

# The Christian Sabbath Examined, Proved, Applied, Chapter 2

## Theological Reasons for First Day Observance

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### 1. Re-creation

A primary reason for the observance of the first day instead of the seventh is that Christ's redemptive work is presented in Scripture (in a spiritual sense) as the creation of a new world. By His redemptive work, Jesus Christ (who is the second Adam, Rom. 5:12-21) created a new order, a new covenant, a new dispensation. His sinless life, atonement and victorious resurrection are the foundation of the regeneration of all things (Rom. 8:18-23). Christ's work is presented in such dramatic cosmic terms because the Bible teaches that sin and the curse have permeated the old creation, reducing it to chaos. In poetic language Jeremiah describes the old creation as rendered dark and chaotic because of sin: "I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; and the heavens, they had no light" (4:23). Looking to the future, the prophets described Christ's redemptive work of restoration as a creation of a new heaven and a new earth: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind" (Isa. 65:17). "I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion, 'You are My people'" (Isa. 51:16).

The re-creation was typified in Noah and the ark. Noah and his family (eight persons in all) were saved from the flood and the destruction of the whole world and brought into newness of life by entering the ark. The flood of judgment destroyed the old order, and out of the ark came the new humanity: a redeemed race. It is significant that God redeemed only eight persons out of the race of prediluvian mankind, for the number eight "has the same meaning of *newness, redemption, sanctification, and rest* which is characteristic of the number one, and to which the number eight itself is indeed equivalent as the first day in the second cycle of seven days."<sup>1</sup>

The change of the weekly sabbath from the seventh day to the first day or eighth day was anticipated throughout the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> Note that circumcision, which was instituted under the Abrahamic covenant, and which represented the new birth or regeneration (re-creation), took place on the eighth day (or the first day of the second week of the newborn baby's life). The resurrection of Christ (which is the beginning of the new creation or regeneration of the world) also takes place on the eighth day. The eighth day was the day of dedication of the firstborn son. Jesus Christ is the firstborn or firstfruits of all who believe. "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). Paul calls

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Some Bible scholars argue that the focus of the fourth commandment is on the *pattern* of six days of labor and one day of rest and *not* the particular day, which must be established by extra-decalogical revelation. Lee writes, "But *the seventh day* is the sabbath...not, as the Seventh Day Adventists insist, 'the seventh day *of the week*,' but simply, the seventh day, that is, the seventh day in relation to the six days of labor just described in the previous verse. Hence, the hebdomodal cycle of work and rest is clearly taught by the commandment; but the precise day of the week which is the sabbath in each particular dispensation must be established by the extra-Decalogical data of the dispensation concerned. It is, however, always 'the sabbath of the Lord thy God'—the day of man's personal re-creating Creator" (*op. cit.*, p. 147).

Christ “the *firstborn* among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). The author of Hebrews calls the people of God “the general assembly and church of the *firstborn* who are registered in heaven” (Heb. 12:23). The eighth day was the day of cleansing from defilement (Lev. 14:10; 15:14, 29). The Apostle Paul points to the believer’s union with Christ in His resurrection (which took place on the eighth day) as a major reason that Christians are no longer under the power of sin (Rom. 6:4-5). There are simply too many parallels between the Old Testament types and Christ’s resurrection on the eighth day, or first day of the week, to ignore. The numbers eight and one in Scripture point to a new beginning: Christ’s redemptive re-creation. “The number ‘one’ is always the beginning of something, just as the number ‘seven’ continually terminates a period. For this reason, the number ‘eight’ as well as the number ‘one’ both occupy the place of a new beginning in the Scriptures. For ‘eight’ is, after all, also ‘one’ after ‘seven’ again and consequently the beginning of a new period.”<sup>3</sup>

That Christ has accomplished a re-creation is even more clearly taught in the New Testament. Christ reveals Himself to the Apostle John as “the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14). The Apostle Paul clearly parallels the first creation (of which the preincarnate Son was the Mediator) and the second creation (accomplished by the divine-human Mediator). “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Col. 1:15-18). Calvin writes, “He is the beginning, because he is the first-born from the dead; for in the resurrection there is a restoration of all things, and in this manner the commencement of the second and new creation, for the former had fallen to pieces in the ruin of the first man.”<sup>4</sup> “God instituted both the Edenic sabbath and the New Testament sabbath for man at the time of creation and re-creation respectively, by His own specific example.”<sup>5</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ ushered in a new creation “wherein old things are passed away, and all things become new: we are said to be created unto Christ Jesus unto good works: all things are restored and reconciled whether in heaven or in earth, and God hath caused light to shine out of darkness, as he did at the beginning; and the dissolution of the Jewish state was often spoken of in the Old Testament as the end of the world. But we who belong to the gospel-church belong to the new creation; and therefore there seems to be at least as much reason, that we should commemorate the work of this creation, as that the members of the ancient Jewish church should commemorate the work of the old creation.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lee, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> Lee, p. 27. The Seventh-day Adventist contention that the Sabbath always has and always will be Saturday does not hold up under scrutiny. “There is no evidence that the Sabbath held from Adam to Joseph, fell on a Saturday; and still less that it fell on a Saturday *before* the fall.... Moreover, it is quite possible that the sevenfold cycle was disrupted at least once more during the Jews’ slavery in Egypt between the time of Joseph and the reinstatement of the sabbath in the time of Moses (Ex. 1-16). But even from the time of Moses onward, although the days have thenceforth (as previously) devolved in unbroken succession, they have not all been uniformly twenty-four hours each in duration. At least two such days were very considerably longer, namely Joshua’s long day (Josh. 10:13) and the day when Hezekiah’s sundial moved back fifteen degrees (Is. 38:8). It is, however, unquestionable that the sabbath fell on Saturday in the days of Christ’s earthly life” (Lee, p. 343). Cf. R.J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 134-36.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, 2:97.

Now that it has been established beyond doubt that the inspired apostles taught that Christ's redemptive work was a re-creation every bit as significant and important as the first creation, a question must be answered: When did Christ, the creator of a new heavens and earth, rest from His work of re-creation? Did He rest on Saturday? No, for His body was still in the tomb under the power of death, subject to a state of degradation and humiliation.<sup>7</sup> Christ entered His rest on Sunday, the first day of the week. Thus, the day of rest and worship is no longer the seventh day which looked back to the rest of the first creation, but it is the first day which looks back to the rest of the new creation in Christ. This makes sense in light of the fact that the first day is the day of victory over the world, sin and the devil. It is the day that Christ's kingdom was established with power. It is the day of Jesus' enthronement at the right hand of God, and the day that our Lord chose to baptize His church (Pentecost Sunday).

## 2. Deuteronomy 5:15 and the New Covenant Lord's Day

The change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week is also clearly seen in comparing the old covenant sabbath and its relation to redemption from bondage in Egypt to the new covenant Lord's day and redemption in Christ. God commanded, "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Dt. 5:15). Every Sabbath, the Jews were to remember God's grace, mercy and glorious work of redemption in bringing them out of Egypt, in *addition* to His work in creation.

The deliverance from Egypt was the great redemptive act of the Old Testament; it serves as the great type of the perfect redemption accomplished by Christ. Since the command to remember His redemption is not to Israel alone, but also applies to Christ's church, Christians have the same responsibility to remember the Lord's day. "The redemption from Egypt cannot be properly viewed except as the anticipation of the greater redemption wrought in the fullness of the time. Hence, if redemption from Egypt accorded sanction to the sabbath institution and provided reason for its observance, the same must apply to the greater redemption and apply in a way commensurate with the greater fullness and dimensions of redemption secured by the death and resurrection of Christ. In other words, it is the fullness and richness of the new covenant that so accord to the sabbath ordinance increased relevance, sanction, and blessing."<sup>8</sup> If the type or shadow is significant enough in God's eyes to warrant a special remembrance under the old

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<sup>7</sup> Those who attempt to find a sabbath rest for Christ in His lying in the tomb under the power of death fail to note the following points: (1) that death is an aspect of the curse; thus, death for Christ was an aspect of His humiliation and not His victory; (2) that sabbath rest in Scripture is a rest from creative work and re-creative work, and Christ's re-creative work was not complete or accomplished until He walked out of the tomb; (3) that biblical sabbath rest is not a cessation of all activity or the resting of a corpse but is an active celebratory rest, a rest involving conscious worshipful reflection; (4) that the sabbath rest and entering into salvation are compared in Scripture; therefore, the sabbath rest could not begin until the achievement of salvation was completed by Christ (this occurred when He rose from the dead). "The abolition of the Jewish sabbath seems to be intimated by this, that Christ, the Lord of the sabbath, lay buried on that day. Christ, the author of the world, was the author of that work of creation of which the Jewish sabbath was the memorial. It was he that worked six days and rested the seventh day from all his works, and was refreshed. Yet he was holden in the chains of death on that day. God, who created the world, now in his second work of creation, did not follow his own example, if I may so speak; he remained imprisoned in the grave on that day, and took another day to rest in" (Edwards, 2:99).

<sup>8</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976), 1:220-21.

covenant, then certainly the anti-type (the substance and the perfect redemption wrought by Christ, which encompasses the whole earth instead of one small nation) warrants the same special remembrance. Comparing the redemption from Egypt to redemption in Christ, Jonathan Edwards writes, “And it was but a shadow, the work in itself was nothing in comparison with the work of [Christ’s] redemption. What is a petty redemption of one nation from a temporal bondage, to the eternal salvation of the whole church, of the elect in all ages and nations, from eternal damnation, and the introduction of them, not into a temporal Canaan, but into heaven, into eternal glory and blessedness.”<sup>9</sup> Thus is it not fitting for the new covenant church to sanctify the first day, the day of total victory and perfect redemption for the elect of all nations and all times? “This is the rationale for regarding the Lord’s day as the Christian Sabbath. It follows the line of thought which the Old Testament itself prescribes for us when it appeals to redemption as the reason for sabbath observance. The principle enunciated in Deuteronomy 5:15 receives its verification and application in the new covenant in the memorial of finalized redemption, the Lord’s day.”<sup>10</sup> Those who cling to the old seventh-day sabbath fail to understand the principle set forth in Deuteronomy 5:15 as it applies to new covenant believers, and thus dishonor the Lord’s day.

### 3. Hebrews 4:9-10 and the Sabbath

A passage of Scripture that is important in the debate regarding the perpetuity of the weekly sabbath is Hebrews 4:9-10: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.” This passage has been interpreted three different ways. Some interpreters use this passage as a proof text against the perpetuity of the Sabbath. They argue that when a person believes in Christ, he then ceases from his evil works, and his whole life as a Christian is one long sabbath rest. Thus they argue that the weekly sabbath was but a type of the Christian’s rest in Christ and is no longer binding on the church. Gary North writes, “Calvin followed the tradition laid by Irenaeus and Augustine, interpreting the sabbath as an allegory of the believer’s rest in Christ from the bondage of sin, a rest to be made perfect in eternity. This, of course, was simply the teaching of Hebrews 4, and Calvin was unwilling to break from its perspective. He went lawn bowling after church on Sunday, a fact which later sabbatarians have chosen to ignore.”<sup>11</sup> This interpretation,

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards, 2:98.

<sup>10</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 1:221-22. Jonathan Edwards applies the fourth commandment as stated in Dt. 5:15 to Christians as follows: “The Egypt from which we under the gospel are redeemed, is the spiritual Egypt; the house of bondage from which we are redeemed, is a state of spiritual bondage. Therefore the words, as spoken to us, are to be thus interpreted, remember, thou wast a servant to sin and Satan, and the Lord thy God delivered thee from this bondage, with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath-day [the Lord’s day]” (*op. cit.*, 2:98).

<sup>11</sup> Gary North, “The Economics of Sabbath Keeping,” in Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 825. Calvin’s view regarding the Sabbath is most clearly set forth in his sermon on Dt. 5:12-14, preached on June 20, 1555: “Now must we come to the second point: which is that (as I have said already) the sabbath day was a policy or order whereby to exercise the faithful in the service of God. For that day was ordained for men to assemble in, to hear the doctrine of the law preached, to communicate together with sacrifices, and to call upon the name of God. As touching these points, it belongs as well to us as to the people of old time. For although the figure be ceased (I mean the same that St. Paul speaks of in the epistle to the Colossians), yet notwithstanding, so much as concerns the order continues still and has his use. And to what end serves this order? To assemble ourselves in the name of God. True it is that this ought to be done continually: howbeit for our infirmities’ sake, or rather by reason of our slothfulness, it is requisite that some one day should be chosen out. If we were as earnest in serving of God as we ought to be, we should not appoint one

as shall be shown, is not correct. An examination of the context (3:7-4:11; cf. 9:11) proves that the sabbath rest spoken of throughout chapters 3 and 4 is the unending rest in the consummate new heavens and new earth. Therefore, this passage cannot be used as a proof text against the weekly sabbath, because the looking toward the great eschatological sabbath when believers enter their perfect rest with God applied to Adam, Moses, David, and believers of every age. If the Sabbath as the perfect future rest did not abrogate the keeping of one day under the old covenant, there is no reason for it to abrogate the new covenant Lord's day, for the eschatological meaning is the same in both dispensations.<sup>12</sup>

A second interpretation common among strict sabbatarians is that Hebrews 4:9 is actually a statement regarding the weekly sabbath and not the future eternal sabbath. The author of Hebrews discusses the eternal future rest in chapters three and four, but in 4:9 he argues for a remaining weekly sabbath. Since new covenant believers have the same hope of eternal rest as old covenant believers, the weekly sabbath remains to foreshadow that future rest. In his examination of chapter 4, R.L. Dabney argues: "That God has an eternal spiritual rest; that he invited Old Testament believers to share it; that it is something higher than Israel's home in Canaan, because after Joshua had fully installed Israel in that rest, God's rest is still held up as something future. The seventh day (verse 4) was the memorial of God's rest, and was thus connected with it. It was under the old dispensation, as under the new, a spiritual *faith* which introduced into God's rest, and it was unbelief which excluded from it. But as God's rest was something higher than a home in Canaan, and was still offered in the ninety-fifth Psalm long after Joshua settled Israel in that rest, it follows (verse 9) that there still remains a sabbatism, or Sabbath-keeping, for God's people under the new dispensation; and hence (verse 11) we ought to seek to enter into that spiritual rest of God, which is by faith."<sup>13</sup>

A strong support for this interpretation is the fact that the word used to describe God's rest throughout both chapters (3-4) is a different word than the one used in verse 9. In 3:11, 18,

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day in a week only, but every man ought to meet both morning and evening without law written, to be edified more and more by God's word. And truly this exercise is more than needful for us, considering that we be so inclined to evil, as there needs not anything to thrust us out of the way: and therefore it were expedient for us to come together daily in the name of God. But what? We see that men will scarcely meet upon the [Lord's] day, and that most of them must be held to it as it were by force. Considering then that there is such infirmity in us, let us understand that this order was not made all only for the Jews, that they might have some day wherein to come together, but also for us, so as it belongs to us as well as to them.... What then? We must apply this not to a higher purpose: we must refrain from our own business which might hinder us from the minding of God's works, and we must call upon His name and exercise ourselves in His Word. *If we spend the Lord's day in making good cheer, and in playing and gaming, is that a good honoring of God? No, is it not a mockery, yes and a very unhallowing of his name? Yes.* But when the shopwindows are shut in on the Lord's day, and men travel not as they do on other days: it is to the end we should have the more leisure and liberty to [attend] to the things that God commands.... Behold, a great number think to have the Lord's day most free to follow their own business.... But the world sees how all things are unhallowed, insomuch that most folk have no regard at all of the using of that day which was ordained to withdraw us from all earthly cares and affairs, that we might give ourselves wholly unto God" (*Sermons on Deuteronomy* [Carlisle, PA, Banner of Truth, 1987], pp. 203-04; spelling modernized, emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> "There were two 'rests' frequently mentioned in the O.T. as special pledges of God's favour: the sabbath and the land of Canaan: the former being styled 'the sabbath of rest to the Lord' (Ex. 35:2), and 'the sabbath of the Lord' (Ex. 20:10); the latter, 'the rest which the Lord gave them' (Deut. 12:9; Josh. 1:15). In view of these the Hebrews might well say, 'We have always enjoyed the Lord's sabbath, and our fathers have long occupied Canaan, why then do you speak so much about entering into God's rest?' The verses which follow meet this objection, showing that neither of those 'rests' was meant by David in Ps. 95, nor by himself here in Heb. 4" (Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954], p. 204).

<sup>13</sup> Dabney, 1:535.

and 4:1, 3, 5, 10, and 11, the Greek word *katapausis* is used. But in 4:9 *sabbatismos* is used.<sup>14</sup> Although it is true that both words can be translated as rest, why use a different word only once, a word usually translated as sabbath? Lee writes, “‘*Katapausis*’ and ‘*katapauo*’ in the LXX are used in respect of the (uninterrupted and therefore unrepeatable) rest of God in Gen. 2:2-3 and Ps. 95:11, but ‘*sabbatizo*’ and ‘*sabbatismos*’ are used in Ex. 16:30 and II Chr. 36:21 to indicate the (intermittent and therefore repeatable) keeping of a sabbath at regular intervals. Conclusion: the ‘*sabbatismos*’ of Heb. 4:9, *which the (saved) people of God must keep*, is the intermittent and repeatable Sabbath at regular (weekly) intervals.”<sup>15</sup> According to this interpretation the passage should be translated: “There remains therefore a sabbath for the people of God” (v. 9).

This interpretation is supported by other aspects of the book of Hebrews. The book was written to Jews who no doubt needed reassurance, given the fact that they had (from an unconverted Jewish standpoint) turned their backs on their nation when they followed Christ. They also needed to be warned that the only way really to remain the people of God and enter God’s eternal rest was by faith. Since Christ’s work of redemption and first-day resurrection gave the new covenant people a new day of rest and worship (a day obviously not recognized by their unbelieving brethren), they also needed reassurance regarding sabbath-keeping on the new day. The reasons for keeping a sabbath were no less relevant for Christians as for old covenant saints. Both looked back to the creation and redemption and both looked forward to the eternal sabbath. Pink concurs: “‘There *remaineth* therefore a sabbath-keeping for the people of God.’ The reference is not to something future, but to what is present.”<sup>16</sup> The Greek verb (in its passive form) is never rendered by any other English equivalent than ‘remaineth.’ It occurs again in Heb. 10:26. The word ‘remain’ signifies ‘to be left after others have withdrawn, to continue unchanged.’ Here then is a plain, positive, unequivocal declaration by the Spirit of God: ‘There remaineth therefore a sabbath-keeping.’ Nothing could be simpler, nothing less ambiguous. The striking thing is that this statement occurs in the very epistle whose theme is the superiority of *Christianity* over Judaism; written to those addressed as ‘holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly* calling.’ Therefore, it cannot be gainsaid [i.e., denied] that Heb. 4:9 refers directly to *the Christian Sabbath*. Hence we solemnly and emphatically declare that any man who says there is no Christian Sabbath takes direct issue with the *N.T.* scriptures.”<sup>17</sup>

The third view (the majority view) holds that verse 9 refers to the believer’s future everlasting sabbath in heaven. Thus, the verse does not teach an explicit sabbatarianism but an implicit. “This verse indirectly establishes the obligation of the Sabbath still; for the type continues until the antitype supersedes it: so legal sacrifices continued till the great antitypical Sacrifice superseded it. As then the antitypical heavenly Sabbath rest will not be till Christ comes, our Gospel Joshua, to usher us into it, the typical earthly Sabbath must continue till

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<sup>14</sup> “*Sabbatismos*—the verb *sabbatizo* (I keep the Sabbath) is the basis of the noun *sabbatismos*, which occurs only once in the New Testament. The ending *-mos* signifies the progressive act of keeping the Sabbath” (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], p. 115).

<sup>15</sup> Lee, p. 235.

<sup>16</sup> The verb *eiserchomai* and participle *katepausen* in v. 10 are both aorist and indicate that entrance into God’s eternal rest occurs only once. In v. 9, however, the verb *apoleipetai* (there remains) is in the present tense. If the author of Hebrews is *not* saying that a weekly sabbath continually remains for the people of God, then he must be speaking of the continuous hope (or ever present hope) of the eternal sabbath set before the people of God. Thus, the eternal sabbath continuously remains before God’s people and should motivate them to faithful obedience.

<sup>17</sup> Pink, pp. 209-10.

then.”<sup>18</sup> The Christian Sabbath should focus the believer’s attention on the past, the present, and the future. The worshiper must look at God’s rest from His creative labors and remember that, had Adam obeyed the covenant of works, he would have participated in God’s rest. In the present, Christians celebrate an accomplished redemption and resurrection joy. Believers are to look to the future and the eternal sabbath rest in the presence of Christ. “The purpose of the Sabbath from the first was eschatological; it was a sign of the end, not only of creation but re-creation. The Sabbath in history took its pattern from the creation week of Genesis, but its time and date on the calendar from the day of salvation. Thus, in the Old Testament, the Sabbath celebrated and commemorated the passover, Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Since Christ, the Sabbath is dated from the day of resurrection. In both cases, it is future-oriented, looking forward to the great restoration of all things.”<sup>19</sup> The second and third views are acceptable interpretations compatible with the thesis of this book.

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[HOME PAGE](#)

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<sup>18</sup> A. R. Fausset, Robert Jamison and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 2:449. “The day of rest is indeed an *emblem* of eternal rest! During our lifespan on earth, we celebrate the Sabbath and realize only partially what Sabbath-rest entails. In the life to come, we shall fully experience God’s rest, for then we will have entered a rest that is eternal. ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them”’ (Rev. 14:13)... However, the text indicates that whoever enters God’s rest does so only once. He enters that rest fully when his labors are ended. He then enjoys uninterrupted heavenly rest from which death, mourning, crying, and pain have been removed; at that time God’s dwelling will be with men; he will live with them and be their God, for they are his people (Rev. 21:4)” (Kistemaker, p. 112).

<sup>19</sup> R. J. Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1983), p. 96.