

*Short Studies in*  
**BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**



**THE SABBATH AS REST  
AND HOPE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

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**GUY PRENTISS WATERS**

“Call the Sabbath a delight,’ bids the Lord (Isa. 58:13), and, in this book, Guy Waters helps us to do just that. Tracing the theological framework and biblical commands for keeping the Sabbath day holy, Waters leads God’s people to recognize this often-misunderstood day as essential for our growth in grace. Thanks to Waters’s accessible writing and thorough exegesis, this book leaves readers with a clear sense of what the Lord commands and a fresh conviction that ‘his commandments are not burdensome’ (1 John 5:3). In a day when Christians talk frequently about the practice of ‘Sabbath,’ Waters invites us to see that the biblical Sabbath is much more than a day to enjoy bodily rest—it’s a day to enjoy God himself.”

**Megan Hill**, author, *Praying Together* and *A Place to Belong*; Managing Editor, The Gospel Coalition

“How and whether we are to observe the Sabbath commandment today has proven to be a tricky question. Waters helps us navigate this complexity with nuanced simplicity. He explains the role of Sabbath in creation and redemption, covering key texts from the Old and New Testaments. He covers tricky issues, like the way Jesus related to the Sabbath and why the Sabbath is now celebrated on Sunday. Waters also shows the ongoing relevance of the Sabbath and provides practical suggestions for observing the Sabbath today. This short book is long on helpful insights: it will show you why the Sabbath is good news, how it relates to Jesus himself, and why it is important that we continue to observe it today.”

**Brandon D. Crowe**, Professor of New Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

“What a timely and necessary book, calling us out of our fast-paced and productivity-driven lives to rightly regard and observe the Sabbath. Waters expertly moves us from Genesis to Revelation, tracing the Sabbath through creation, redemption, and consummation. Far from an outdated practice, the Sabbath day is a necessary reset that gives us perspective and promotes fruitfulness during our six days of labor. Waters reminds us that the Sabbath rest is an important means of imitating God and a weekly invitation to enjoy him. I found myself longing for the Sabbath, ready to joyfully submit to this command given at the beginning of time.”

**Colleen D. Searcy**, Bible teacher; speaker; creator, Meet Me in the Bible resources



*The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*

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# The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God

Guy Prentiss Waters

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WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover illustration and design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2022

Printed in the United States of America

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Paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-7354-5

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-7357-6

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-7355-2

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-7356-9

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Waters, Guy Prentiss, 1975- author.

Title: The Sabbath as rest and hope for the people of God / Guy Prentiss Waters.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, 2022. | Series: Short studies in biblical theology | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022001337 (print) | LCCN 2022001338 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433573545 (paperback) | ISBN 9781433573576 (epub) | ISBN 9781433573569 (mobipocket) | ISBN 9781433573552 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Sabbath. | Sunday. | Rest—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV111.3 .W38 2022 (print) | LCC BV111.3 (ebook) | DDC 263/.3—dc23/eng/20220224

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022001337>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022001338>

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Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

BP	30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22				
14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

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## Series Preface

Most of us tend to approach the Bible early on in our Christian lives as a vast, cavernous, and largely impenetrable book. We read the text piecemeal, finding golden nuggets of inspiration here and there, but remain unable to plug any given text meaningfully into the overarching storyline. Yet one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God’s covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity.

This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.

Each volume in this series takes a whole-Bible theme and traces it through Scripture. In this way readers not only learn about a given theme but also are given a model for how to read the Bible as a coherent whole.

We have launched this series because we love the Bible, we love the church, and we long for the renewal of biblical theology in the academy to enliven the hearts and minds of Christ's disciples all around the world. As editors, we have found few discoveries more thrilling in life than that of seeing the whole Bible as a unified story of God's gracious acts of redemption, and indeed of seeing the whole Bible as ultimately about Jesus, as he himself testified (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The ultimate goal of *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* is to magnify the Savior and to build up his church—magnifying the Savior through showing how the whole Bible points to him and his gracious rescue of helpless sinners; and building up the church by strengthening believers in their grasp of these life-giving truths.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

# Introduction

Over the last several decades, the Sabbath has undergone rapid decline in American life. A Sabbathless world promises heightened productivity and greater economic gain. It flatters the illusion that we have autonomous control over our schedules and our lives. But it leaves its frenetic inhabitants weary and empty. We deprive ourselves of the very thing that we most need—rest.

This book is not a plea to state and federal legislators to put blue laws back on the books. It is, rather, an exploration of what the Bible says to all human beings about the Sabbath. Many associate the Sabbath with Judaism or with certain movements in Protestant Christianity (e.g., Puritanism), but the Scripture teaches that the Sabbath concerns every human being. God has given us one day every week to remind us of some of the most important truths about himself, the world, and ourselves—he created us to worship him and to enjoy fellowship with him; he has redeemed sinners at the cost of his own Son, Jesus Christ; he has prepared a heavenly rest for each and every one of his people. In our 24/7 world, it is easy to lose sight of these basic truths. The Sabbath offers all people a weekly reset. In taking up God's call to meet with him in Jesus Christ on his appointed day, we find renewed clarity of vision. We see God, the world, and ourselves for what they really are. More than that, we find rest and

refreshment of soul and body. That renewal equips us to serve God faithfully for the rest of the week, and it points us toward our heavenly home that lies at the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

In this book, we are undertaking a biblical theology of the Sabbath.<sup>1</sup> The Sabbath appears in Genesis, in Revelation, and at many points in between. It is woven into the warp and woof of Scripture. Thus, we will look at the Bible's testimony to the Sabbath from cover to cover. In chapter 1, we will explore what God says about the Sabbath at the creation of the world. God built the Sabbath into the creation such that human beings have never been without the Sabbath. This weekly rest points to the glorious goal of human existence—that we would glorify God in drawing near to him in worship and adoration. We will also see that God instituted a covenant in the garden of Eden so that Adam (representing all human beings who would trace their ordinary descent from him) might bring himself and us into the everlasting rest to which that weekly rest pointed. Adam would have achieved that goal had he continued to be obedient to God. Sadly, he sinned and fell (and we sinned and fell in him). In mercy, God appointed a Savior, the last Adam, to do what Adam failed to do (by obeying God perfectly) and to undo what Adam did (by bearing on the cross the penalty for his people's sins). In this way, God brings sinners from every tribe, tongue, people, and race into that promised heavenly rest.

God set to work saving sinners right away, and thus he began to prepare the world for the arrival of Jesus Christ. In chapters 2 and 3, we will explore how the Law and the Prophets spoke of the Sabbath in such a way as to point the faith of God's people forward to their coming Savior. While retaining its significance as a creation

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1. For a sketch of the project of biblical theology, see my book, *The Lord's Supper as the Sign and Meal of the New Covenant*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 15–16.

ordinance, the Sabbath comes to take on additional meaning as a redemptive commemoration of the exodus. Every week, Israel would remember that God had redeemed them from bondage in Egypt—a glimpse of the coming redemption that Christ would accomplish at the cross. The Prophets, in particular, remind us that God intends the Sabbath to be a day of joy and delight for all kinds of people as the redeemed gather in the presence of their Creator and Deliverer.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ’s teachings and miracles also had a lot to say about the Sabbath. In chapter 4, we will see how his earthly ministry served to clarify the Sabbath’s true meaning and purpose. His miracles were glimpses into the restoration and redemption that he had come to bring sinners. And his teaching about the Sabbath both stripped away the burdens that human teachers had laid upon it as well as highlighted the genuine joy and freedom that sinners receive and experience through faith in him.

But it was the resurrection of Christ from the dead that transformed the Sabbath. In chapter 5, we will see how the Gospels, Acts, the Letters, and Revelation all point to “the first day of the week” as the day on which the new covenant community, by divine commandment, gathers to worship God. As the seventh day of the week commemorated God’s work of creation, so the first day of the week commemorates God’s work of new creation, which dawned in human history at Christ’s resurrection. As such, it comes to be known as “the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10)—Christ’s name is stamped upon this day, a fitting tribute to the one on whom creation, redemption, and consummation converge.

Overall, a biblical theology of the Sabbath has a lot to say about how Christians and the church should observe the Sabbath today. Thus, in chapter 6, we will explore some of these practical implications. They speak to our mindset, our attitudes, our choices, and

our relationships with other Christians. Honoring the Sabbath, we will see, is critical to the pursuit of a Christian life that is healthy and vibrant.

For many in the church, the Sabbath is little more than a point of contention, a list of dos and don'ts. For others, it is utterly foreign. If your impressions of the Sabbath are either negative or nonexistent, I hope that you'll come away from this book with a sense of the good that God intends in your life and mine when we take up his call to observe the Sabbath. After all, the Sabbath is a weekly invitation from God to draw close and enter into renewed fellowship with the one who made us and who redeemed sinners at the cost of his own Son. And it is a weekly reminder that in Christ, the best is yet to come. May this book encourage you to find and to experience the rest that you and I need in the only place where it can be found—Jesus Christ.

## Creation

The Bible introduces the Sabbath at its beginning. We first meet the Sabbath in the account of God making heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1–2:3). Strikingly, it is *God* who, in a sense, observes the first Sabbath (2:3). In this chapter, we are going to look, with the help of the New Testament, at what Genesis says about that Sabbath. We will make the case that God intends all human beings to observe a weekly Sabbath as a day of holy resting. We will then see that the Sabbath is a window into what God intended for the world at its creation. In this respect, the Sabbath is eschatological—that is to say, it points to the goal that God had for creation from the very beginning. Although the fall of humanity into sin appeared to thwart that goal, our fall in Adam actually prepared the way for its fulfillment in the last Adam, Jesus Christ. The Sabbath, then, draws together the great concerns of the Bible—creation, redemption, and the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

### **God Works, God Rests**

In the creation account, God makes the world and everything in it in six days. A seventh day follows that is set apart from the previous six in some important ways. Genesis 2:1–3 reads,



Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

These verses conclude the account of God's creating the world that started in Genesis 1:1.<sup>1</sup> We may now look at what they tell us about God and the creation and then further reflect on their message in light of Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a whole.

First, it is clear that the work of creation is completed—verse 1 reads, “the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (cf. 1:2, 30). This work was done in six days, so the seventh day will be different. It is not a day of work for God, but rest—verses 2 and 3 say that he “rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done” and that “on [the seventh day] God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” Though the word “Sabbath” does not appear here, a related word does. The Hebrew verb translated “rested” (*shbt*) in Genesis 2:2–3 is related to the Hebrew noun translated “Sabbath” (*shabbat*). There is, therefore, an implicit connection established between God's rest and what later revelation will call the “Sabbath.”

Further, the beginning of Genesis shows us that this day is set apart from the previous six days in at least two more ways. In the first place, it is a day that “God blessed” (2:3). Earlier, God is said to have “blessed” the birds and the sea creatures and to have “blessed” Adam and Eve at their creation (1:22, 28). In each case that benediction is

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1. The next verse begins with the phrase, “These are the generations.” Commentators often point out that this clause serves as the marker of a new section within Genesis (see Gen. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). The first portion of the section that follows, Genesis 2:4–25, offers a more detailed account of the way in which God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, on the sixth day (cf. 1:26–31).

followed by the command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill” (1:22, 28). Thus, when God blesses the seventh day, our expectation is that this day will be marked by fruitfulness and fullness appropriate to that day.

In the second place, God “made [the seventh day] holy” (2:3). This is the first time in Genesis that God is said to make something “holy,” and it means that this seventh day was deemed different from the other six days. What distinguishes the “holy” seventh day is that it is set apart for purposes of worship.<sup>2</sup>

The resting in view on this seventh day is therefore a holy resting. To be sure, it is a day marked by the cessation of God’s work in creating the world and everything in it. But that cessation is only the penultimate characteristic of the day. The ultimate characteristic of the day is worship, a worship that is tied to fruitfulness and fullness.

### **THE SABBATH: GOD’S ORDINANCE FOR HUMAN BEINGS**

This observation raises the question, “What kind of worship is in view, and by whom?” The answer of Genesis is, “Humanity’s worship of the God who made them.” Human beings are unique within Genesis 1:1–2:3 as those said to be made after the “image” and “likeness” of God (1:26), after God’s “own image, in the image of God” (1:27). As such, people are uniquely capable among all the creatures mentioned in Genesis 1:1–2:3 of fellowship and communion with God.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the worship for which God provides in Genesis 2:1–3 is given so that his image bearers may have fellowship with him. Strikingly,

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2. Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 778. As Beale notes, “the use of the Piel stem of the Hebrew word *qādaš* found in Gen. 2:3, which is used the most throughout the OT, almost always refers to setting apart humans or things for human cultic use. However, the only days said to be ‘set apart’ or ‘holy’ in the OT are Sabbaths and various festival days” (778).

3. L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 46.

then, “humanity . . . is not the culmination of creation, but rather humanity in Sabbath day communion with God.”<sup>4</sup>

Genesis 1:1–2:3, in fact, presents a twofold imitation of God on the part of his image bearers. First, God creates human beings to work (1:28–30). In part, people express the image of God as they labor in their various callings. The God who exercises dominion over the works of his hands calls humanity to “have dominion” over the earth and all the animals in it (1:26). The God who fills the world that he has made calls human beings to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28). Thus, humans will exercise dominion as they are faithful to marry and produce offspring (see 2:23–25). But it would be a mistake to say that Genesis 1:1–2:3 conceives no higher human imitation of God than labor. As human beings imitate God at work, so also are they to imitate God at rest. As God made the world and everything in it within the space of six days and rested on the seventh day, so are human beings to engage in six days of labor and one day of holy resting.

In sum, God intends for human beings to imitate his rest by taking the weekly Sabbath to rest from their labors and devote the whole day to his worship. The word translated “bless” (*barak*) in Genesis 2:3 “is normally restricted to living beings in the [Old Testament] and typically does not apply to something being blessed or sanctified only for God’s sake.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, God does not bless the seventh day for his own sake but for humanity’s sake. He is setting apart this one day in seven to be a regular day of rest in the weekly cycle of human existence. He is, in effect, commanding human beings to observe the Sabbath. Further, we have noted above that the word translated “made . . . holy” (*qadas*) frequently relates to the worship of God in the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> This clarifies that human beings are to observe

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4. Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 47.

5. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 778.

6. See footnote 2.

this seventh day as a day devoted to such worship. As it is dedicated to the worship of God, the Sabbath promises blessing to human beings who comply with this divine command.

Exodus 20:8–11 confirms our findings from Genesis 2:1–3. Here, God draws an explicit parallel between his creating the world in six days but resting the seventh and human beings working six days but resting the seventh. Exodus reads:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Thus the basis for the weekly Sabbath, according to Exodus, is God's resting on the seventh day of Genesis 2:1–3.<sup>7</sup> This relationship between God's resting and the weekly Sabbath is precisely what we have observed in Genesis itself, where this relationship implicitly grounds the Sabbath command as a perpetual ordinance for human beings.

In addition to this confirmation from Exodus, the New Testament provides indirect testimony to the Sabbath as an ordinance for humanity established at the creation. Early in Mark's Gospel, we read of a series of incidents in which Jesus comes under criticism by the religious authorities (Mark 2:1–3:6). One of these incidents takes place in "grainfields" through which Jesus and his disciples

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7. John Murray observes that "even in Ex. 20:11 it is difficult to ascertain whether the sabbath day referred to is expressly the seventh day in the realm of God's activity or the seventh day in man's weekly cycle." Even so, he continues, "the sabbath of God's rest is the reason given for the sabbath of man's rest, the recurring seventh day of the week. And this would carry with it the inevitable inference that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day of our week precisely because he sanctified the seventh day in the realm of his own creative activity." John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 31.

are traveling on the Sabbath (2:23). The Pharisees accuse Jesus of “doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath” (2:24). But he defends his disciples’ activity as proper to the Sabbath day and then proceeds to clarify the true nature of the day. As he does so, he tells the Pharisees, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (2:27). Here, Jesus makes at least three points that bear on our study of Genesis 2:1–3. The first is that the Sabbath is not unique to the Jew, nor is it exclusively intended for any other subset of the human race. Rather, it is something that pertains to human beings as human beings (“man”).<sup>8</sup> The second point that Jesus makes is that the Sabbath “was made” for man. The passive voice here points to divine agency—it is God who made the Sabbath for human beings, and thus the Sabbath is a divine ordinance. Third, God instituted the Sabbath as a help to humanity (“for man”). The Sabbath is intended to promote and to further the purposes for which God made human beings. Although Jesus does not explain those purposes or how the Sabbath advances them in this passage, his words echo what we have observed from Genesis 1:1–2:3—that the Sabbath is a means to an end, specifically, the end for which God created human beings, which is to commune with him and to find rest and refreshment in this divine communion.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, by setting aside the seventh day as a time of resting from his work of creating the world, God institutes the weekly Sabbath as an ongoing ordinance for human beings. The Sabbath commandment does not oblige Israel alone; it binds all human beings by virtue of them being made in the image of God. Thus, humanity did not receive the Sabbath commandment at some point far into the

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8. Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *This Is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in Its Jewish and Early Church Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1978), 11.

course of human history—God gave the Sabbath to humanity at the beginning of history, at the creation of the world.

So how are human beings to keep the Sabbath? And what does God intend to bring about through their Sabbath keeping? Humans are to imitate God by engaging in labor for six days of the week. But they are no less designed to imitate God by resting the seventh day. This means that God wants people, for twenty-four hours, to cease the work that occupies them six days of the week. Yet, that cessation of labor—and the refreshment that comes from that cessation—is a means to a greater end.<sup>9</sup> God wants human beings to worship him. The Sabbath is a day that God has “made . . . holy”—it is set apart to him and to his worship. And it is precisely because the day is directed toward God that it carries blessing for human beings. It is a day that God has “blessed.” In light of the testimony of Genesis 1:1–2:3, that blessing carries potential for fruitfulness and fullness. Thus, as God meets with people who truly worship him on that day, they experience all of these gifts—spiritual blessing, fruitfulness, and fullness.

It is this latter point that brings us to the heart of the Sabbath. God made human beings to worship him, to have fellowship with him, and to find blessing and happiness in that worship and fellowship. We were created to labor, to be sure, but the ultimate goal of human existence is to worship and glorify the God who made us. As we read farther into Genesis 2, with the help of the New Testament, we get additional clarity and insight into how God disclosed that goal at the dawn of history. And that additional light will, in turn, help us to understand the beginnings of the Sabbath even better.

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9. Geerhardus Vos rightly notes that the “rest” in view at Genesis 2:1–3 “stands for consummation of a work accomplished and the joy and satisfaction attendant upon this. Such was its prototype in God. Mankind must copy this.” Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1975), 140.

## The Sabbath: Eschatological and Covenantal

When systematic theologians use the term “eschatological,” they usually refer to the “four last things”—death, judgment, heaven, and hell. When biblical theologians use that term, they often have in mind a different but complementary definition. “Eschatology” brings into view the fact that human history has meaning and direction. Specifically, it has a *God-assigned* meaning and direction. History is going somewhere, namely, to the goal that God has set for it. This goal is one that he purposed in eternity and revealed at the very beginning of history—the blessed communion of image bearers with the God who made them (Gen. 1:1–2:3).

Genesis 2:4–25 helps us to understand that goal better. If Genesis 1 is the wide-angle portrait of God’s creation of the world in six days, then Genesis 2 is the zoom-lens close-up of God’s work on the sixth day. Here we learn that, after he had created Adam (2:7), God “planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed” (2:8). God’s purpose for setting Adam in the garden is that he would “work it and keep it” (2:15). He generously permits Adam to eat “of every tree of the garden” except for one, saying, “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (2:16–17).

Biblical theologians have termed this arrangement a “covenant.” A covenant is an arrangement between two parties in an “existing” and “elective relationship.”<sup>10</sup> In biblical covenants between God and human beings, this arrangement is initiated by God himself. In particular, God sovereignly administers promises with corresponding obligations. These covenants address life-and-death issues.<sup>11</sup>

10. The phrase “existing, elective relationship” is from Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with An Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 43.

11. I have drawn this definition in this paragraph from my book, *The Lord’s Supper as the Sign and Meal of the New Covenant*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway,

Even though the word “covenant” does not appear in Genesis 2–3, we have the essence of a covenant in the garden.<sup>12</sup> By the time we arrive at the end of Genesis 2, we have learned that God and Adam are in an existing and elective relationship. Not only does God relate to Adam as the creature he has made (1:26–27), but God also chooses Adam, as a representative person, to undertake a project that will profoundly affect his descendants. Further, the arrangement that God imposes upon Adam is one of life-and-death issues, and its tragic outcome is death in all its fullness—physical and eternal. This arrangement, moreover, is sovereignly administered. God imposes these terms upon Adam. Adam receives them but sadly rejects them when he disobeys God’s command, and death for him and his ordinary posterity is the consequence.<sup>13</sup>

The obligation of this covenant is clear enough—upon pain of death, Adam must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17). But where is the promise? What promise did God hold out to Adam? The promise is implicit in the command and the curse that accompanies it. When Adam disobeyed God, God justly passed the sentence of death upon him. But if Adam had obeyed God, he would have received life as the reward of his obedience. God implicitly promises life to Adam for obedience even as he explicitly threatens death for disobedience.

But this raises a further question. Adam was already alive when God made this promise to him. God made him righteous and holy (Eccles. 7:29), and he was already enjoying fellowship with God in the garden. How could God meaningfully offer life to someone who appeared to be enjoying life to the full? The answer to that question

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2019), 21–26. The phrase “life and death” is from O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 4, 10.

12. Not all biblical theologians understand God to have entered into a covenant with Adam in the garden of Eden, in part because of the absence of the word “covenant” in Genesis 2.

13. The material in this paragraph has been drawn, with some adaptation, from my book, *The Lord’s Supper*, 32.



arises from the sad fact of Adam's fall. When Adam sinned, he forfeited the life that he had in the garden. Once righteous, Adam was now guilty of sin and under the reign of sin. Once the friend of God, Adam now covered himself and hid himself from God (Gen. 3:7–8). All of this is to say that the life that Adam enjoyed in paradise was losable. Adam could—and did—forfeit the life of fellowship with God. So, we may say, what was promised to Adam in this first covenant (often called the covenant of works) was a secured or confirmed life.<sup>14</sup> We may also say, on the basis of what we will soon see from the testimony of the New Testament, that God was no less promising to Adam a heightened or intensified life. In other words, Adam would have enjoyed higher and greater degrees of the communion and fellowship with God than he was already enjoying in the garden.<sup>15</sup>

We are now in a position to draw together what we have seen both in Genesis 1 and 2. First, Genesis 1:1–2:3 shows us that human beings, God's image bearers, realize the goal of their existence in the worship and fellowship of their Creator. God's seventh-day resting from his labors of the six days of creation does not only *describe* the way in which God made the world. It also *prescribes* the way in which human beings are to order their lives—six days of labor and one day of holy resting. This day involves the setting down of the work of the six days in order to take up the work of the Sabbath day, namely, the worship of and communion with God.

Then, Genesis 2:4–25 reveals a covenant that God made with Adam that is designed to advance that goal of human existence. This covenant is marked by the generosity and kindness of God. God has set Adam in paradise and invites him to enjoy its bounty. He offers

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14. Historically, theologians have termed this covenant the “covenant of works.” The word “works” emphasizes the fact that the blessings offered to Adam in this covenant were suspended upon his obedience. In other words, Adam would secure the life of this covenant by his ongoing and perfect obedience to God.

15. The material from these last two sentences is drawn from my book *The Lord's Supper*, 32.

to Adam confirmed, heightened life in fellowship with him, provided that Adam refrain from eating the fruit of a single tree in the garden. This life, of course, is precisely the one that is envisioned in the seventh-day resting of Genesis 2:1–3. As Geerhardus Vos observes,

The so-called “Covenant of Works” was nothing but an embodiment of the Sabbatical principle. Had its probation been successful, then the sacramental Sabbath would have passed over into the reality it typified, and the entire subsequent course of the history of the race would have been radically different. What now is to be expected at the end of this world would have formed the beginning of the world course instead.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, God’s covenant with Adam in Genesis 2 was designed to advance humanity to its eschatological goal of Sabbath life with God.

Sadly, we may only think along these lines hypothetically. Adam fell into sin and, because Adam was our appointed representative (see Rom. 5:12–21), we sinned in him and fell with him in that first sin. From that point forward, death and not life would be the birthright of every human being ordinarily descended from Adam. Adam—and we in Adam—forfeited the Sabbath life that God had held out to him at the creation.

Thankfully, though, that is not the end of the human story. God sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to save sinners from death and to bring them to eschatological life. The saving work of Christ is the outworking of God’s eternal plan to glorify himself through the redemption of sinners. This plan, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:42–49, encompasses the purposes for humanity that we have

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16. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 140.

seen God announce at the creation. In fact, Paul shows us here how creation and redemption, far from sitting uncomfortably next to one another, are part of an integrated whole. In particular, Paul shows us how the Sabbath goal for humanity, which was announced at the creation, comes to fulfillment in the person and work of the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

### **Jesus Christ, the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:42–49)**

In 1 Corinthians 15:1–58, Paul wants us to see the necessity and the nature of the bodily resurrection from the dead, and in the course of his argument, he compares our present bodies with our resurrection bodies in order to illustrate their differences (1 Cor. 15:42–44a).<sup>17</sup> His concluding observation in this series of comparisons is that “it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (15:44). This distinction (natural/spiritual) prompts the line of argumentation that follows in 15:44–49. Paul reasons, “If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (15:44). He grounds this claim in the following verse, “Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (15:45). Here, Paul quotes Genesis 2:7, the account of the creation of Adam. This quotation, and Paul’s interpretation of and commentary on it, helps us to see clearly what Paul is comparing and contrasting. In sum, Paul sets before us two representative men: Adam (“the first man”) and Christ (“the second man”) (15:47). Their two bodies correspond to the two ages over which they preside and the “two different modes of existence pertaining to them.”<sup>18</sup> Paul here is not principally comparing and contrasting the Adamic order as characterized by sin, corrup-

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17. Some of the material that follows has been drawn from my work, “1-2 Corinthians,” in Michael J. Kruger, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 212–14.

18. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John R. DeWitt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 542.

tion, and death with the eschatological order inaugurated by Christ, the “last Adam.” Rather, he is comparing and contrasting the Adamic order prior to the fall in its “original state” with the eschatological order that follows.<sup>19</sup> We know this because it is Adam-as-created (Gen. 2:7) that Paul mentions here.

Overall, Adam and Christ are similar to one another in that each is a representative man presiding over a distinct order of existence. Adam was created a “living being” (*psychēn zōsan*); Christ at his resurrection “became a life-giving spirit” (*pneuma zōopoion*). Moreover, the words translated “being” and “spirit” in 1 Corinthians 15:45 are related to the words translated “natural” and “spiritual” in 15:44 and 15:46. However, Adam and Christ differ in that Adam became living (*zōsan*) at his creation but Christ became life-giving (*zōopoion*) at his resurrection.<sup>20</sup> Adam, though created “living,” fell into death through sin, plunging his ordinary posterity into death with him. Christ, on the other hand, conquered death in his death and resurrection (see 15:54–57); raised in the power of the Holy Spirit, possessed by and possessing the Spirit, he is now the “life-giving” last Adam. In sum, Adam forfeited life through his disobedience but Christ has secured life through his obedience, and this life he freely gives to his people by the Holy Spirit.

Paul is not simply saying that Christ follows Adam in time; nor is he saying that Christ has merely repaired what Adam damaged at the fall. He is claiming at 15:44 that one may infer the spiritual body from the natural body (“if there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body”). This is so because “Adam, by virtue of creation (not because of sin), anticipates and points to another, higher form of [bodily] existence.”<sup>21</sup> The covenant of works was designed to usher

19. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 542n152.

20. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 87–88.

21. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 82.

into human existence such fullness of eschatological life in communion with God. Adam failed to do this, choosing rather to sin against God. But the last Adam, by his obedience, death, and resurrection, has secured this eschatological life.<sup>22</sup> What creation was pointing toward, Jesus Christ has fulfilled and freely gives to his people through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Just like in the creation account, the word “Sabbath” is not found anywhere in 1 Corinthians 15:42–49. But the idea of the Sabbath pervades Paul’s teaching in this passage for the simple reason that “the Sabbath is an expression of the eschatological principle on which the life of humanity has been constructed.”<sup>23</sup> God instituted the weekly Sabbath at the creation in order to point to the goal of human existence, namely, eschatological life with God. That goal has been secured and realized in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. And believers in Christ have already begun to share in that life by the Spirit, even as they will fully experience that life when their bodies are raised gloriously from the dead. Overall, this goal of human existence remains the same as it was at the creation of Adam. What has changed is that, in the last Adam, God has removed the barriers of sin and death and brought multitudes of human beings definitively and irreversibly into that life. Adam did not bring us there. We did not bring ourselves there. It is Christ who brings us there.

### **Our Sabbath Rest (Heb. 4)**

One passage in the New Testament that speaks of the eschatological goal of humanity in terms of the Sabbath is Hebrews 3:7–4:13.

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22. Christ has won redemption and life for sinners in every age of redemptive history as the covenant head of his people. The work of Christ was and is administered to human beings through what has been called the covenant of grace. This covenant is introduced in Genesis 3:15 and finds its climax in the new covenant, which began at the resurrection of Christ. The various covenants that God makes with human beings after the fall are administrations of this one covenant of grace. See further my book, *The Lord’s Supper*, 33–41.

23. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 140.

This section explicitly interprets the Sabbath rest of God in Genesis 2:1–3. Throughout this passage, the writer compares the church with Israel of the wilderness generation. Beginning with a citation of Psalm 95:7–11, the writer characterizes that generation as one that “rebelled,” “sinned,” was “disobedient,” and was “unbelie[ving]” (Heb. 3:16, 17, 18, 19; cf. 4:6). He likewise warns the church against “an evil, unbelieving heart” and the “harden[ing]” of “the deceitfulness of sin” (3:12, 13). Notwithstanding the outward benefits that they received from God (3:9, 16), including “the good news” (4:6), the wilderness generation rebelled against God. Today, the church has “good news” offered to it just as it was offered to the wilderness generation (4:2) and must respond to God in faith, not by “the same sort of disobedience” (4:11) that made God “sw[ear] in [his] wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest’” (3:11, 18–19). In light of this divine oath, the writer warns the church, “While the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” (4:1).

But what is this rest that the wilderness generation failed to attain and believers now are called to “enter” (4:1, 11)? The writer answers that question in 4:3–4:

For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

“As I swore in my wrath,  
“They shall not enter my rest,”

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.”

In other words, the rest that lay before the wilderness generation, and that lies before the new covenant church, is the seventh-day rest

of the creation (Gen. 2:1–3). God prevented the disobedient Israelites from entering into that rest. This point is confirmed by the writer’s emphasis on the word “today” at the beginning of his citation of Psalm 95:7–11 (Heb. 4:7). This word, he argues, demonstrates that Joshua did not give Israel rest in the land, for if he had done so, “God would not have spoken of another day later on” (4:8)—that is to say, David would have not spoken in his own day (in Psalm 95) of a future rest if Joshua had already brought Israel into that rest.

Thus, this seventh-day creation rest is what the writer exhorts the church to enter (Heb. 4:11). He terms it “a Sabbath rest,” saying, “so then, there remains a Sabbath rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God” (4:9). It is this rest that is entirely future to the believer (just as it was entirely future to our spiritual ancestors, Israel).<sup>24</sup> And it is this rest that will mark the conclusion of our wilderness sojourn as the people of God.

The writer does not in this section give an explicit command to Sabbath observance.<sup>25</sup> What he does, rather, is to say that the seventh-day rest of Genesis 2:1–3 is the rest that believers have yet to enter and that believers are called to enter. We will enter this rest in the way of faith in the “good news” (Heb. 4:6), a faith that does not let go of Christ (3:14), a faith that abounds in good works (see 4:10). Thus, this Sabbath rest is eschatological in that it is the goal of God for human beings and this rest is Christological in that we may only reach this goal through faith in the work of another, our “great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God” (4:14).

These considerations speak to Sabbath observance even under the new covenant; God intends for his pattern of working six days

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24. For a reply to the claim that Hebrews 4:3a and 4:10 demonstrate that this rest is presently enjoyed by the believer, see Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God,” eds., Charles Dennison and Richard Gamble, *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 41–46.

25. As Gaffin observes in “A Sabbath Rest,” 41.

and resting the seventh to provide an abiding pattern for human beings (Gen. 2:1–3). The weekly Sabbath is a pointer and reminder of the purpose for which we were made as well as the goal to which God’s people are moving—consummate, eschatological life in Jesus Christ. And the author to the Hebrews is telling us that this creational pattern continues with the arrival of the new covenant (Heb. 8:8–13). To be sure, Christ has “appeared once for all at the end of the ages” (9:26) “in these last days” (1:2). But we have not yet arrived at our “better country, that is, a heavenly one” (11:16), “the city that is to come” (13:14). Thus, the weekly Sabbath points us to our heavenly destination and calls us to “hold our original confidence firm to the end” (3:14).

## Conclusions

Overall, the Sabbath is a microcosm of human history—creation, redemption, and consummation. It captures the purpose and goal of human existence (eschatological life with God) and acts as a perpetual reminder of that purpose and goal (Gen. 2:1–3). It comes to expression in the covenant of works (Gen. 2:15–17). After the fall of humanity into sin in Adam, God sends his beloved Son, the last Adam, to redeem his people. Christ does not merely repair what was destroyed or lost in Adam—he also advances his people to the goal for which they were created (1 Cor. 15:42–49). Thus, in Christ, we continue to observe the weekly Sabbath as a pointer toward our future rest and a help in our present pilgrimage (Heb. 4:9).

This is the rich biblical framework of the Sabbath, anchored in the creation itself. The Sabbath is a window into our own humanity and the kind of people that God calls us to be in Jesus Christ. In the chapters that follow we will trace the rich trajectory of the Sabbath across redemptive history, from the Law to the Prophets to Christ and his apostles.