

# SEPTENARY STRUCTURE OF SCRIPTURE

DIVINELY ESTABLISHED IN GENESIS 1:1-2:3

By Arlen L. Chitwood

God has structured His revelation to man after a particular fashion — a fashion which He set forth in basic, minute form at the very beginning in Gen. 1:1-2:3. A complete sequence of events surrounding four things is set forth in these verses: 1) *Creation (1:1)*, 2) *Ruin (1:2a)*, 3) *Restoration (1:2b-25)*, and 4) *Rest (2:1-3)*. And God, through beginning His Word after this fashion, established a framework for the whole of that which He would subsequently reveal.

To show this septenary structure in subsequent Scripture is quite simple. And to do so, three different, related areas of Scripture will be considered — *The Sabbath given to Israel, John's Gospel*, and *Peter's second epistle*.

## THE SIGN OF THE SABBATH

The Sabbath was given to Israel as *a sign* of “a perpetual covenant.” Relative to the Sabbath, God said:

“It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed” (Ex. 31:16, 17).

When giving the Sabbath to Israel (*cf.* Ex. 20:11) or referring to the Sabbath rest awaiting the people of God in Hebrews, in each instance, *for a very good reason*, God called attention to that which occurred in Genesis chapters one and two. There is a latter work of restoration,

followed by rest, which is based on a former work of restoration, followed by rest; and *the Sabbath was given to Israel to keep this thought ever before the Jewish people*.

That is, *the sign* of the Sabbath, which concerned a present work and future rest, was based on a past work and past rest. God worked six days to restore a ruined creation in the opening chapter of Genesis; and on the sixth day, along with the completion of His work of restoration, He brought man into existence to rule over the restored domain. Then God rested on the seventh day.

But a ruin ensued once again. Man, an entirely new creation in the universe, fell; and, as a result, the restored domain was brought under a curse, leaving God with two ruined creations: *man*, and *the material creation*.

With this in mind, how did God, in the Genesis account, set about to restore these two ruined creations? The answer is not only clearly revealed but it is also very simple. According to Scripture, God set about to restore the subsequent ruined creations *in exactly the same manner* as He had restored the former ruined creation in the opening chapter of Genesis. He, in accord with Genesis 1:2b-25, set about to restore the subsequent ruined creations over six days of time; and He, in accord with Gen. 2:2, 3, would then rest on the seventh day.

The latter restoration *had to occur* in complete keeping with the former restoration. A pattern had been set in the opening verses of Genesis which could not change. The latter restoration *had to occur* over a six-day period. And also in accord with this pattern there *had to be* a day of rest following the six days of work.

The Sabbath was *a sign*, and *a sign* in Scripture always points to something beyond itself. The Sabbath, as *a sign*, points to a seventh-day rest which God will enter into with His people (“the people of God” in Heb. 4:9) following six previous days of restorative work. The Sabbath was given to Israel to keep the thought ever before the nation that God, in accordance with the opening verses of Genesis, was going to work six days to effect the restoration of that presently in a ruined state (both man and the material creation) and then rest the seventh day.

Each day in the former restoration and rest was twenty-four hours in length, but each day in the latter restoration and rest is revealed to be one thousand years in length (II Peter 1:16-18; 3:3-8; *cf.* Matt. 16:28-17:5). Based on the pattern set forth in Genesis chapters one and two,

God is going to work six thousand years during the present restoration and then rest the seventh one-thousand-year period.

Scripture begins by laying the basis for this septenary arrangement of time in the opening verses (Gen. 1, 2), this is something seen throughout Scripture (Ex. 31:13-17; Num. 19:12; Hosea 5:15-6:2; Jonah 1:17; Matt. 17:1; Luke 24:21; John 1:29, 35, 43; 2:1; 5:9; 9:14; 11:6, 7; Heb. 4:1, 4, 9), and this is the way God concludes His revelation surrounding time immediately prior to the eternal ages (Rev. 20:4-6).

Scripture deals with 7,000 years of time — time extending *from* the restoration of the earth and the creation of man *to* the end of the Messianic Kingdom. Scripture has very little to say about that which occurred prior to these 7,000 years, and it also has very little to say about that which will occur following these 7,000 years. Scripture has been structured in a septenary fashion, patterned after and resting upon the opening two chapters of Genesis; and this is an evident fact which *must be recognized* if one would properly understand God's redemptive plans and purposes which He has revealed in His Word.

## THE SIGNS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

The Gospel of John is built around *eight signs*; and, as in the sign of the Sabbath, the signs in this gospel point to things beyond the signs themselves.

It is the Jews who require a sign (I Cor. 1:22); and these signs, taken from numerous signs which Jesus performed during His earthly ministry, are directed (as was His ministry in that day) to the Jewish people. Jesus performed these signs for *one central purpose*:

“...that ye [the Jewish people] might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30, 31; *cf.* John 2:11; 5:46, 47; 6:14, 21; 11:45).

Seven of the eight signs in John's gospel were performed in connection with particular days, all in perfect keeping with one another, all in perfect keeping with the sign of the Sabbath, and all in perfect keeping with the septenary structure of Scripture. And all of the signs refer, after different fashions, to the same thing. *All of them refer to Israel's coming salvation and restoration*.

*The first sign*, in 2:1-11, has to do with Jesus turning the water in six waterpots to wine (“six,” is *man’s number*; the “waterpots” were made from *the earth, as man*; they were filled with “water,” symbolizing *the Word* (Eph. 5:26); and, through Divine intervention, *a change ensued*). This sign, pointing to the future deliverance of Israel (seen through a marriage in Cana of Galilee, foreshadowing that time when God restores Israel as His wife [cf. Gen. 25:1]), occurred *on the seventh day* (1:29, 35, 43; 2:1), which is when Israel will be saved and restored yet future.

*The second sign*, in 4:40-54, has to do with the healing of a nobleman’s son. This sign occurred after Jesus had spent *two days* with the Samaritans, *on the third day* (vv. 40, 43). It will be *after two days* visiting “the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name,” *on the third day*, that Jesus will return to the Jewish people and the nation will be healed (cf. Isa. 1:1-2:5; Hosea 5:15-6:2; Acts 15:14-18).

*The third sign*, in 5:1-9, has to do with a man being healed *on the Sabbath*, after being physically sick for *thirty-eight years* (vv. 5, 9). The reference (in the type) would be to the healing of the nation through the second generation of Israelites being allowed to enter the land under Joshua *after thirty-eight years* (dating from the overthrow at Kadesh-Barnea), referring to that time (in the antitype) when the nation will be healed and be allowed to enter the land under Christ, an event which will occur *on the seventh day, the Sabbath*.

*The fourth sign*, in 6:1-14, has to do with bread being provided for the multitudes; and this sign occurred in connection with *the Passover* (v. 4). Jesus is that “bread of life” which will be provided for the nation yet future (v. 35); and *the Passover* is the festival in Lev. 23 which has to do with the future salvation of Israel, when the nation will receive the true “bread of life.” Israel has slain the Lamb (cf. Ex. 12:6; Acts 2:36; 3:14, 15), but the nation has yet to apply the blood (cf. Ex. 12:7, 13; Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:26).

*The fifth sign*, in 6:15-21, has to do with Christ’s departure, a storm, His return, the disciples’ attitude toward Him at this time, and the geographical location in

which they subsequently found themselves. It points to Christ’s departure from Israel two thousand years ago (v. 15), the coming Tribulation, with Israel scattered among the nations (vv. 16-18), Christ’s return (vv. 19, 20), the Jewish people receiving Him (v. 21a), and the nation’s restoration to the land (v. 21b). This is the only sign which does not refer to particular days, but the chronology must be understood in the light of the other seven signs.

*The sixth sign*, in 9:1-41, has to do with the healing of a blind man, *on the Sabbath day* (v. 14). This points to Israel’s future deliverance from her blindness (Rom. 11:25), which will occur *on the seventh day, the Sabbath*. Or, as in Luke 24:13-31, it will occur *after two days* (dating from the crucifixion), *on the third day* (v. 21).

*The seventh sign*, in 11:1-44, has to do with the resurrection of Lazarus. This resurrection occurred after Jesus had been out of the land of Judaea *two days, on the third day* (vv. 6, 7), after Lazarus had lain in the grave *four days* (v. 17). This points to Israel’s future resurrection (Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2), after *two days, on the third day*; and at this time Israel will have been in the place of death *four days*, dating four millenniums back to Abraham.

*The eighth sign*, in 20:1-29, has to do with the resurrection of Christ. This resurrection occurred *after two days, on the third day*. God’s firstborn Son had been raised *on the third day*, pointing to all of God’s firstborn Sons — Christ, Israel, and the Church (following the adoption) — being raised up to live in God’s sight *on that coming third, seventh day, the Messianic Era*.

## THE STRUCTURE OF II PETER

II Peter parallels Jude in the sense that both deal with the *Word of the Kingdom* and *apostasy* after a similar fashion.

Both epistles begin the same way. The first chapter of II Peter is taken up with that which is stated in one verse in Jude (v. 3). Then the matter of apostasy is dealt with throughout most of the remainder of both epistles. However, there are things dealt with in the first and third chapters of II Peter, showing the septenary structure of the epistle, which are not dealt with at all in Jude.

Peter exhorts his readers to make their “calling [pertaining to the kingdom] and election [‘selection’ for a position of power and authority in the kingdom] sure” (1:1-15); and Jude states the same thing in Jude 3 when he exhorts his readers to “earnestly contend for [‘strive with respect to’] the faith” (cf. I Tim. 6:12; II Tim. 4:7, 8). Then the thought of *apostasy* relative to “the faith” comes into view in both epistles.

However, Peter does something which Jude does not do. Before beginning his dissertation on apostasy he calls attention to that which occurred on the Mount in Matt. 17:1-8 (II Peter 1:16-18), which has to do with the Son of Man coming in His kingdom, *after six days, on the seventh day* (cf. Matt. 16:28-17:1).

Then toward the end of his epistle, Peter, unlike Jude, moves from thoughts surrounding apostasy to thoughts surrounding the existence and subsequent destruction of the heavens and the earth *at two different times* — 1) at a time following the creation of the heavens and the earth (“the heavens...of old” and “the world that then was [the world existing at the time of ‘the heavens...of old’]” [vv. 5, 6]), and 2) at a time following the restoration of the heavens and the earth (“the heavens and the earth which are now” [v. 7]).

The destruction of the former is seen in Gen. 1:2a (“But the earth had become without form, and void; and darkness [the sun had ceased to give its light] was upon the face of the deep [‘the raging waters’]”); and the destruction of the latter — a destruction by fire — is seen in succeeding verses in II Peter (3:10ff).

Peter then draws the entire matter to a climax by stating that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (3:8). Understood contextually, the verse is self-explanatory. “The heavens and the earth, which are now” (v. 7) *must cover the entire septenary period from chapter one* (vv. 16-18), else II Peter 3:8 would be meaningless. And each day in this period is revealed to be one thousand years in length — six millenniums of work, followed by one millennium of rest, in perfect accord with the opening verses of Genesis.

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