

Sabbath for the Church

Hebrews 4:1-10

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1988 (Rev. 01)

Introduction: There Remains a Rest for the Church, (Heb. 4:1-10)

There are three different words for "rest" in the New Testament:

1. "rest" (Greek "anapauo/anapausis") meaning "intermission, sleep, or the rest which brings positive refreshment to a weary person," (Matt. 11:29; 26:45; 1 Cor. 16:18; Rev. 4:8)(equivalent to Hebrew "nuah/manoah" meaning "resting place, state, or condition of rest," used 28xs, Ex. 23:12; Job 3:13, 17,26);

2. "rest" (Greek "katapausis") meaning "cessation or restraint from activity," (Heb. 3:11; 3:18; 4:1,3,3,4,5,8,10,10,11; Acts 7:49;14:18). (seems also equivalent to the Hebrew "nuah/manoah.");

3. "rest" (Greek "sabbatismos/sabbaton") meaning "cessation from labor," (Heb. 4:9; Matt. 12:2,5,8; 28:1; Luke 4:16; Mark 16:9; Col. 2:16). (equivalent to Hebrew "sabat" used numerous times, Ex. 20:8-11; 34:21; Deut. 5:12-15; Lev. 23:1-3).

(An Exposition of Hebrews, By Robert Gromacki, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, pp. 70,75) (The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revisited, By Harold Moulton, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, pp. 24,219, 361) (Dictionary of New Testament Theology, By Colin Brown, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, pp. 254-258, 405-411)

The writer of Hebrews introduces the topic of "rest" with seven important introductory facts.

1. The seriousness of understanding the "rest," (Heb. 4:1). The Christian should be marked by a godly "fear" (Greek "phobethomen") as he contemplates the consequences of his spiritual decisions in light of the issue of "rest."

2. The benefits of partaking in the "rest," (Heb. 4:1). The Christian has some kind of "promise" (Greek "epangelias" no definite article) left to him of "rest." "The absence of the article with [the word] promise is significant in that [the] reference is not just to that specific promise to Israel during the Exodus, but to something which partakes of the same character but may not be absolutely identical." (The Epistle to the Hebrews, Homer A. Kent, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972, p. 78)

3. The possibility of confusion over the "rest," (Heb. 4:1). There is a real danger of the Christian "thinking" (Greek "dokei") he has actually come short of "rest." "No one should be misled into thinking that he has come short of God's rest by following Christ alone apart from the Old Testament ritual." (The Epistle to the Hebrews, Homer A. Kent, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972, p. 79)

4. The contrast concerning the "rest," (Heb. 4:2). The Christian has the "good news" (Greek "euaggelismenoi") of "rest" living under the new covenant, just as Israel had the good news of "rest" living under the old covenant. In considering "rest" there must be a distinction between people (Israel vs. the church) and between programs (old covenant vs. new covenant) or the Christian will not enter into God's "rest." "The good news was not absolutely the same for the

promise of physical rest in Canaan did not apply to Christians. Yet in its essential character as a participation in God's rest for His people... the good news was proclaimed to both groups." (The Epistle to the Hebrews, Homer A. Kent, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972, p. 79)

5. The missing ingredient in the "rest," (Heb. 4:2). The "rest" will only profit the Christian if the "word" (Greek "logos") is "mixed" (Greek "sunkekeramenos") with "faith," (Greek "pistei").

6. The ones who are truly entering the "rest," (Heb. 4:3) Christians are the ones who have truly believed and as a consequence are presently "entering" (Greek "eiserchometha") the rest God has for them. "The truth insisted upon by the author is that Israel's failure to believe, and the subsequent oath of God which presented their participation in His rest, did not annul the fact that God's plan for believers to enter this rest would still be carried out." (The Epistle to the Hebrews, Homer A. Kent, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972, p. 80)

7. The change in the type of "rest" for the church, (Heb. 4:4,7,9). "Sabbath" is not a "sacred" day of observance for the church because the writer of Hebrews uses the word "rest" (Greek "katapausis") to describe the "rest" (Hebrew "sabat") of God (Gen. 2:2-4) and the Mosaic Covenant "rest" (Hebrew "sabat") of Israel, (Ex. 20:8-11; 31:12-17). This seems to remove the concepts of "ritual" and "religious ceremony" from this "rest" for the church.

The writer of Hebrews reviews the concept of "rest" in God's Word to insure the Christian that he has "rest" and that the Christian is now entering this "rest."

1. THE CREATION "REST" (Heb. 4:4)

The facts of Genesis 2:2-3 take place approximately 3,000 years earlier than when the account of Genesis was written. Moses wrote Genesis 2:2-3 (i.e. the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), in approximately 1445BC shortly after the old covenant was given to Israel.

Adam and his descendants probably did not know about the facts in Genesis 2:2-3, which would explain why there is no recorded account in God's Word of an observance of a "seventh-day sabbath" over the 3,000 years prior to the giving of the old covenant to Israel in Exodus 20. The events that take place prior to Exodus 20 such as Genesis 2:2-3 with God's rest and Genesis 12 with Abraham were written to explain to Israel how special they were to God and what God had in store for them.

A review of the facts of the creation sabbath reveal that "God" was the one who rested, not mankind, (Gen. 2:2). God "rested" or "ended" His work of "creating something out of nothing" which he did in the previous six literal 24 hour days, (Gen. 2:2). Each of the six days has a "beginning" and an "ending," except for the "seventh day." The "seventh day" has no termination, thus God's "rest" is viewed as still occurring. It is a perpetual "rest" for God. God did not resume creating things out of nothing on the "eighth day." The "blessing" and "sanctification" (Gen. 2:2-3) are written from the writer's perspective in explaining what this day of rest would mean in God's plan and program for Israel. God's rest was one of His own satisfaction and enjoyment in what He accomplished in the six days of creation.

2. THE MOSAIC COVENANT "REST" (Heb. 4:5-8) God gave to Israel the observance of the "seventh day rest" or "sabbath" as a sign of the old covenant, (Ex. 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:2; Lev. 23:1-3; Num.15:36-36; Deut. 5:12-15). The "rest" God intended for Israel was much broader than the "sabbath" listed in the ten commandments. The land of Canaan was also to be a place of "rest" for Israel as opposed to life under the Egyptians in the land of Egypt, (Ex. 1:9-14; 3:7-10; 6:1-8). Joshua was to take Israel into the land, (Heb. 4:8; Deut. 34:4-12; Joshua 1:1-24:33).

Israel did not enter into the "rest" God had for them, (Heb. 4:6-8). "The proof is the fact that long after the days of Joshua God would not have spoken in Psalm 95 about a need today to enter into rest if it has been previously accomplished. Grammatically, it is a condition contrary to fact." (The Epistle to the Hebrews, Homer A. Kent, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972, p. 84)

3. THE REDEMPTION "REST" (Heb. 4:9-10) There remains a "rest" (Greek "sabbatismos") for Christians, (Heb. 4:9). The "rest" of Israel of a "seventh day sabbath" and the "dwelling in the land of Canaan" are not the "rest" that remains to be entered by the Christian. "Although Israel entered Canaan under Joshua (the Old Testament equivalent for the name of Jesus), they did not experience the total rest of God. If they had, then God would not 'afterward have spoken of another day.'" (Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews, Robert G. Gromacki, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, p.74)

The word "ceased" (Greek "katepausen") is the same word as "rest" (Greek "katapausin"). The one who has entered "rest" has ceased from something, (Heb. 4:10). "The usage of the present tense (the word "remaineth") shows that the rest does not refer to heaven or to an experience after death; rather it points out what a child of God can have right now. The rest also should not be equated with the gaining of initial salvation, because the promise is to those who are already the people of God. The abundant life is also acquired by faith, by resting in the divine provision, not by sight or by self-righteous works." (Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews, Robert G. Gromacki, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, p.74)

Conclusion: The writer of Hebrews gives the Christian reader a three fold challenge.

A. The challenge to diligently remain in the "rest." The Christian must give "diligence" (Greek "spoudasomen" meaning "strive earnestly or give haste") to the goal of entering the "rest" that is available to the Christian, (Heb. 4:11). "The word stresses urgency, attentiveness and quickness in decision making." (Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews, Robert G. Gromacki, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, p.76)

B. The challenge not to depart from the "rest." The Christian is warned that some may fall after the same example of "disbelief" (Greek "apeitheias") as did Israel, (Heb. 4:11). "The author did not want to have one single defector. Falling is the opposite of standing or advancing. To fall as Israel fell was to lose out on the gracious provisions of God for this life through lack of faith." (Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews, Robert G. Gromacki, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, p.76)

C. The challenge for not fully entering into the "rest." Those of Israel that did not keep the "rest" that God gave unto them were to be put to death or face the threat of the sword, (Ex.

31:12-17; 14:43). Christians that do not keep the "rest" face the sword of the Word of God, (Heb. 4:12-13).

Problems over the "sabbath" day came from three sources:

1. Early in the New Testament church, Christians wanted to go back under the Old Covenant and practice the Mosaic Law. God's Word discouraged the Christian from going back under the Mosaic Law, (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:4,7,13; Gal. 2:21; 3:10-12; 5:4; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:16). (The Christian Sunday, Roger T. Beckwith, Wilfrid Scott, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978, pp. 11-12)

2. The making of Sunday as a form of Christian "sabbath" worship by the Puritans from England. However, the Puritan often confused the Old Covenant with the New Covenant in their theology. "A new 'sabbatarianism', however, rapidly developed in the Protestant tradition, especially in English Puritanism, and became especially characteristic of English, Scottish and American Protestantism. The 'sabbath' was a common term for Sunday in sixteenth century England, becoming a puritan shibboleth..." (From Sabbath To Lord's Day, D. A. Carlson, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, pp. 312, 322)

3. The making of the "seventh-day" as a form of Christian "sabbath" worship found its new life after the Protestant Reformation in the "seventh-dayers" who stressed the "moral code" as found in the ten commandments, especially the practice of the fourth commandment. The most famous "seventh-day sabbath" keeper was an Anabaptist names Oswald Glait (D. 1546). "John Traske and Thomas Brabourne, attached themselves to the Seventh-day Baptist churches, of which there were nine or ten in England in 1668, and which maintained the seventh-day tradition virtually alone until the rise of Seventh-day Adventism (1840's, became a denomination in 1860). The first Seventh-day Baptist Church in America was founded at Newport, Rhode Island in 1671." (From Sabbath To Lord's Day, D. A. Carlson, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, pp. 333-334)

The church is not commanded to worship on the "seventh-day sabbath" but rather make everyday sacred unto the Lord, (Rom. 14:5; Col 2:11-16).