

Entering into God's Rest

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- "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." -Hebrews 4:9-11

I would like to address a passage in Scripture that people often distort, claiming God's seventh day Sabbath is not binding or mentioned in the New Testament. This article has two underlying assumptions.

First, I assume you have been introduced to the idea that God continues to move forward with His plans regardless of human conduct, and second, I assume that you are aware of the inseparable relationships that exist between grace and law, faith, and obedience.

For discussions on these matters, you can download the following links from our web site: Appendix D in my book, *Jesus' Final Victory* <https://www.wake-up.org/Commentary/AppendixD.pdf> and Chapters 4 and 5 in my book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega* <https://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Chapter4.htm> and <https://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Chapter5.htm>

Anticipation Begins with a Promise

To appreciate the significance of Hebrews 4:9-11, we need to start with a promise that God made to Abraham about 400 years after Noah's flood. **"At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.'**" (Genesis 12:6-7)

Later on: **"The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, 'Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the Earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.'**" (Genesis 13:14-16)

Finally, the Lord said to Abraham: **"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as *an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you*; and I will be their God."** (Genesis 17:7-8, italics mine)

Many people read these verses and think that Canaan is nothing more than "promised" real estate, but there is far more to God's promise than several million acres. God promised Abraham that he and his descendants would inherit the kingdom of God, whose headquarters

would be in Canaan, as an everlasting (eternal) possession. We see evidence of this understanding in Abraham's anticipation:

"By faith he[Abraham] made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:9-10, insertion mine)

From the time of Abraham to Christ's ascension, God has adjusted His plans for mankind. This may come as a surprise, but it was God's original plan to establish His kingdom in Canaan shortly after Abraham's descendants took possession of the land.

Jesus would have come to Earth as a baby and after paying the penalty for sin, He would have established the kingdom of God in the land of Canaan. Thus, Israel would have become a nation of priests (Exodus 19:6), serving God on behalf of all mankind. Jesus would have eventually resurrected Abraham and the saints who had died previously.

They, along with those who had not died, would have lived forever in Canaan, the headquarters of the kingdom of God! Abraham understood God's promise and this is why he was looking forward **to a day** when Canaan would have **a city whose architect and builder was God.**

Two Profound Points

When we understand the elements of God's promise to Abraham, two profound points surface. First, if God's kingdom had been established on Earth as God originally planned, *Moses* would have led Israel into **God's rest**. The kingdom of God is called "God's rest" in Scripture (Psalm 95:6-11) for very good reasons.

After the children of Israel were delivered from slavery, they began to understand God's rest. (Exodus 33:14) The concept behind "God's rest" is the fact that God worked for six days and then He "rested" from His work on the seventh day. (Genesis 2:1-3) Because there was no curse on Earth, Adam and Eve enjoyed the daily bliss of "God's rest."

Since God met their physical needs, they did not need to work to survive. Then, when sin entered the world, Adam & Eve's work began in earnest. The Lord cursed the ground and ever since, mankind has had to work hard to survive. (Genesis 3:17-19) The Edenic promise of redemption God gave to Adam and Eve included a full restoration to "God's rest" and Paul urged the Jews (Hebrews 4:11) to make every effort to enter God's rest (the kingdom of God) which had not yet appeared.

Notice what Paul says about Israel's forefathers:

"Who were they who heard[God's voice] and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would

never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." (Hebrews 3:16-19, insertion mine)

The second point is even more profound (and often ignored). Paul says that Joshua ***did not*** lead Israel into God's rest even though Joshua led Israel into Canaan! **"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would *not* have spoken later about another day."** (Hebrews 4:8, italics mine)

After Moses and Joshua died, Israel continued with numerous cycles of apostasy followed by repentance. Finally, after living in Canaan for about 400 years, Israel rejected Christ as their king. (1 Samuel 8:7) When Israel did this, God abandoned the plan He gave to Abraham. God started over with another plan after David became king.

"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. *Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, '*They shall never enter my rest.*' " (Psalm 95:6-11, emphases mine)

Note: Massah and Meribah are two names that identify a large rock near Horeb, where Israel became angry with God and doubted that He was with them. (See Exodus 17:5-7)

Near the time of his death (~970 B.C.), David spoke to Solomon saying, " **'I am about to go the way of all the Earth,'** he said. **'So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: "If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man [a descendant] on the throne of Israel." ' "** (1 Kings 2:2-4, insertion mine)

Like Abraham, David anticipated the kingdom of God. David knew that Israel had not yet entered into God's rest. This is why the Holy Spirit, speaking through David, said to Israel, **"Today**, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. . . . as our forefathers did." David understood that God's rest was coming and he anticipated a day when his own descendant, the Messiah, would come to Earth and sit on his throne.

Moving forward about 250 years, we find that Jesus could also have been born around 730 B.C. if Israel had been willing to cooperate with God. God was willing to establish His rest during the days of Isaiah and King Ahaz, but the people did not have faith in God and were not spiritually prepared for His kingdom so they were not able to enter God's rest. Remember Isaiah's words to King Ahaz.

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give

birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right" . . . "Before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria". . . "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." (Isaiah 7:14-15; 8:4; 9:6-7)

When God's plan failed again, He implemented the terms which were clearly stated in His covenant. (Leviticus 26) Because Israel disobeyed God, He destroyed Israel and sent the remnant into captivity. During the Babylonian captivity, God revealed another plan to Daniel.

In this plan, God granted Israel 70 weeks to accomplish His objectives and He set an unconditional date for the Messiah to arrive. If Israel would have repented and prepared for the kingdom of God, God's rest would have been established on Earth when Jesus came to Earth in 4 B.C. Notice what Jesus said at the beginning of His ministry: **"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'"** (Mark 1:14,15)

Unfortunately, Israel would not listen to Jesus and wanted no part of His kingdom. **"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."** (John 1:10-11)

When it became clear that Israel had no interest in entering into God's rest, God abandoned biological Israel, allowing His temple and the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed.

Shortly before His death, Jesus lamented, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate."** (Matthew 23:37-38)

The Father put His final plan in motion while Jesus was still on Earth. Jesus implemented a new covenant (Luke 22:20) which contains a new set of promises and prophecies. Under this plan, there is a new Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1), a new Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12), and a new Israel (Galatians 3:29).

God's first three plans failed because entering into "God's rest" comes with a very difficult condition: **"Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' 'No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.' . . . 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven.'"** (John 3:3,5; Matthew 7:21)

The reason Jesus returned to Heaven is because Israel would not cooperate with God. God's rest could not be established in Canaan, even with Messiah on the ground in Jerusalem! Three times God patiently tried to establish His rest on Earth and each time, Israel failed. Earth's inhabitants have yet to experience God's rest! For the fourth time, God started over with His final plan, the plan that is now in place, and this is how Paul's comments (written around A.D. 64) in Hebrews 3 and 4 become clear. Please consider three elements that support this conclusion.

1. Paul said the promise of entering God's rest still stands.

"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel [the good news concerning the kingdom of God] **preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.**" (Hebrews 4:1-2, insertion mine)

2. Paul said those who have faith in Christ will also rest from their works on the seventh day just as God rested from His work.

"There remains, then, a[weekly] **Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.**" (Hebrews 4:9-10, insertion mine)

"Now we who have believed[in Christ and received His gospel] **enter that rest [each week], just as God has said, 'So I declared on oath in my anger, "They [the rebellious and unbelieving] shall never enter my rest." ' And yet his work has been finished [and God has been resting] since the creation of the world. For somewhere he [Moses] has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.'**" (Hebrews 4:3-4, insertions mine)

Remember, Paul wrote the book of Hebrews about A.D. 64. His comparison between resting on God's weekly seventh day Sabbath and entering God's eternal rest is clear. God's holy Sabbath was *not* nailed to the cross; in fact, God's Sabbath is a weekly rest that points to the fulfillment of the everlasting rest promised to Abraham. Notice the logic that Paul used in his letter to the Jews (who observed the seventh day Sabbath, but poorly understood the prophetic importance of the Sabbath rest). Putting all the pieces together, here is what I believe Paul could have written:

In the beginning, our forefathers were slaves of Pharaoh. God mercifully set us free and gave us His seventh day Sabbath rest. To help us understand His rest, God also made the land produce enough food to last three years every sixth year so that we could enjoy His rest every seventh year! God also required us to set our slaves free so that they might taste the joy of His rest as well!

Thus, throughout our history, God's Sabbath rest has been a recurring example of His rest which Adam and Eve forfeited by sinning. Since God's promise to Abraham remains intact, and

since God's rest has not been established, we must make every effort to align our hearts and thoughts with God's truth and live by faith, or like our forefathers, we will not be permitted to enter His rest.

3. Paul used the experiences of Moses, Joshua, and David to make the point that the current generation should be very careful or it will repeat the fatal mistake made by its forefathers.

Summary

God's eternal rest is future and we should be asking God to purify our hearts each day so that we might enter His rest. The promise is intact, Abraham and his descendants will possess God's rest forever. Paul says that **all** Israel will be saved. (Romans 11:26) Those who have been born again, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb will be saved! What about God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants as an **everlasting** possession? Unfortunately, God abandoned that endeavor 2,000 years ago because of rebellion.

However, to keep His promise to Abraham, God has exponentially increased the value of His promise. He will purify the whole Earth with fire. Then, He will create a new Heaven and a new Earth. New Jerusalem will be a glorious city whose architect and builder is God and it will descend from Heaven. When Abraham and his descendants (e.g., people having the faith of Abraham) see the fulfillment of God's final plan, they will be satisfied – eternally satisfied. Jesus said to us with all His love: "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**" (Matthew 11:28)

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