

The Rest That Remains

Introduction. Australian aborigines pictured heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought heaven was a distant island in the faraway East. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed they went to the sun or the moon after death. Native Americans believed that in the afterlife their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo. Although these depictions of the afterlife differ, the unifying testimony of the human heart throughout history is belief in life after death. Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal — that this world is not all there is.

Appealing to the example of Israel's fall in the wilderness is a natural one, for despite Moses' leadership, most died in the wilderness and did not enter the promised land for lack of faith. Now under Christ's leadership, we face a similar danger of falling short of our "promise" through a lack of faith (Hebrews 3:14-15; 4:1).

Hebrews 4 continues the warning with a focus on the promised "rest" awaiting the faithful Christian. This promised "rest" is actually one of a few "rests" found in the Bible. It is a "rest" that Moses and Joshua did not provide, which is another reason why the Jewish Christian should not forsake Jesus and return to Judaism. It is a "rest" that still remains for the people of God today.

To spur our hearts to true dedication to God, we will address what is the rest that remains and what elements are essential to enter that rest.

I. What Is The Rest That Remains?

- A. It is not the Canaan rest.
 - 1. This "rest" is mentioned in Deuteronomy (3:20; 12:9-10) and Joshua (1:13-15), and it was given as God promised (Joshua 21:43-45).
 - 2. But in chapter 4 "His rest" (or "My rest," "God's rest") is clearly delineated from what Joshua provided (Hebrews 4:8).
 - a) Long after Joshua died, the passage in Psalm 95:7-8 was written.
 - b) The word "Today" indicates that the Spirit was warning the Israelites who had long before received the "Canaan" rest.
- B. It is not the Sabbath rest.
 - 1. It is natural to think of the Sabbath when one hears or reads the word "rest."
 - a) When first introduced to the nation of Israel, it was spoken of as "the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord" (Exodus 16:23).
 - b) This was the seventh day rest, patterned after God's own rest following the creation (Genesis 2:2).
 - c) It was encoded into the Law given on tablets of stone (cp. Exodus 20:8-11).
 - 2. But the Sabbath as a day of rest was given only to the nation of Israel
 - a) It was not given to the nation's fathers — ancestors such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 5:2-22; Nehemiah 9:13-14).
 - b) It was given to Israel as a weekly remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

- c) The only Gentiles ever commanded to keep the Sabbath were those living among the Israelites in Canaan.
- 3. The Sabbath day, like the rest of the Old Law, has been done away.
 - a) It was nailed to the cross (cp. Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 2:14).
 - b) Those in Christ have died to the Old Law, having been delivered from it that they may now serve Christ (Romans 7:4, 6)
 - c) “The ministry of death” (the Old Testament) has been replaced by “the ministry of the Spirit” (the New Testament) according to 2 Corinthians 3:5-8, 11.
- 4. Finally, the argument regarding Joshua can also be made regarding Moses.
 - a) Long after Moses provided the “Sabbath” rest, Psalm 95:7-8 was written.
 - b) This indicated that there was still another “rest” to come.
- C. It is God’s rest.
 - 1. Through this section of scripture there are repeated references to:
 - a) “My rest” (Hebrews 3:11; 4:3, 5; cp. Psalm 95:7-11).
 - b) “His rest” (Hebrews 3:18; 4:1).
 - (1) Which those who fell in the wilderness did not enter (Hebrews 3:18).
 - (2) Which Christians today have a promise of entering (Hebrews 4:1).
 - 2. It is a rest that God entered after the completion of His creation (Hebrews 4:4, 10), but one that Joshua (and Moses) did not provide.
 - 3. God’s rest is one in which:
 - a) We must be diligent not to come short of it (Hebrews 4:1, 11).
 - b) One who has “entered into His rest” has “ceased from his works” (Hebrews 4:10).
 - c) “God’s rest” is the “heavenly rest” of which we read in Revelation 14:13. It is the beautiful city of God, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10-27).

II. What Are The Essential Elements To Enter God’s Rest?

- A. The word of God.
 - 1. Both the Israelites and we today have had “the gospel” preached unto us (Hebrews 4:2).
 - a) The “gospel” (i.e., good news) proclaimed to the Israelites pertained to the promises of Canaan.
 - b) The “gospel” proclaimed to us contains the blessings we have in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross.
 - 2. The word of God is essential for at least two reasons:
 - a) Without it we would not even know about our promised rest.
 - b) Without it we would not know how to receive our promised rest.
 - 3. Thus the word of God (i.e., the gospel) is truly God’s power to save (cp. Romans 1:16-17).
 - a) It is also, according to Hebrews 4:12-13, a living and active entity that is constantly working His will, never returning to Him empty (Isaiah 55:11).
 - b) It furthermore penetrates into the inner parts of human nature. No segment of the human personality can escape its keen edge. Men are laid bare before God, and they must render account — naked and exposed, stripped of every possible concealment (John 12:48).

B. Faith.

1. The word of God did not profit many in Israel because they did not receive it with faith (Hebrews 4:2).
2. As powerful as we have just seen the word of God to be, its power in our lives is hindered unless we accept it with faith.
 - a) Of course, the word is designed to create and nurture faith to a point (John 20:30-31; Romans 10:17).
 - b) But unless our hearts are good and noble, the word will not find the proper soil needed to produce its intended fruit (cp. Luke 8:15).
3. The point of faith is that it spurs us on to good works (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:7, 14; Hebrews 10:24), for faith without works is dead (James 2:26).

C. Fear and diligence.

1. The Hebrew writer stressed both of these essential elements.
 - a) "Let us fear" (Hebrews 4:1).
 - b) "Let us therefore be diligent" (Hebrews 4:11).
2. Fear (awesome reverence) has an important place in the life of the Christian.
 - a) Jesus taught us who to fear (Matthew 10:28).
 - b) Paul taught that "fear and trembling" should accompany our efforts to serve God (Philippians 2:12).
3. Diligence (strenuous effort) likewise is important.
 - a) Be diligent to grow in Christ-like character (2 Peter 1:5-7).
 - b) Be diligent to put away wickedness and the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-7).
 - c) Be diligent to make your "calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).
 - d) The need for such fear and diligence is understandable because the possibility of falling short is very real.

Conclusion. The rest that remains is indeed a wonderful blessing. It is God's rest, and therefore is a heavenly rest. It is a rest in which one has "ceased from his work as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:10). It is the rest of which John heard a voice from heaven speak in Revelation 14:13.

But we have seen how disobedience led many Israelites to fall short of their Canaan rest. Although they collectively as the nation of Israel were God's "elect," predestined to receive the promises made to Abraham (cp. Genesis 12:1-3), they failed individually to make their "calling and election sure." They had the "gospel" spoken to them, but they did not receive it with faith. And so they did not have the fear and diligence necessary to persevere.

So what about us? If we are "in Christ," we are blessed to be God's "elect" in a collective sense as Christ's body. We are predestined as such to receive the wonderful blessings of salvation in Christ, including the "heavenly rest" that awaits us. Yet individually we must still make our "calling and election sure." Are we receiving the word mixed with faith? Do we have the proper sense of fear? Are we diligent in our efforts to remain faithful and steadfast? Only then can we have the assurance of entering into the rest that remains. May the words of Hebrews 4:11 sink into our hearts.

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