

Hebrews 4:1-11 - Understanding the Sabbath • The Rest of God

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We're in Hebrews; Hebrews 4. Open your Bible there please, if you would. Hebrews 4. We're going to be reading the first 11 verses of this chapter, so I'll let you get there and then follow along as I read. It says:

“¹Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, as he said,

‘As I swore in my wrath,

‘They shall not enter my rest,’

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works”, ⁵And again in this passage he said,

‘They shall not enter my rest.’

⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

‘Today, if you hear his voice,

do not harden your hearts.’

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.” (ESV)

Stop there, please, if you would, and let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for giving us time to get into Your word. We know, Lord God, that these can be some challenging verses here in this first part of chapter 4 of Hebrews. But Lord, we're trusting You to speak to our hearts and bring illumination and understanding. You've given us spiritual ears to hear. We ask You, Father God, to just really speak to us and allow this word to give us understanding, also to nourish our heart. And then Father, lead us in application to walk it out. We thank You for all that You have done. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

I think it's rather interesting that on the weekend that we come to what I consider to be a fairly pivotal passage here pertaining to the Sabbath and resting in the Lord that I should get this mailer; did anybody else get this by any chance? This is a mass mailer that went out. I picked it up on Saturday. I'm not sure if it actually came on Saturday. We don't necessarily check our mail every day, but yeah, this showed up in my mailbox.

It's called, "*Truth Matters, Signs of the Times.*" And then it's titled below, "*The Great Controversy Between Good and Evil is Nearly Over.*" And if that doesn't draw you into the pages, nothing will. But actually, it's a very well-done little magazine, all color and great titles. "*War in Heaven,*" I mean in the midst of a pandemic, I imagine somebody's probably interested in that. "*God's Rescue Plan,*" "*Judging the World,*" goes on, "*The Final Conflict,*" and then finally, "*The End of the Drama.*"

And again, very well laid out colorful magazine. If you don't know who puts this out, if you don't recognize the publishing company or any of the websites that are listed in this magazine, you wouldn't know because they don't tell you that this is put out by the Seventh Day Adventists, and there's a little postcard that usually gets tucked inside this.

And of course, they're wanting you to return that and ask them to send you more information. And they will believe me. And ultimately, I mean, in the midst of all the other things that they want to convey to you, they want you to understand the importance of the Sabbath; in keeping the Sabbath as the Jews kept the Sabbath, and they want you to know how important that is to your eternal salvation.

There are some Seventh Adventists who actually believe that during the great tribulation, the mark of the beast will be Sunday worship in opposition to Sabbath-keeping or worshiping on the Sabbath. So, we're going to talk today

because the writer of Hebrews addresses this issue of the rest of God and this Sabbath rest for the people of God.

We're going to talk about this, and I trust that we're going to share some important insights related to this. But I want to begin with a question that kind of connects us back to the previous chapter, and I hope that you were here for Hebrews 3. If not, I hope you had a chance to listen to it online. But the question I want to ask is, what kept the Nation of Israel out of the promised land when they came to the border of that land for the very first time under Moses?

Well, we learned the answer to that question last week. What kept them out of the promised land was unbelief. In fact, we spent pretty much the entirety of the last study talking about unbelief, what it is and so forth.

But in this chapter, you'll notice as we read through these first 11 verses, the emphasis kind of changes a little bit to something that is briefly mentioned in chapter 3, and that is the rest of God. And if you take notes and you want to have a title for this, we'll put it up on the screen here for you because this is it.

"The Rest of God", that's the theme of what this first 11 verses of the chapter is all about, resting in God. So in order to understand what the author of this letter is saying, and so that we might know and understand what he's saying to us about that rest, we need to answer the question, what is the rest of God? What does it mean to rest in God?

Well, as we saw last week, the whole conversation about resting in God started with the author quoting one of the psalms, in fact, Psalm 95. And we didn't look at that psalm or that section of that psalm last week. We just saw how he quoted it in the earlier chapter, but I wanted to put it up on the screen for you so we could see it together.

I've actually quoted it out of the NIV because I kind of like the wording of this particular version, but it essentially goes like this:

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Psalm 95:7-11 (NIV)

"Today, if only you would hear his voice, 'Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah'" (And that's where the Israelites ran out of water and grumbled against the Lord and against Moses. He says, those places) *in the wilderness where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did.* (You can see this is the Lord talking here) *For 40*

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.'"

So when God says in that passage that generation of Israelites would not enter His rest, you'll remember what He was referring to. It was talking about entering the promised land, going in and taking the land. And so, he's painting a picture for you and I; a picture of what it means to rest in God.

And the first picture he gives is that quotation from Psalm 95, where the nation of Israel comes to the border of the promised land, but through their unbelief, they are unable to enter in. They can't go in. So, what happens to that generation of people? They're sent out back out into the wilderness to wander for an additional 38 years until that entire generation drops dead in the wilderness so that their children can enter in. Right?

So, but why does God refer to the Jews entering the promised land as entering His rest? Well, you think about it, it's called the promised land, the land of promise; to enter into that land is to enter into the promises of God.

God, didn't just say this is your land, that wasn't the only promise He gave them. He gave them all kinds of promises. He said once you get there, I'll be with you. I'll see you through. Anybody who comes against you, they won't be able to stand. And when you're there, all these blessings will be yours.

Your crops will be fruitful, your children will be strong and healthy. He went on and on and on, all these promises. So God says, as you enter into this land of promise, you step into the promises of God. You don't need to worry. Somebody comes against you, they won't be able to maintain their threat.

So what that means is once you enter into the land of promise, you're good to go. You can just trust God all along the way. He'll take care of you. Okay? That's called entering into His rest. I don't have to work anymore. I can just let God's promises lead me through this whole thing, you know. I don't have to use my own strength, my own ability.

I'm entering into the promises of God. So, what does that mean for you and I today? Because remember, everything that God did in the Old Testament is done as an example to teach us things for our relationship with Jesus Christ in the New Testament. How do we know that? Check out 1 Corinthians 10:11. He says:

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1 Corinthians 10:11 (ESV)

“Now these things happened, (and Paul's talking about the things that happened in the Old Testament) to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come.”

Alright, so the promised land and entering into the promised land, to enter into God's rest, is a picture for you and I in the New Testament, a picture of what? It's a picture of entering into our relationship with Jesus Christ, which is a relationship based upon promises, right? So we enter into that. And we know that it this rest of God that God talks about, we know this is also for today because of a verse right here in Hebrews 4.

Look in your Bible at verse 8. Look with me at verse 8. What does it say? It says, *“for if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.”*

Now, let me explain this. Remember God said about the Jews, because of their unbelief, they couldn't enter the land. He said, *“they're never going to enter my rest”*. So again, that whole generation died. Their kids went in, their children went into the land, and they did enter into the rest of God. But that wasn't the fulfillment of God's rest. And that's what he says in verse 8. If Joshua had given them the fulfillment of that rest, he never would've spoken about another rest later on. Which occurs in Psalm 95 where he says *“Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as they did in the rebellion.”*

So the promise was partially fulfilled when the Israelites went into the promised land. It is completely fulfilled when we as believers enter into the rest of God through Jesus Christ. Okay?

And so this is how we get to verse 9, pivotal verse. Look at verse 9 in your Bible. *“So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.”*

And this is such an important verse in this whole discussion because this is the first time the author mingles the idea of the rest of God with the Sabbath. So what he's doing is he's introducing yet another picture.

Let's talk about the Sabbath. What is the Sabbath? The Sabbath was and is a single day that God set aside as a day of rest. And when he gave the law to Israel, he commanded them to rest on the Sabbath, which basically meant do no

regular work. Of course, the Jews made it ridiculous with all their added rules and so forth, but essentially God just told them to rest on the day of Sabbath.

But it's a picture. Just as entering into the Promised Land is a picture of entering into the promises of God, the Sabbath day is a picture of entering into or walking in God's rest. It's a picture of a greater reality. This is what these people don't get. To them, the Sabbath day is a New Testament command just as it was in the Old Testament. And they've missed the point completely of what God was trying to communicate through all of these examples in the Old Testament; that it is a picture of a greater reality and the greater reality is to rest. It's to rest in what? Well, what's the theme of this whole letter? What's the theme of Hebrews?

If somebody said to you, "why did the author of this letter even write this letter?" It's easy. It's about Jesus. That's all you have to say to answer that question, why did he write this letter? Jesus. Because you see, he was writing it to believing Jews, Christian Jews, who had accepted Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross, but were now being tempted to turn aside from the cross and go back under the law because of their persecution.

And so the writer of this letter is telling them about the preeminence of Jesus Christ, that there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. And he's showing them, Jews you've raised with these feasts and days and festivals, they all point to Jesus. That's his point.

That's his theme. It all points back to Jesus and the Sabbath like everything else. Underscores the reality of Jesus Christ, because the Sabbath was given in the Old Testament as a way of understanding what we must do to be saved.

Let me say that again. The Sabbath was given in the Old Testament to help us understand the way to be saved.

Now see, Seventh Day Adventists would agree with that. But it's in the walking it out where we differ. They think you have to keep the Sabbath like they did under the Mosaic law. But I'm going to show you that that is not the case. Just last week I showed you a passage in Isaiah. I want to show you this again. It's from Isaiah 30 on the screen. I think this is just such a wonderful passage:

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Isaiah 30:15 (ESV)

“For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved...”

That is one of the most beautiful passages because God tells us even in the Old Testament, how do you, how are you saved? First of all, by returning to the Lord and then resting. Resting. So, does that mean we have to keep the Sabbath to be saved? No. The resting in God that he's talking about is resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

And you know, God showed us so many ways throughout the Old Testament that we needed to rest in Him to find our salvation. Entering into the promised land was a picture of entering into His rest. The Sabbath was a picture of resting in Him. I think one of the other great illustrations of the Old Testament, frankly it's not mentioned here in Hebrews 4, but I think one of the greatest illustrations is Passover.

I love the picture of Passover. Passover was actually the final plague that was visited upon the Egyptians when God delivered them from the Jews from their slavery in Egypt. But understanding how he delivered them through the Passover is absolutely critical to understanding the significance of what God is trying to show you in the Passover. Because you'll remember that because Pharaoh had hardened his heart over and over again, God finally said, we're going to do this one final plague.

And so, He told all of the Jews to go into their homes on one special night. And to remain there and not to leave their house, but they were to slaughter a year-old lamb. And they were to take the blood of that lamb, and with a hyssop branch, which very much resembles a brush, they were to dip it in the blood of that sacrificial lamb, and they were to paint it upon the doorposts of their homes.

And the Lord through Moses told them that night the Angel of the Lord would go through the region of Egypt and he would bring death to every home where there was a firstborn male, both men and animals. However, the Jews were told that when that angel saw the blood of the lamb placed on the doorpost of their homes, He would pass over those homes and they would be safe, and no death would come there.

So again, we see just a beautiful picture of our salvation through Jesus Christ. Because the Jews on that first Passover are doing the exact same thing that you and I are doing. They sheltered under the blood of the lamb. And we are doing that very thing, but they had to rest. There was nothing they could do to be saved. All they had to do is apply the blood, and that's all we have to do. Apply the blood of the lamb, the sacrificial lamb of God in order to be saved. And death passes over us, and we know that Passover is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ because we're told so in the word of God.

Let me show you 1 Corinthians 5. Paul writes:

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1 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)

“Cleanse out the old leaven (or the old yeast out of your lives. It's always a picture of sin), that you may be a new lump, (that means a lump of dough at which they would work the yeast into) as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

And with that single statement, the Apostle Paul draws a line between the Old Testament's feast of Passover and Jesus Christ in the New Testament and how you and I are saved. So again, what was God teaching the Israelites on that first Passover? He was teaching them to rest. The same thing He was teaching them through the Sabbath. The same thing He was teaching them about, talking about entering His rest as they came into the promised land. It was all about rest. Just multiple pictures of God inviting us to enter in.

And so my question to you today is have you entered into His rest? How do we do that? By keeping the law of Moses? Heavens no. There's no resting in that because you never know if you've done enough. How do we enter into the rest of God? It's right here in Hebrews 4.

Look at verse 3. Look in your Bible at verse 3. *“For we who have believed, enter that rest”*. If that isn't underlined or highlighted in your Bible, it probably should be. What do I got to do to be saved? Believe, and rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

It's so beautiful. So here's the other question. I've been showing you this out of Hebrews 4, that the Sabbath is a picture of resting in Jesus. But are there any other New Testament passages that kind of corroborate this information? Well, yes there are. Let me show you a couple. First, from Romans 14, Paul writes:

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Romans 14:5-6

“One person esteems one day as better than another, (he thinks that one day is better) while another esteems all days alike. (So, how should we treat this sort of a thing? He says) each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (Because he says:) The one who observes the day (or a day) observes it in honor of the Lord.”

So if somebody says, “I have a day out of the week that I consider special and I honor the Lord with that day”, I have no problem with that, and I'm not going to try to talk anybody out of that. Now, when they start telling me you got to do their day to be saved, now we've got a problem. But if somebody just has a day, it's like, great honor the Lord on that day.

The next person over here says, “you know what? All seven days are the same”. Wonderful. *“Let each one be fully convinced”*. But concerning the Sabbath, we go on to Colossians. And this is what Paul writes. He says:

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Colossians 2:16-17

“Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or (how about this) a Sabbath? (And this is the most important statement here because it sums it all up). These are a shadow of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”

The substance of all those – guys, the Old Testament's all about Jesus. There's a spoiler for you.

You read through the Old Testament, it's all about Jesus. It all points to Him. He's the focal point. He's the essence. He's the reality behind the types and shadows and examples and pictures and illustrations. It's all about Jesus, and that's what people miss. And they think that they have to keep certain aspects of the law, but those things are fulfilled in Jesus.

Isn't that what He said? He said, *“I've not come to get rid of the law. I've not come to, to obliterate it; I've come to fulfill it. I came to fulfill the law”*. In His life, death ministry, He fulfills the law for us. And so, if somebody says to you, “do you keep the Sabbath?” Yeah, every day by resting in Jesus Christ as the savior of my life, resting in what He did on the cross.

There's nothing else I have to do. He did it all. He said "*It is finished*", I believe Him. Do you believe Him? I believe when He said it is finished, He meant it's finished. It's done. The price has been paid, it's over. Now all you need to do is apply the blood. What a beautiful picture. Have you applied the blood or are you still working?

If you're working, you haven't entered into His rest. If you're working to try to be a good Christian, trying to be good enough trying to pray enough or read your Bible enough, or go to church enough, or you're trying to get over some of these things in your life - you're working, and you have not entered into His rest.

To rest means He did it; He did it, and it was enough. What He did for me was enough.