

Jesus, the Giver of Rest



Week Five

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Hebrews 3-4

PERFECT REST

Hebrews 1 and 2 focus on Jesus as the ruler and deliverer of God's people. Hebrews 3 and 4 introduce Jesus as the One who provides rest for us. He is better than Joshua who was unable to give the perfect rest God had promised (Heb. 4:8).

Hebrews describes this rest as both a rest that comes from God and a Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:1-11). God made this rest, based on His creation of the world in six days and resting on the seventh day (Heb. 4:4), available to Adam and Eve. Their first Sabbath was an experience of perfection with the One who made that perfection possible. True Sabbath observance enables us to taste and experience to some extent the perfect fellowship with God we will have in heaven and the new earth.

When we keep the Sabbath, we *remember* that God made a perfect world in the beginning at creation and made perfect provision for our salvation through Jesus at the cross. True Sabbath observance, however, is more than an act of remembrance.



inScribe

Write out Hebrews 3–4 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Hebrews 4:1–11. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.

inGest



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse in Hebrews 3–4. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

How should keeping the Sabbath help us understand our complete dependence upon God, not only for existence but for salvation?

In what ways can you help build the faith of fellow believers?



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THE REST OF THE LAND

When God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, His purpose was to bring Israel to the land of Canaan, where they would be able to serve and obey Him freely (Exod. 8:1; Ps. 105:43–45), including enjoying the Sabbath rest that Pharaoh had prohibited (Exod. 5:5). This land of Canaan was the inheritance God had promised to their father Abraham because he had obeyed God’s voice and left his country to go to the land God would show him (Gen. 11:31–12:4).

God’s purpose in giving the land to Israel was not simply for them to possess it. God was bringing them to Himself (Exod. 19:4). God wanted them to live in a land where they would be able to enjoy an intimate relationship with Him, without any hindrance, and would also be a witness to the world of who the true God was and what He offered His people. Like the Sabbath of creation, the land of Canaan was a framework that made possible an intimate relationship with their Redeemer and the enjoyment of His goodness.

In Deuteronomy 12:1–14, the Lord told the people that they would enter rest, not simply when they entered the land, but when they had purged the land from idolatry. After that, God would show them, as His chosen people, the place where He would dwell among them.

God connected the Sabbath of creation with the deliverance from Egypt. He instructed Israel to observe the Sabbath as a memorial of creation and as a memorial of their redemption from Egypt. Creation and redemption are both enshrined in the Sabbath commandment. Just as we did not create ourselves, we cannot redeem ourselves. It’s a work that only God can do, and by resting we acknowledge our dependence upon Him, not only for existence but for salvation. Sabbath-keeping is a powerful expression of salvation by faith alone.

The sad story is that, according to Hebrews 3:12–19, those who were delivered from Egypt were unable to enter into the rest that God had promised them. When Israel arrived at Kadesh Barnea at the border of the Promised Land, they lacked the faith that they needed to enter the land. Numbers 13 and 14 explains that the Israelite spies “brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land” (Num. 13:32, ESV). They affirmed that the land was good, but warned that the inhabitants were strong and the cities were fortified and they would not be able to conquer the people.

Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies, agreed that the land was good and did not dispute the fact that people there were strong and the cities fortified. But they said that God was with them and He would bring them into the land (Num. 14:7–9). Yet, the people who saw God destroy Egypt through plagues (Exodus 7–12), annihilate Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea (Exodus 14), provide bread from heaven (Exodus 16) and water from the rock (Exodus 17), as well as manifest His continuing presence and guidance through the cloud (Exod. 40:36–38), failed to trust in Him now. It is a tragic irony that the generation which saw such mighty displays of God’s power became a symbol of faithlessness (Neh. 9:15–17; Ps. 106:24–26; 1 Cor. 10:5–10).

God promises His children gifts that are beyond human power to obtain. That is why they are based on grace and are accessible only through faith in God’s power and blessing. Hebrews 4:1–2 explains that, although the gospel was preached to Israel, the “word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who hear it” (Heb. 4:2).

Israel traveled to the borders of the Promised Land as a people. When the people were faced with contradictory reports, they failed to believe that God would defeat their enemies and lead them successfully into the land He promised them. Faith, or lack of it, is contagious. That is why Hebrews admonishes its readers to “exhort one another” (Heb. 3:13), “to stir up one another to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24, ESV), and to “see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God” (Heb. 12:15, ESV).

ENTERING INTO HIS REST TODAY

The unbelief of the desert generation prevented them from entering into the rest God promised. But God kept urging His people to enter this rest and not to harden their hearts. Paul repeats several times that God's promise "remains" (Heb. 4:1, 6, 9, NKJV). He uses the Greek verbs *kataleipō* and *apoleipō*, emphasizing that the "promise of entering his [God's] rest still stands" (Heb. 4:1, ESV). The fact that the invitation to enter this rest was repeated in the time of David (Heb. 4:6, 7, referring to Psalm 95) implies both that the promise had not been claimed and that it is still available. In fact, Paul suggests that the experience of true Sabbath rest has been available since the time of Creation (Heb. 4:3, 4).

God invites us "today" to enter into His rest. "Today" is a crucial concept throughout Scripture. When Moses renewed Israel's covenant with God at the border of the Promised Land, he emphasized the importance of "today" (Deut. 5:3; compare Deut. 4:8; 6:6; 11:2). It was a moment of reflection to recognize God's faithfulness (Deut. 11:2–7) and a time of decision to obey the Lord (Deut. 5:1–3). Similarly, Joshua called on the people of his time to "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15, NKJV).

In the same way, "today" is a time of decision for us, a time of opportunity as well as of danger, as it always has been for God's people (See 2 Cor. 6:2). "Today" appears five times in Hebrews 3 and 4. It emphasizes the importance of listening to God's voice (Heb. 3:7, 15; 4:7) because failing to listen and believe God's word leads to disobedience and the hardening of our hearts. It could even delay our entrance into the heavenly Canaan, just as it kept the wilderness generation from entering the earthly Canaan.

But Jesus has defeated our enemies (Heb. 2:14–16) and inaugurated a new covenant (Hebrews 8–10). Thus, we can "come boldly to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:14–16; 10:19–23). The appeal "today," invites us to recognize that God has been faithful to us and has provided us with every reason to accept His invitation right away without delay.

Both the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 and Moses' restatement of it in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 invite us to remember what God has done for us. As we have seen, what God wrote on tablets of stone point us to the finishing of His work of Creation (Exod. 31:18; 34:28). In Deuteronomy Israel is commanded to keep the Sabbath in view of God's finished work of deliverance, from Egyptian bondage. The Exodus from Egypt pointed forward to the ultimate work of deliverance from sin that Christ would accomplish on the cross when He said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). So the Sabbath is doubly blessed and, in fact, is especially meaningful for Christians.

The Sabbath rest celebrates the fact that God ended, or finished, His work of Creation and redemption. Similarly, Jesus' ministry in the heavenly sanctuary celebrates that He offered a perfect sacrifice for our salvation on the cross (Heb. 10:12–14).

Notice, God rests only when He has secured our well-being. At Creation, God rested when He had finished the creation of the world. Later on, God rested in the temple only after the conquest of the land He had promised to Abraham was completed through the victories of David and Israel "lived in safety" (1 Kings 4:21–25, ESV; compare with Exod. 15:18–21; Deut. 11:24; 2 Sam. 8:1–14). God had a house built for Himself only after Israel and the king had houses for themselves.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

How can we practically enter into His rest (in the assurance of salvation in Christ) today?



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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Genesis 2:1-3

Exodus 33:14

Joshua 1:13

Exodus 20:8-11

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Matthew 11:28-30



What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Deuteronomy 7?

Review your memorized verse from Hebrews 3-4.

MESSIANIC REST

As we have already seen, these texts in Exodus and Deuteronomy invite us to look to the past. They exhort us to rest on the Sabbath in order to celebrate God's work for us in Creation and Redemption. Hebrews 4:9–11, however, also invites us to look to the future. It tells us that God has prepared a Sabbath rest that is in the future. It suggests a new dimension for Sabbath-keeping. Sabbath rest memorializes not only God's victories in the past but also celebrates God's promises for the future.

The future dimension of Sabbath observance has always been there, but it has often been neglected. After the fall, it came to imply the promise that God would one day restore creation to its original glory through the Messiah. God commanded us to celebrate His acts of redemption through Sabbath observance because Sabbath pointed forward to the culmination of redemption in a new creation. Sabbath observance is an anticipation of heaven in this imperfect world.

This has always been clear in Jewish tradition. A work titled *Life of Adam and Eve*, composed between 100 BC and AD 200 said: "The seventh day is a sign of the resurrection, the rest of the coming age." (James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1985), 18.) Another ancient Jewish source said: The coming age is "the day which is wholly Sabbath rest for eternity." (Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 873.) The *Othiot of Rabbi Akiba*, a later source, said: "Israel said before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, 'Master of the World, if we observe the commandments, what reward will we have?' He said to them: 'The world-to-come.' They said to Him: 'Show us its likeness.' He showed them the Sabbath." (Theodore Friedman, "The Sabbath Anticipation of Redemption," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1967): 443, 444.)

It is very significant that Paul in Hebrews used the Sabbath rest, and not Sunday, as a symbol of the salvation through grace that God offers us. The use of Sabbath rest in this way implies that Sabbath was cherished and observed by believers. From the second century AD forward, however, we find evidences of a decisive change in the church. Sabbath observance ceased to be considered a symbol of salvation and was, instead, considered a symbol of allegiance to Judaism and the old covenant, one that had to be avoided. To keep the Sabbath became the equivalent of "to Judaize." For example, Ignatius of Antioch (around AD 110) remarked: "Those who lived according to the old order have found the new hope. They no longer observe the Sabbath but the day of the Lord—the day our life was resurrected with Christ." (Jacques B. Doukhan, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 42.) Similarly, Marcion ordered his followers to fast on Sabbath as a sign of rejection of the Jews and their God, and Victorinus did not want to appear that he "observed the Sabbath of the Jews." (See Doukhan, *Israel and the Church*, 41–45.) It was the loss of the understanding of Sabbath observance as a symbol of salvation by grace that led to its demise in the Christian church.

The biblical Sabbath is for celebration, for joy and thanksgiving. When we keep the Sabbath, we indicate that we believe God's promises, that we accept His gift of grace. Sabbath is faith alive and vibrant. As far as actions go, Sabbath observance is probably the fullest expression of our conviction that we are saved by grace through faith in the Messiah Jesus.



inVite

Meditate on Hebrews 3–4 again
and look for where Jesus is.



How is resting on the Sabbath an expression of salvation by Christ's grace?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?



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Jesus, the Giver of Rest



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?



After this week's study of the passage, where are areas in your personal life that need true rest?

Who in your relationships and social circles also needs this rest? What can you do about it?



Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inverseible.org/heb05-7

REST IN CHRIST

“The Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God....

“The Sabbath points them to the works of creation as an evidence of His mighty power in redemption. While it calls to mind the lost peace of Eden, it tells of peace restored through the Saviour. And every object in nature repeats His invitation, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ Matt. 11:28.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 288, 289.

“Jesus says, ‘Abide in Me.’ These words convey the idea of rest, stability, confidence. Again He invites, ‘Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest.’ Matthew 11:28. The words of the psalmist express the same thought: ‘Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.’ And Isaiah gives the assurance, ‘In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.’ Psalm 37:7; Isaiah 30:15. This rest is not found in inactivity; for in the Saviour’s invitation the promise of rest is united with the call to labor: ‘Take My yoke upon you: . . . and ye shall find rest.’ Matthew 11:29. The heart that rests most fully upon Christ will be most earnest and active in labor for Him.

“When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence it is Satan’s constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life’s cares and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections—to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ he hopes to gain the victory. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears. Say with the apostle Paul, ‘I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.’ Galatians 2:20. Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to Him. If you will leave yourself in His hands, He will bring you off more than conqueror through Him that has loved you.” (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: 1892), 70, 71.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



What is the relationship between Sabbath observance and justification by faith?

How can you learn to keep the Sabbath in a way that, indeed, shows our understanding of what salvation by faith, apart from the deeds of the law, is about?

What have been your past experiences when you have delayed doing what you knew God would have you do right away?

What is the difference between true observance of the Sabbath and a legalistic observance of the Sabbath?

How can the connection between spiritual Sabbath-keeping rest and salvation in Jesus be made stronger in your personal life?

How can you make sure that you never say or do anything that could weaken another's faith?