

Text: Heb 3-4

We continue with our background study before progressing in Hebrews 4. Our message today is called:

An Outline of a Theology of Rest

Just before Debbi and I went to the UK, I preached a message called “I Need a Rest” which began to define this concept of “rest” in the Bible. In light of my continuing study, I went back and took a look at those notes. I don’t think I said anything that I now disagree with! That’s something!

However, I hope to expand our understanding with today’s message.

Before we get into that, I want to review the key points I made in last week’s message.

We are comparing three (at least) generations in Heb 3-4.

1. The Exodus generation
2. The Psalm 95 generation (David’s gen.)
3. The Hebrews generation (readers of Hebrews)

There has to be a point of contact for the comparison to work. In other words, if they are widely different, the comparison becomes pointless.

The question we asked last time was whether the Exodus generation was saved or unsaved? (We are applying NT terminology to an OT group.)

Our answer was that, by and large, the generation that God prevented from entering his rest was made up of mostly regenerate (believing) people.

Key points to prove that:

- Various statements of them believing God in the OT
- Hebrews 11.28-29, 39

Heb 11.28-29 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.²⁹ ¶ By faith **they** passed through the Red Sea as though *they were passing* through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

Heb 11.39 ¶ And all **these**, having gained approval through **their faith**, did not receive what was promised,

- Moses was among them

We don't mean every individual among them was a believer, but most of them were.

They failed to enter God's rest, but because of their faith in God, they would not fail of eternal life.

Some will dispute that: How could they have eternal life when God was so angry with them? God forgave them.

And Moses did not fail of eternal life. He was with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, though he suffered the same penalty as the rest of them.

Consequently, "rest" cannot mean the same thing as "eternal life." The point of Hebrews 3-4 is that there is a rest remaining, and the Hebrews were endangering their experience of that by thinking to go back to Judaism for safety reasons.

So, what is this rest? We will need to keep thinking about that, so today we will work our way through a list of passages that will help us understand.

Proposition: God's rest, available to those who believe, is worth every sacrifice to retain.

I. Key initial points of understanding (Heb)

So much to say, but today we focus on "rest" in Heb 3-4

- A. The key text for Heb 3-4 (Ps 95) reminds that "they" did not achieve "my rest" (God's rest) (3.11)
- B. There is some kind of real loss to fear for NT believers (4.1)
 1. There is a promise of rest
 2. There is a fear of missing rest
- C. The rest our author means is also connected tightly with God's *Sabbath-rest* at the end of Creation (4.3-5)

If we can, we need to keep all these ideas in mind as we study the passages.

II. Key terms for rest (NT and OT)

- A. The NT term in Heb 3-4 is *katapausis* (noun) in all but one instance (4.8, verb *katapauō*)
 1. Noun means "state of ceasing all activity, at rest"

2. Verb means “causing to stop, ceasing, bringing to rest”
3. Both key OT terms are translated in the LXX by a form of this word

B. The two main OT terms to consider

1. *Ūuah* (verb, *to rest*) or related noun *m^enūḥāh* (noun, *resting place*)
 - a. The word includes the notion of being brought to rest, placed, put in a place of rest
 - b. This place of rest is a place which implies security (no enemies) and thus victory
2. *Šābat* (*shabbat, i.e., Sabbath*) – absence of activity, with an emphasis on an activity coming to an end

III. The OT thread of offered, missed, and achieved rest

A. God’s promise to give rest (Ex 33.14)

Ex 33.14 And He said, “My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.”

1. Given to Moses on the mountain [second giving of Law]
2. Responding to Moses’ prayer for God’s presence as they depart Sinai (and allows Moses a glimpse of his “back” Ex 33.23)

B. The initial journey towards rest (Num 10.33-36)

Num 10.33-36 ¶ Thus they set out from the mount of the LORD three days’ journey, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD journeying in front of them for the three days, **to seek out a resting place for them.** ³⁴ The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp. ³⁵ ¶ Then it came about when the ark set out that Moses said, “Rise up, O LORD! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You.” ³⁶ **When it came to rest**, he said, “Return, O LORD, *To* the myriad thousands of Israel.”

1. Setting: they are leaving Sinai, Law received, covenant made, tabernacle constructed
2. They are seeking a resting place, following the Lord (temporary rest, encampment, with a view to a permanent resting place)

3. Each time the cloud “came to rest” (36)
 - a. They followed the Lord to victory (35)
 - b. They are joined by the Lord in rest (36)

C. The look forward to change “when you come to rest” (Dt 12.8-11)

Dt 12.8-11 “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man *doing* whatever is right in his own eyes;⁹ for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you.¹⁰ “When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around *you* so that you live in security,¹¹ then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD.

1. There will be a change in their behaviour; worship localized where the tabernacle is [later the temple]
2. This change reflects that the nation “has come to the resting place” (9)
3. The change involves “rest from all your enemies” (10)
4. Don’t miss the connection between rest and coming into the presence of God in “God’s place” (11)

D. The “Exodus generation” in Num 14

1. They were prevented from entering the land
2. Rest isn’t mentioned in Num 14 (or Num 32, where Moses repeats the story)
3. Rest comes into connection with the “Exodus generation” in Psalm 95

E. Rest achieved in subsequent history (examples)

1. The “rest” of Joshua (Josh 21.44)

Josh 21.44 And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand.

But remember Heb 4.8:

Heb 4.8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.

2. Solomon has rest on every side, so he can build the temple (1Ki 5.4)

1 Ki 5.4 “But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune.

3. Even Jehoshaphat gains this kind of rest (2Chr 20.30)

2 Chr 20.30 So the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God gave him rest on all sides.

We have a sense that this is not the ultimate rest, but a type of that rest. (A prefiguring ...)

F. Rest promised to David (2 Sa 7.10-11)

2 Sa 7.10-11 “I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly,¹¹ even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you.

1. Note the triumph over enemies
2. Note the Lord’s promise of a place
3. Compare Ps 132.13-14

Ps 132.13-14 For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation.¹⁴ “This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

G. What can we say of this rest?

1. There is a promise of security
2. There is a promise of a specific place
3. There is a promise of special presence of God

One more concept to flesh out...

IV. The significance of God's rest

Gn 2.2 By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He **rested** on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Ex 20.11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and **rested** on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

A. The terms

1. In Genesis, *Šābat*
2. In Exodus, *Ūuah*
3. In LXX, *katapauō* in both references (the Hebrews word)

B. What did God do when he rested?

1. He ceased from the activity of creation (Gen 1)
2. He caused the man to *rest* in the garden (Gen 2.15)

Gn 2.15 ¶ Then the LORD God took the man and **put him** into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

- a. To "rest" is to "put in a place of rest," to "bring to the place of triumph," to "eliminate threats"
 - b. There were no threats at the beginning, only perfect fellowship with God
3. The rest Israel forfeited was "my rest" — the place he was leading them to

C. The significance of being “in the land” with “no enemies” — rest

1. The land is a type of something better
2. Even when they achieved rest, they forfeited rest

Neh 9.28 “But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion,

3. The covenant with Abraham, Moses, and David is oriented to the land... the land at rest

Heb 4.9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

V. The rest we seek

A. There are two views of this rest

1. One is the rest of perfect fellowship with God in this life

“the present Christian experience of peace”¹

2. Another is the future millennial rest where the saints reign with Christ a thousand years
 - a. The nation is restored to the land
 - b. Zion is the place of worship
 - c. The nations will join in perfect fellowship with the Lord there

B. What loss do we fear if we come short of this rest? (Heb 4.1)

1. We’ve already warned about the “wilderness” kind of life that comes with hardened hearts
 - a. How miserable to be a Christian out of fellowship with God!
 - b. Pursuing this world for rest; but finding no rest for our spirits!

Loss of fellowship with God is a real loss, we should desperately fear it.

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, “The Eschatology of the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3, no. 1 (1982): 71.

2. There is a kind of loss that means a loss in the kingdom to come

a. The parable of the pounds illustrates this (Lk 19.12-27)

- 1) One man earned ten pounds more, the Lord gave him authority over ten cities (17)
- 2) One man earned five pounds more, the Lord gave him authority over five cities (19)
- 3) Another man earned nothing. The Lord judged him (24)

But note, in this parable, the man is not cast out...

b. The “saved so as by fire” teaching (1 Cor 3.10-15)

- 1) Those who build with gold, silver, precious stones receive a reward
- 2) Those who build with wood, hay, stubble, are judged, but not lost (15)

1 Cor 3.15 If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Conclusion:

Proposition: God’s rest, available to those who believe, is worth every sacrifice to retain.

What do you have to do to attain God’s full rest?

First, put your faith in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation.

Second, lay aside everything that might pull you away from the will of God.

- Sports
- Pleasures
- Wealth

These, and more, can’t be the object of your life. There is something better to come.

Heb 4.9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.