" in Ex. 31:14.

2. "Feast" and "Sabbath"?

On various pages du Preez claims that a combined mention of both "feasts" and "[annual] sabbaths" is necessary to encompass all the annual solemnities, which he believes Paul intended.⁶ (This follows his belief that the term translated "feast" in Hos. 2:11 *and* Col. 2:16 is a specialized term referring only to the pilgrimage feasts; it does not seem to encompass Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur.⁷) However, du Preez never provides another text that uses these terms appear together to encompass all annual observances. His insistence that the two must occur together to encompass all annual festivals seems odd when one considers the two are never so used in other contexts.

Moreover, du Preez himself acknowledges the fact that the Old Greek ("Septuagint") of Ezek. 45-46 renders the specialized terms of Hos. 2:11 "inconsistently."⁸ For instance, he notes: "both Hebrew terms *moed* (v. 9) and *hag* (v. 11) are rendered with the same Greek word *heorte*."⁹ If the

6. du Preez, 78, 93.

7. du Preez, 129.

8. du Preez, 64-5.

9. du Preez, 64.

Old Greek could confuse *moed* and *hag*, could not Paul have as well? Is his use of *heorte* necessarily as limited as the Hebrew term *hag*? Could not the term encompass more referents—perhaps even all the annual festivals?

Finally, it would not be inappropriate to question whether Hosea desired to invoke all the annual festivities at all. Ron du Preez follows Anderson in recognizing the first line of Hos. 2:11 as an *inclusio*.¹⁰ However, this suggests that “her feast, her new moon, and her sabbath” can be summarized as “all her mirth.” At the very least, the text communicates the notion of a terminated *joy* (cf. vv. 10-11, 14). Should one expect, then, that the solemn “sabbaths” of the Lord (i.e., Trumpets/Rosh Hashanah and Atonement/Yom Kippur) would even be included on this list? As du Preez himself argues, Yom Kippur was distinguished by the obligation to “afflict” oneself (Lev. 16:31; 23:27); it hardly qualifies as an appointed times of “mirth,” and its revocation hardly suggests the loss of joy.

If these were excluded from this list, Hos. 2:11 would invoke only those festivals celebrated in a more positive spirit: the annual pilgrimage festivals, the new moons, and the seventh-day sabbath. This is, of course, a reversed and modified catalogue of the same festivals invoked in 2 Chr. 8:12-13, after mention of the daily: “the sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual festivals—the festival of unleavened bread, the festival of weeks, and the festival of booths.” That text provides a precedent for listing only the pilgrimage feasts beside the new moon and Sabbath.

One might also ask, if du Preez’ reading of Hos. 2:11 is correct, why would “all her mirth” *not* include the seventh-day Sabbaths? Why would the weekly sabbath be absent from this catalogue? (Du Preez admits even the septennial sabbaths among the days worthy of being called “her sabbath.”) Hos. 2:11 is not predicting the New Covenant abolition of feasts, but the execution of judgment upon the land of Israel [2:5, 14], such as interrupts her observance of festivals [2:13]. The Sabbath would naturally be among the affected festivals.

Conclusion

After comparing the language of Hos. 2:11 to the language of Ezek. 45:17ff., one may safely conclude that the “sabbaths” referenced in each passage almost certainly refer to the seventh-day Sabbath. The weight of this exegetical evidence is significant in establishing that the seventh-day Sabbath is in view in all texts using the construction “feast. . . new moon. . . and sabbath,” including Col. 2:16. Ron du Preez’ own arguments as to why the “sabbaths” referenced in Hos. 2:11; Col. 2:16 cannot be the seventh-day Sabbath are less persuasive, and can be safely eliminated on the grounds noted above.

10. du Preez, 120; “A” in du Preez’ simpler chiasm.

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