God's Sabbath Rest and Our Eschatological Hope
An Exegetical, Theological and Historical Investigation of Hebrews 4:8-11

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“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken afterward about another day.

Consequently a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God. For the one who enters God's rest has also rested from his works, just as God did from his own works. Thus we must make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by following the same pattern of disobedience.”

Hebrews 4:8-11 (NET)

The letter to the Hebrews is one of the most theologically advanced and well written letters in the New Testament from its poetic utilization of Koine Greek to its advanced Christology. The author of Hebrews also uses both Jewish hermeneutical techniques and Greek logic to form his argument. The central focus of Hebrews is the superiority of Jesus Christ. The author spends the opening chapters (1-10) of the book demonstrating Christ's superiority over the angles (1:1-14), Moses (3:1-6), Joshua (4:8), and the Aaronic Priesthood (4:14-10:18). The author then uses examples from the Old Testament to demonstrate what faith looks like and concludes with a series of exhortations.

Throughout the letter the author uses typology. The author uses typology as one of his main forms of argument in demonstrating the superiority of Jesus' priesthood and ministry over those of the old covenant (3:3; 7:15; 8:6; 9:11,23). The author always begins his arguments by pointing out the weakness(es) of the old covenant and moves to show the greatness of Christ's (new) covenant. Thus, the author argues from a lesser type to a greater antitype to show Christ as the true fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. In this way, the author's focus throughout his letter is on Christ.

George H. Guthrie notes that the author uses both exposition and exhortation as tools to weave together the message of the letter. In the sections of exposition (1:1-2:18; 4:14-10:25), the author points to the person and work of Jesus Christ and uses typology to demonstrate his superiority over

creation. In the sections of exhortation (2:1-4; 3:1-4:13; 5:11-6:20; 10:26-13-21), the author uses both positive and negative examples (types) from the Hebrew Bible to warn, extol, and encourage his readers to hear God's word, obey it and not fall away from it.

Two main themes, then, emerge from this letter: faith⁴ and perseverance.⁵ First, place your faith in Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of God's promise(s) to Israel and is superior to the Mosaic covenant. The author uses a myriad of examples from the Old Testament to demonstrate that faith in (the promise of) Christ before his coming (11:1-40). Second, persevere until the end. The author uses both positive and negative examples in persevering. The same people who had faith were also obedient (11:1-40) and persevered, some even unto torture and death (11:35-38). The author also uses the negative examples of the disobedience of Israel during the wilderness wanderings to exhort his readers not to be like disobedient Israel, who did not have faith and as a result wandered around the desert for forty years, but instead he calls his readers to preserve until the end.

It is within this framework that the author of Hebrews begins his exhortation on entering God's rest (3:7-4:13). Andrew Lincoln points out that the author also uses typology to show how the Old Testament serves as a foreshadowing of things that are to come.⁶ In this way, the author of Hebrews utilizes the Old Testament typologically to demonstrate to his readers that what has happened in the past is only a shadow of what is to come. Within Hebrews three and four, the author uses four texts from the Old Testament (specifically Gen. 2:2, Ps. 95, Num. 13:26-14:26 and Josh. 21:43-45) to demonstrate to his readers that the rest promised to Israel is still to come.

In this investigation, we will explore what the author of Hebrews means by entering God's rest.

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⁵The book of Hebrews is probably the best example of a crossroads between the Pauline doctrine justification by faith alone and the Jamesian doctrine of faith that produces good works. The author of Hebrews focuses on persevering to the end in faith, through obedience. See Morris, Leon. Hebrews. Bible Study Commentary series. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 43.

⁶Lincoln, 72.
To accomplish this task we look at Hebrews 4:8-11 and its preceding context. We investigate the passage verse by verse, exploring the literary and historical contexts upon which the author's argument is built, and looking at the various passages in the Old Testament that the author quotes, alludes to, or reflects upon. We will look at the author's word use and the literary structure of his argument, paying special attention to his use of typology, and his use of “rest” in a historical, soteriological and eschatological sense. In our investigation of verse nine, we will look into the issue of keeping the Sabbath to determine whether or not the author of Hebrews is calling his readers to keep the Sabbath, as some Sabbatarians have often presented. In our treatment of verse ten, we will then look at several views held by Bible scholars about the timing of entering God's rest and we will seek to determine which view fits with the text. Finally, we will conclude by demonstrating how the text applies to our lives today and reflect on how we too “must make every effort to enter that rest” (3:11).

**The Literary Context of Hebrews 3:7-4:7**

In Hebrews 3:7-3:19, the author begins his exhortation by sharing the word of the Holy Spirit (Ps. 95). The author attributes Psalm 95 to the Holy Spirit to show that Israel's inability to enter God's rest is due to God's judgment, rather than just the human author's condemnation on Israel. The author concludes the Spirit's divine utterance with the quotation “they shall never enter my rest” (3:11; Ps. 95:11). The “they” is the Exodus generation, who died in the desert because of their unbelief. The author then calls on his “brothers” not to have “an unbelieving heart” but to instead “encourage one another” and “to share in Christ” (3:12-14). He also quotes another portion of Psalm 95 that is calling the people to “hear and not harden your hearts” (3:15). The author then begins a Homiletic

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9 See Deut. 6:4-6
Midrash\textsuperscript{10} of Psalm 95, by posing several rhetorical questions\textsuperscript{11} (3:16-18) and then answering them by reiterating his earlier point that the Exodus generation was not able to enter God's rest “because of their unbelief” (3:19). He reiterates his point to draw to a conclusion his first premise that the promised rest is unfulfilled because of Israel's unbelief in the wilderness.

In chapter four, the author changes the form of his argument from a negative, “they shall never enter my rest” (3:11) to a positive, “the promise of entering his rest still stands” (4:1). He points out that the Exodus generation received the good news, just like the recipients of the letter of Hebrews had, but that the Exodus generation had not believed. Now the author points out that those who believe will be able to enter God's rest, because Israel's disobedience has not done away with God's rest. It was established on the seventh day, the author points out, when God rested from his own work (4:3b-5). Thus, the promise of rest was a part of his original plan for his creation and had existed long before Israel's disobedience in the wilderness. Because God is faithful to his promises (6:13-16) and because of “the unchanging nature of his purpose” (6:17), the author concludes “that some [who believe] will enter that rest,” (4:6) regardless of the fact that the Exodus generation was not able to do so (4:3).\textsuperscript{12} The author then points out that God, through his faithfulness, established a new day in which those who believe can enter his rest, and “through David”\textsuperscript{13} identified that day as “Today” (4:7).

\textit{Joshua and Another Day (v. 8)}

\textsuperscript{10}Homelititc Midrash is a Rabbinical method of exegesis that was originally used in sermons (homilies) during the 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD and later written down. See Lane, William L. Hebrews 1-8. Word Biblical Commentary series. (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 95.

\textsuperscript{11}The rhetorical questions serve as a literary device to remind the reader of the connection between Psalm 95 and the wilderness wanderings.

\textsuperscript{12}For a similar argument see Galatians 3 in which Paul argues that Abraham was righteous not because of the Law, but because of his faithfulness to the promise, which proceed and therefore was superior to the Law.

\textsuperscript{13}In the MT, Psalm 95 is not ascribed to David, but in the LXX Psalm 95 (94 in the LXX number system) it is. F.F. Bruce has also suggested that “David” could be referring to the time of David rather than the king himself. See F. F. The Epistle to the Hebrews. Revised ed. New International Commentary on the New Testament series. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 108.
Verse eight begins the conclusion of this passage by referring back to Joshua and the conquest of the land of Canaan. Joshua in Greek is the same word, jIhsou:V, as Jesus. The Authorized Version does translate jIhsou:V here in verse eight as Jesus, but all other English versions have since correctly identified the jIhsou:V as referring to Joshua, the son of Nun. Leon Morris adds that the use of jIhsou:V was possibly the author's way of connecting the two, as many have argued that the author is using typology to portray Joshua as a type, or prefiguring, of the one who bears his name. Morris' explanation does seem to fit with the author's concentration on Christ throughout his letter. The author of Hebrews may be picking up on some of Jesus' own teachings. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus commands all “who are weary and burdened” to come to him and receive rest from him. Jesus is promising “rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29), not a physical rest, but a rest from a burden of sin, a soteriological rest (Matt. 11:29).

Additionally, William Lane notes that the use of a second class condition clause in verse eight implies an unfulfilled condition. Thus, Joshua did not or was unable to give Israel rest. However, in Joshua 21:43-45, we read:

So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled. (NIV)

And in 2 Samuel 7:1(NIV), we read, “After the king (David) was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him.” How do these texts fit with what we read in Hebrews 4:8?

Simon Kistemaker explains that:

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14 with the exception of James Darby's translation, also Wycliff's translations and the Geneva and Bishop's Bibles render jIhsou:V as Jesus, but these version were translated before the KJV, from the Latin Vulgate.
16 Lane, 94.
One of the motifs in the Epistle to the Hebrews is the author's use of statements that describe a condition contrary to the fact (see Heb. 4:8; 7:11; 8:7). The writer employs a conditional sentence in each instance and shadows that in the Old Testament era rest (Heb. 4:8) and covenant (Heb 8:7) were incomplete. Perfection, he writes, could not be attained (Heb. 7:11). But Christ brought fulfillment to the promise and prophesy when he delivered the fullness of God's revelation.17

Walter Kaiser further explains that we see repeated periods of rest throughout the books of the Old Testament (Josh. 11:23; 14:15; Jud. 3:1, 30; 5:31; 8:28; Isa. 57:20), but that this rest refers to periods of time in which the land was given rest from wars.18 Morris adds that “the Old Testament spoke of rest on the Sabbath (Exod. 16:23, etc.) and of a certain rest in the land (Josh. 23:1). There was a domestic rest (Ruth 1:9), and Job looked longingly at the rest in death (Job 3:17).”19 Kaiser goes on to say that “this type of rest must be separated from what God calls 'My Rest.'”20

Donald Guthrie points out that verse eight is likely the beginning of a rebuttal against the readers' possible objection that Joshua and the Deuteronomy generation did achieve God's rest, while their predecessors died out in the wilderness.21 This conclusion by Guthrie fits in nicely with what the author argues in chapter three that Israel was unable to enter the promised rest because of their unbelief. It would be logical for the original readers of the letter to remember that although Moses and the Exodus generation did not enter the Promised Land, Joshua and the Deuteronomy generation did, and thus conclude that Joshua was indeed successful. When in fact, the rest achieved by Joshua and Israel after the conquest of Canaan was not the promised rest, but rather only a physical or temporal rest from war. Indicating that Joshua did not fulfill God's promise of rest and therefore the promise of rest remains unfulfilled, until “another day” (4:7).

20 Kaiser, 139.
As the author of Hebrews tells us in v. 7, God used David\textsuperscript{22} to speak “about another day” through Psalm 95,\textsuperscript{23} when David recalls the rebellion of the Exodus generation at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13:26-14:9, 11-12, 21-23) and recounts how God told the people that they would not enter his rest. Here, in the second half of verse eight, the author builds on his previous statements and makes the insight that if Joshua had given the people rest, David would have not spoken four hundred years later about “another day” in which this rest would finally come to the people. Thus, even in David's generation, when the nation of Israel was experiencing great prosperity and peace, the promise of rest was still not yet achieved.

Harold Attridge concludes that:

The redefinition of God's rest provided in vv. 3-9 substantially affects the logic of the typology exhortation used here. The author of Hebrews does not make a simple analogy between his contemporaries and the Exodus generation, but rather advances a rather complex argument which may be outlined as follows. The Christian community corresponds to the Exodus generation as antitype to type. Furthermore, the goal which Christians pursue in the same way, as antitype to type. However, the type in the analogy (the rest in Canaan) is itself an antitype of a more original type, the state of rest which God himself entered as the completion of the week of creation.\textsuperscript{24}

Attridge's outline serves to advance the connections that the author is drawing. First that the readers of the letter are to be connected with Israel and in drawing that connection they are to be warned against unbelief. Second that the rest given to the Israelites in Canaan is to be connected with God's own rest, a connection which we will make more clear in our investigation of verse 9.

\textit{A Sabbath Rest Remains} (v. 9)

In verse nine, the author begins by is drawing his conclusion from verse eight into verse nine. In verse nine, however, the author makes an abrupt change in his terminology. The words used for rest

\textsuperscript{22}David so longed for and looked forward to the day of God's rest that he named his favorite son, Solomon, “man of rest.” See Kaiser, 139.


thus far have been, katavpausiV (3:11, 18; 4:1, 3 (x2), 5, 10, 11), the noun form meaning “rest” or “place of rest” and katapauvw (4:4, 8, 10), the aorist verb form meaning “rested” or “rest.” Both words indicate a ceasing of action or to cause something or someone to rest. In verse 9, however, the author uses neither of these words, instead choosing to create his own word, sabbtiamoV. William Lane notes that the deliberate choice of sabbtiamoV over katavpausiV or katapauvw must be due to a particular nuance that sabbtiamoV connotes. SabbtiamoV finds its origins in sabbaton (Sabbath), a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew equivalent. The author's use of sabbtiamoV reflects back upon the Jewish Sabbath and festival days in which God's people worship him by celebrating his various acts throughout history. Leading Lane concludes that sabbtiamoV “stresses the special aspect of festival and joy, expressed in the adoration and praise of God.” However,” as Ellingsworth points out, “sabbtiamoV is not contrasted with katavpausiV, and the main distinction between them appears to be that they denote respectively temporal and spacial aspects of the same reality.” Implying that the author's use of sabbtiamoV is not to act as a contrast with katavpausiV but rather serves to advance his argument by using a general term for “rest” (katavpausiV) to a more specific term sabbtiamoV, which links “rest” with the Sabbath and thus links his discussion of rest with the rest which God, himself, experienced on the seventh day of creation.

Further, Walter Kaiser identifies six different types of rest in Hebrews chapter four: (1) Divine Rest (4:1-3, 10-11, or Rest of Faith), (2) the Creation Rest (4:4), (3) the Sabbath Rest (4:4, 9) or the Rest that Remains (4:6-9), (4) The Canaan Rest (4:8), (5) The Redemptive Rest (4:10), (6) The Eternal Rest (4:9). Walter Kaiser points out that “(Sabbath) rest (in v. 8) is where the presence of God stops.
(as in the wilderness wanderings, Num. 10:33) or dwells (as in Palestine, Ps. 132:8, 14: Isa. 66:1; 1 Chron. 28:2). The very place where God's presence dwelt and became the center of worship for the nation of Israel, first in the Tabernacle, from the wilderness wandering until the time of Solomon, and then in the Temple in the City of Peace. It is in this very place where the High Priest would atone for himself and the sins of the nation of Israel (5:3). During the sacrifice, the High Priest would enter into the very place, the Holy of Holies, where God is at rest.

Later in Hebrews, the author (4:14-10:49) makes his argument for the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, in which Christ has become the eternal High Priest (7:24), whose once for all sacrifice atoned for all of God's people (10:12), so that they can enter Sabbath rest (4:9). In this way, the author expresses sabbatiamoV as a soteriological rest, in which Christ has taken away our sins (10:10), freeing us from the burden of having to offer yearly sacrifices that only cover our sins (7:27).

Further, Walter Kaiser states that "despite entering the land (with Joshua) and having the promised heir (Jesus) in the historical [fulfillment of rest], there is a tension expressed in Hebrews that rest was 'not yet' the full realization accomplished." F.F. Bruce adds that "this blissful rest in unbroken fellowship with God is the goal to which his people are urged to press forward; this is the final perfection which has been prepared for them by the sacrifice of their heavenly high Priest." Thus, Bruce and Kaiser both point to a third understanding of how the author uses rest, in an eschatological sense. Additionally, William Lane notes that “it is Psalm 95 that calls for an

31 Kaiser, 140.
32 The author of Hebrews later picks up on this theme of coming to the Tabernacle and Temple, when he makes arguments for Jesus as our High Priest (4:14-10:39).
33 Kaiser, 138.
34 Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews. (1990), 110.
35 Likewise Photius, former Patriarch of Constantinople, explains Hebrews 4:8-11 in this way, “Just as the first [historical] 'rest' did not prevent there being a second [soteriological] rest, so neither does the existence of a second [soteriological] rest prevent the existence of a third more perfect [eschatological] rest...Then it is clear that there is a certain other [eschatological] rest beyond those [historical and soteriological] rests which have been spoken of, and that this [eschatological] rest is hallowed not for anyone who happen to chance upon it, but rather 'for the people of God.' But truly the people of are 'those who believe' in him and who keep his commandments. Hebrews. Vol. X of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Edited by Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity
eschatological understanding of katavpasiV, 'rest.' Thus, “the rest which God gives is at once historical (Canaan), soteriological (salvation), and eschatological [our eternal heavenly hope].”

Morris points out that “the people of God” (4:9) clearly signifies New Testament believers rather than Israel. Some have suggested that the author's use of the word sabbtiamoV in v. 8 implies the author's belief of a continued Sabbath observance by Christians. However this seems unlikely, as the author in chapter eight states that the “sanctuary [of the earthly Temple and Tabernacle] is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (8:5). In 10:1, he adds “the law [including the Sabbath] is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-- not realities themselves.” Likewise, the Jewish rabbinical writings of the Mishnah explain that Sabbath rest is “the time that is to come for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting” (Tamid 7:4), and thus reinforce the idea that the Sabbath Law was indeed created in order to point to something greater. It seems likely then, that a literal Old Testament Sabbath observance is not the purpose behind why the author uses sabbtiamoV, as Christ's atonement has granted believers everlasting life and because the Sabbath itself only points to what is to come in believers' eschatological rest. However, as G. K. Beale points out “Sabbath worship on Sunday reminds us to look forward to the time when our eschatological rest will be consummated in the final form of the new creation when Christ returns the final time.” Leading this author to conclude that although a legal Sabbath observance is no longer required, it is crucial to our spiritual health to engage in Sabbath worship, whether on one day or everyday (Rom. 14:5).

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36 Lane, 101.
37 Kaiser, 138. In his article, Kaiser writes “eschatological (the kingdom and our reign with Christ).” I altered Kaiser's quote, because I did not agree with his eschatological conclusion, which will be discussed later.
39 Grossmann, 125-137.
41 Barth, 73.
Rested from His Works (v.10)

The author then shifts his focus from arguing from the existence of the rest which remains to describing it. He equates it to the rest which God partook of and enjoyed during the seventh day after he completed his work. Thus, the author concludes that “the one who enters God's rest has also rested from his works” (4:10). Donald Guthrie states that God's rest is “wholly different” than man's idea of rest.43 Gleason adds that in Genesis 2, “God ceased from his activity to enjoy what he had created.”44 In ceasing he “blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (Gen. 2:3). Jason DeRouchie points out that Genesis 1:1-2:3 is not merely a historical account of creation, but is also used by Moses in order to remind the nation of Israel to find their rest in God.45 Gleason expands on this idea by stating that “if God ceased other activities in order to enjoy Adam, then humankind enters God's rest by ceasing from other activities in order to take pleasure in worshiping God.”46

Similarly, F. F. Bruce says, “when we read that God 'rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made' (Gen. 2:2), we are to understand that he began to rest then; the fact that he never said to have completed his rest and resumed his work of creation implies that His rest continues still, and may be shared by those who respond to his overtones with faith and obedience.”47 The use of eijselqwn, in the participle aroist active in v. 10, suggests that entrance into God's rest occurs only at one point in time.48 Therefore, although God's act of resting is continuous from the seventh day on, humanity's entrance to this rest can only occur at one point in history. Thus, it seems likely that the rest described in v. 10 is rest in the eschatological sense in that the rest is achieved at the culmination

43Guthrie, Donald. Hebrews, 115.
44Gleason, 290.
45Dr. DeRouchie shared this understanding of Gen. 1:1-2:3 during one of his exegetical insights in his Hebrew course.
48Kistemaker, 115.
of history, and would bookend history with God entering rest during the seventh day and man entering rest at the end of time.

Three main views by Bible Scholars emerge in discussion of the eschatological rest here in Hebrews. The first by Walter Kaiser, Jr., in which Kaiser advocates for eschatological rest to occur during the millennial reign of Jesus on the earth, with no real treatment of soteriological rest. The second by Leon Morris who believes that eschatological rest is only an extension of soteriological rest into eternity. The third by F. F. Bruce who sees eschatological rest as the culmination of everything that has happened in history. He believes that soteriological rest functions as honey on the lips in order to entice us to enter into a greater eschatological rest.

Kaiser believes:

The dead will enter into its full enjoyment after their resurrection from the dead (Ps. 116:7), therefore it is not to be identified with heaven. Rather it is fixed by Isaiah 11:10 as being “in that day” when “the LORD will extend his hand a second time to recover the remnant of his people” (Isa. 11:11). In that eschatological setting, “his rest” (not “dwelling” as in RSV) shall be glorious. Then the LORD shall choose Jerusalem as His dwelling place, and this new David will say, “This is my resting place forever” (Ps. 132:14).49

Kaiser's perspective, however, is not drawn from Hebrews but rather from various prophetic passages in the Old Testament, which Kaiser has interpreted to be eschatological in nature and then has grafted onto the Hebrews' eschatological understanding of rest. Kaiser believes that God's rest shall be given to God's people during the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth. Kaiser believes that a literal temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem and Christ will rule from it. Kaiser, however, ignores that the fact the author of Hebrews plainly says the “sanctuary [of the Temple] is a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven (8:5) and that sacrifices are no longer needed. Thus, a physical temple in Jerusalem is no longer needed.

Also, as F. F. Bruce points out that God's rest never ends, which leads Bruce to conclude that

49Kaiser, 150.
eschatological rest should not be linked with the millennium, which will end one day. Rather, Bruce believes that eschatological rest is eternal and will take place in heaven. Further, William Lane notes that the phrase “the one who enters God's rest” is a conditional statement that should be regarded as being fulfilled. Thus, the eschatological rest experienced by the believers has already come to pass that creates a tension in the text that the rest is both present in the here and now, and “not yet.” Thus, creating an Inaugurated Eschatology for God's rest.

While Kaiser's view does not take into account this tension of “not yet” and present occurrence, two other views do. Leon Morris says that:

> We should probably understand (rest) in both senses (soteriological and eschatological). It is true of the here and now, for those who put their trust in Christ and His finished work do indeed rest from their own works. For then there is no striving to achieve salvation through their own efforts but a quiet resting in what God has done for them. And it is true of the future, for in the world to come those who are in Christ enter a rest from this world's strivings, a rest from their works.

In another commentary he adds that believers “live in [rest] here and now by faith, but what they know here is not the full story. That will be revealed in the life hereafter.”

Morris' view then places emphasis on the believer's full experience of rest in the here and now and that the believer's only gain in eternity is the ability to fully comprehend the rest. Thus, for Morris the difference between soteriological rest and eschatological rest is merely an epistemological issue:

We cannot fully comprehend the rest that we experience here on earth.

Three problems, however, arise with Morris' view. First, if the readers cannot comprehend the rest then how do the readers know that they have it? Nowhere in Hebrews does the author tell his readers that he is fully experiencing rest. Rather, he calls his readers to “make every effort to enter that rest” (4:11). Secondly, within the context of his exhortation, the author is warning the people not

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50 Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. (1964), 74-75.
51 Ibid.
to miss out on the rest. If they were fully experiencing rest then how would they miss out on it?

Thirdly, Morris' view, like Kaiser's, places too much emphasis on experiencing rest on earth, whether
during the millennium or not, rather than on an eternal rest in heaven that we must strive to enter.

Finally, F. F. Bruce believes that eschatological rest is “an experience which they (believers) do
not enjoy in their present mortal life, although it belongs to them as a heritage, and by faith they may
live in the good of it here and now.”

For Bruce the soteriological rest believers experience in this life
is merely a foretaste of what is to come. Further, the soteriological rest is meant to draw believers in,
so that believers may “make every effort to enter that [eschatological] rest” (4:11). Bruce's view also
fits with what the readers of the letter would know about history, in that God has been experiencing
rest since the seventh day and that he invites us to enter fully into that rest at the end of time. Thus, I
believe that Bruce's view is correct and is the best explanation for the “not yet” and present occurrence
of rest in the lives of believers.

In verse 11, the author repeats his warning from verse one that the readers of the letter should
not fall short of achieving the rest that God has promised. This repetition of the exhortation from
verse one serves to frame the text so that the reader views 4:1-11 as a section. However, differences in
emphasis emerge between verse one and verse eleven. The author in verse one emphasizes that his
readers should not “be found short of (receiving God' rest),” while in verse eleven the author calls on
his readers “to make every effort...so that no one will fall.” In verse one the author is introducing the
application to his exhortation and warning his readers based on what had happened at Kadesh Barnea.
Guthrie points out that the author “thinks that there is a grave danger in history repeating itself,”

55Bruce, F. F. The Epistle to the Hebrews. (1964), 78.
56Guthrie, Donald. Hebrews, 116.
while in verse eleven the author calls his readers to action, “to make every effort.” Lane suggests that “make every effort” could better be translated as “let us become zealous” or “let us do our utmost,” because they connote a sense of doing everything so that we may enter rest. Believers are then called to live out their lives in longing for that rest which they hope for.

Morris adds:

Someone else will enter: the preserving, believing people of God. The readers should not throw away the blessing that is held before them. There is nothing automatic about entering it. Israel has thrown away its opportunity. Let not those who have professed to be in Christ make the same mistake.

Kistemaker explains that “unbelief leads to disobedience, which results in an inability to come to repentance.” In a very real sense, then, it was not Israel's sinning but rather their unrepentant and hardened hearts which caused them to miss out on God's promises. The author then concludes by calling his readers to turn from their hardened hearts and to accept the inheritance of rest that God has granted them through his Son.

**Conclusion**

In the beginning of his *Confessions*, St. Augustine declares, “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you” (*Confessions 1.1*). From the very beginning, of time God has dwelt in his rest and man has longed to join him, but because of our hardened hearts, we have turned away in disobedience. Yet we who are made in the image of God and who are being remade in the image of Jesus, there is a longing to find this rest. To find God's rest, we must heed the author's exhortation. We must live in faith and persevere until the end. We must turn away from our own very nature. As humans we are often distracted by the busyness of life that we often forget how God is at work in our lives, changing us, molding us, and conforming us to his image. We must cease

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57 Lane, 94.
59 Kistemaker, 113.
from our busy lives and busy work schedules to stop and worship and enjoy God and what he has done for us. We must also remember the promise of the better things that are to come. We were not made to dwell here forever, but rather we have been called by God to come to him, and through his Son we have been given an open invitation to enter God's rest. By accepting that invitation, we are no longer doomed to miss out on God's rest and to die out in the desert, but rather we become citizens of heaven who gain a better country, and heirs according to the promise who gain the inheritance of rest, which God has established for us since the seventh day of creation.

Bibliography


