

GENERAL EPISTLES AND LATER NEW TESTAMENT

Hebrews 4:1-10

“Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST’ [Psalm 95:11], although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: ‘AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS’ [Genesis 2:2]; and again in this *passage*, ‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST’ [Psalm 95:11]. Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS’ [Psalm 95:7-8]. For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.”

Many have taken Hebrews 4:1-10 as being dismissive of the seventh-day Sabbath, and that with the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah on the scene of history, Torah institutions like the Sabbath have little relevance for Believers. Others, however, have taken Hebrews 4:1-10 in the direction of recognizing that many in Hebrews’ audience had an incomplete view of God’s rest, as it has both present and future dimensions to it. A proper understanding of God’s rest begins with an appreciation of the seventh-day Sabbath, but a weekly Sabbath rest necessarily draws attention to the eschatological rest to be experienced by the redeemed in the future—be such rest in the Millennial Kingdom and/or Eternal State. **This is a rest that no one who has partaken of the salvation of Israel’s Messiah should be found forfeiting.**

Hebrews ch. 4, if not understood properly from a First Century Jewish perspective, can be a confusing section for many.¹ It is a cause of considerable confusion for many in the Christian community, who often interpret it as being a diatribe against the seventh-day Sabbath. In spite of this confusion, though, Hebrews 4:1-13 is actually subtitled as “A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God” in a resource like the *NIV Study Bible*.² The reason there is considerable confusion regarding Hebrews ch. 4, and other texts in the Apostolic Scriptures regarding the Sabbath, is because the Christian Church today as a whole largely lacks a theology of “rest.” Tim Hegg summarizes this predicament quite well:

“The answer to the question of why the modern Christian theologians and teachers have neglected the theology of ‘rest’ may simply lie in the fact that the

¹ This section has been adapted and significantly expanded from the commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic* (2006) by J.K. McKee.

² Kenneth L. Barker, ed., et. al., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1901.

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contemporary Christian Church has, by land large, jettisoned the Sabbath and even the concept of Sabbath. With Sabbath no longer part of the Christian culture and practice, the emphasis shifted from 'rest' to 'work.' In this scenario, biblical 'rest' becomes entirely allegorized as symbolic of eternity and therefore of no current consequence. In contrast, the Scriptures teach the concept of 'rest' as of central importance."³

Many contemporary Christians have indeed chosen to approach Hebrews 4:1-10 as only depicting God's rest in entirely spiritual or metaphorical terms, perhaps representative of the experience born again Believers are to have in being released from the guilt of sin (cf. Romans 8:14; John 8:31-37). If the "rest" that the redeemed are to experience is only one that is spiritual, then Hebrews 4:1-10, is a passage that could not only be used to downplay or dismiss those who observe a physical, seventh-day Sabbath, but even the widespread "Sunday Sabbath" that has been kept by many historical Protestants.

What is the rest that Hebrews' audience is directed toward (4:1)? Is such rest not to be properly recognized as a complete and total rest, one which employs the institution of the weekly *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת) as a base, to convey a fuller message to human beings and what God's salvation-historical intention involves for those who know Him? Very few Christian examiners of Hebrews 4:1-10 would conclude that the seventh-day Sabbath lacked importance; the issue, as we will see, typically involves what they think the Sabbath represents for those in the post-resurrection era. *God's people continue to anticipate the return of the Messiah, the manifestation of the Messianic Kingdom, and the eventual arrival of the Eternal State.* Many would say that while the seventh-day Sabbath prefigured many of these futuristic phenomenon, that only by dismissing such a seventh-day Sabbath now, can we fully appreciate the rest to come. Quite contrary to this, people in today's Messianic movement (and even a few Christian voices, as we will see), are not at all favorable toward a dismissal of the Sabbath meriting a right and proper appreciation of future eschatological realities.

Having just addressed the superiority of Yeshua to Moses in ch. 3, the author of Hebrews will proceed to describe the superiority of Yeshua to the Sabbath, not negating God's rest, but how the Sabbath is to be fully realized in Him. This does not minimize *Shabbat*, but properly prioritizes it. God designated that the Sabbath was to be an important sign between Him and His people:

"But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you'" (Exodus 31:13).

The keeping of the Sabbath for the First Century Jewish community was one of the important signs that one was Jewish, just as it is today. In fact, the Rabbis of the Talmud teach that if Israel keeps two Sabbaths properly, then the final redemption will come:

"Said R. Yohanan in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai, 'If the Israelites keep two successive Sabbaths in a proper manner, they will be saved immediately: "Thus says the Lord concerning the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths" (Isa. 56:4), followed by, "even them will I bring to my holy mountain" (Exo. 56:7)'" (b.*Shabbat* 118b).⁴

³ Tim Hegg. (2014). *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter 4. Torah Resource*. Retrieved 21 April, 2015, from <<http://torahresource.com>>.

⁴ Ibid.

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These kinds of sentiments may have been believed among the large Jewish audience to whom the author of Hebrews is writing. The author of Hebrews hardly teaches that *Shabbat* is something to be dispensed with—but He teaches that only Messiah Yeshua can provide *true rest*. The realization of God's "rest" did not occur for the Exodus generation, and now the author of Hebrews extends how this lesson needs to be heeded by his audience. Originally, the rest of God may have been widely perceived as being principally physical in early Hebraic thought, but William L. Lane indicates that "over the source of time a distinctly eschatological concept of rest developed, presumably through synagogue preaching and school debate."⁵ The rest that God's people are to experience begins with understanding the weekly *Shabbat*, but includes much more—extending to the hope of His Kingdom restored on Earth, and the future of everlasting communion between the Creator and His redeemed sons and daughters.

4:11 The author of Hebrews opens up this part of his argument with the words *phobēthōmen oun* (φοβηθῶμεν οὖν), "Fear, therefore." He is sincerely concerned about various members of his audience not being able to enter into the rest of God promised in the Tanach Scriptures. As the Montgomery New Testament puts v. 1, "Let us be on our guard, then, though there is a promise still standing of being admitted to his rest, lest any one of you should be found to have come short of it."

The author warns his audience about danger of not entering into God's rest. The promise of God's rest is witnessed in the Torah, where the Lord says, "My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14), and "the LORD gives rest to your fellow countrymen as to you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God will give them beyond the Jordan" (Deuteronomy 3:20). The urgency of understanding that a door may be closing, for various members of Hebrews' audience, on entering into God's rest, is emphasized by the writer. He says that his listeners all must fear while this promise "still stands" (NIV) or "while the promise of entering his rest is still open" (NRSV), lest "any one of you should be found to have missed his opportunity" (REB). This opportunity, of course, is that God is gracious to people to allow them to enter into His complete rest. The author of Hebrews may be indirectly referring to Numbers 14:30-32, where the Exodus generation is told that they will not enter into the Promised Land:

"Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness."

Here, our writer would be applying these concepts to various First Century Believers who may be on the verge of denying their faith in Yeshua. Just as the Exodus generation rebelled against God and did not get to experience His full blessing, so were these people demonstrating similar attitudes. The rest that God intends for His people is seen in His covenant to Abraham, reinforced by His covenant to David, and ultimately realized in the Messiah who will return and establish His Kingdom on Earth. The Prophet Isaiah attests to this coming reality:

⁵ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13*, Vol. 47b (Nashville: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1991), 47a:98.

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“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

“For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me,” declares the LORD, “So your offspring and your name will endure” (Isaiah 66:22).

Revelation 21:4 further indicates, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

This is **the full realization** of the “rest” that the author of Hebrews is talking about—and one would be utterly foolish to give it up. The Greek noun that he uses for “rest” is *katapausis* (κατάπαυσις), meaning “*a putting to rest: a putting down, deposing*” or “*a cessation, calm*” (LS).⁶ Its verb form is *katapauō* (καταπαύω). In the Septuagint, *katapausis* is used to render the Hebrew *menuchah* (מנוחה), which generally means “*resting-place*” or “*rest, quietness*” (BDB).⁷ In contrast, though, the verb *katapauō* often renders the Hebrew verb *shavat* (שָׁבַת), often meaning to “*cease, desist, rest*” (BDB).⁸ This latter verb, as opposed to the more common *nuach* (נָח), may be seen to depict the eschatological state. The verb *shavat* is used in Leviticus 26:34 to describe the rest of the Land of Israel: “Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land will rest [*shavat*] and enjoy its Sabbaths.” TWOT is keen to point out that “The soteriological use forms around the theology of the sabbath.”⁹ It will be seen that our author is connecting God’s “rest” to the Sabbath, but specifically to the greater rest that is to occur when the Promised Land rests and when all His people are obeying Him in full communion with Him. **This is a perpetual rest that only comes to those who abide in the care of God.**

What our writer warns is, “let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it” (RSV). The verb *dokeō* (δοκέω) is rendered in many versions as “seem,” but in the NEB and NIV it is rendered as “found.” BDAG defines it as “**to appear to one’s understanding, seem, be recognized as.**”¹⁰ Regardless of how it is specifically rendered in English, no one is to be so presumptuous so as to think that he or she has fully entered into God’s rest. God’s rest, while it involves the Sabbath and concepts of the Sabbath, is by no means limited to the Sabbath—as God’s rest also involves a spiritual condition that His people are to always strive to be experiencing. God’s rest ultimately involves dwelling among human beings in His Kingdom. The redeemed can surely partake of elements of that future rest now—but if anyone gives up on Yeshua—only an eternity of “unrest” awaits.

4:2 The author of Hebrews refers to the Exodus generation, saying that “we also have had the gospel preached to us” (NIV), or “For indeed we have heard the good news, as they did” (NEB). Did the Ancient Israelites actually hear the “gospel,” per se, or did they just hear some sort of “good news”? In its secular context, the verb *euangelizomai* (εὐαγγελίζομαι) means “*to bring good news, announce them*”

⁶ LS, 412.

⁷ BDB, 630.

⁸ Ibid., 992.

⁹ Leonard J. Coppes, “שָׁבַת,” in TWOT, 2:562.

¹⁰ BDAG, 255.

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(LS),¹¹ and does not need to refer to the more formal gospel of salvation as we know it, but rather of any kind of good news. But the Apostles teach that the “Old Testament saints,” as we often hear them referred to by many Christian people today, had the gospel proclaimed to them, even if a bit incomplete. The Apostle Paul writes, “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’” (Galatians 3:8, NIV). Because Abraham “put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to his merit” (Genesis 15:6, NJPS). But this is not the only example we see in the Tanach of the development of the gospel or good news.

King David says “this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. And this is the custom of man, O Lord GOD” (2 Samuel 7:19). The Apostle Peter confirms that David foresaw the day of the Messiah (Acts 2:22-31). The author of Hebrews himself further says, perhaps clarifying his statement here, that Moses “considered reproach for the sake of the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since his attention was on the reward” (11:26, HCSB). Moses believed in the Messiah to come, and was able to serve Him even though the Deliverer had yet to come into the world. As Donald Hagner aptly explains, “They, too, had benefited from God’s saving grace.”¹² Perhaps earlier generations of God’s followers did not understand the “gospel” in such refined terms as we understand it now that Yeshua has come, but they nevertheless recognized that God would send a Redeemer, and they were to live the life of faith exemplified by that belief.

The real tragedy for the Exodus generation, is that “it did them no good because they didn’t share the faith of those who listened to God” (NLT). Even though they were promised many great things from God directly, about a great future that would await them—and they even saw many miracles—they lacked the trust in Him, and so they did not enter into the Promised Land. As Hagner further observes, “For those in the wilderness [good news] was the deliverance of the exodus (cf. 3:16) and the Sinai covenant...The implication for the readers is clear. Hearing must be accomplished by believing.”¹³

The challenge being presented, by the author of Hebrews, is that unless someone acts upon the good news, then nothing can be achieved in the life of a person who hears it. The problem, with the Exodus generation which rebelled against God, was that “in them the message they heard did no good, because it met with no faith in those who heard it” (NEB). Because the good news of the Lord’s deliverance was not “united” or “mixed with faith” (KJV, YLT), it was meaningless. F.F. Bruce remarks that “The practical implication is clear: it is not the hearing of the gospel by itself that brings final salvation, but its appropriation by faith; and if that faith is a genuine faith, it will be a persistent faith.”¹⁴ When the population of Ancient Israel in the wilderness heard the report of the ten spies (Numbers 13:30-14:10), they reacted to it as those who did not have the trust in their God that they should have had.

¹¹ LS, 322.

¹² Donald Hagner, “Hebrews,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al. *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2157.

¹³ Donald A. Hagner, *New International Biblical Commentary: Hebrews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 67.

¹⁴ F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp 105-106.

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Any person who has been truly redeemed will be striving, with God's help, to have a consistent faith. The problem with the Ancient Israelites—that any generation since has had to take warnings from—is that they saw the mighty acts of God deliver them from the Egyptians and they still *did not believe*. The author of Hebrews argues that Believers in Yeshua, who have seen and experienced God's salvation—and yet fail to believe—face a worse fate than they. Any person who hears the message of salvation in Yeshua and does nothing with it is in dangerous territory.

How many people today have heard a gospel presentation that means nothing to them? How many hear a gospel message that does not deal with the sin nature of the individual? Perhaps some responsibility rests on the person proclaiming the message, but equally so much responsibility lies with the person hearing, who fails to take appropriate action and investigate. In the Messianic community today, how often do we fail to proclaim a complete gospel message of repentance from sin, deliverance from one's flesh, and a new, consistent life in Messiah Yeshua? How many of us, although we read the Torah, **do not take its warnings as seriously as we should?**

The rest which the Exodus generation forfeited was the new home and prosperity offered to the people in the Promised Land, and it is safe to assume that many of them will not be in God's Kingdom. The initial "good news," if you like, which was declared to them—was representative of the fuller message of good news, fully manifest in the work of Yeshua the Messiah. As Peter T. O'Brien directs, "The message of good news heard by the exodus generation was the promise that God would deliver them from slavery and bring them to Canaan (Exod. 3:16-17; 4:27-31; also 6:1-9). This was in fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers, especially Abraham (Exod. 6:1-9; note Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17), and which stood within a salvation-historical trajectory leading to the promise of entering God's final rest."¹⁵ Indeed, the rest that God's people are to be striving to reach—via their faith and trust in Him, and in the Messiah—is now specified as that which was present at the completion of His creative acts (vs. 3-4).

4:3 The author of Hebrews says that "only we who believe can enter [God's] place of rest" (NLT). Just as in ch. 3, he once again appeals to Psalm 95:11—"Therefore I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest"—and the severity of the Ancient Israelites not having faith in the Lord and failing to enter into the Promised Land. David A. deSilva indicates, "This repetitive recontextualization of Psalm 95:11 allows 'entering God's rest' to saturate the hearers' minds, replacing any contrary or competing agendas they may have brought to the hearing of this sermon."¹⁶ Whereas in Hebrews 3, quotations from Psalm 95 are used as warnings against not hearing the Lord and hardening one's heart, now they are used as warnings not to give up on the rest that He offers those who have faith in Him.

¹⁵ Peter T. O'Brien, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 161.

¹⁶ David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 153.

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In his commentary on Hebrews, Hegg draws attention to Deuteronomy 12:8-11,¹⁷ detailing how “The rest envisioned in Deuteronomy is thus picked up by the prophets and spoken of as yet future, as yet to become a reality in the reign of the Messiah.”¹⁸ He quotes the critical themes of Isaiah 14:3-4 and Ezekiel 34:11-15:

“And it will be in the day when the LORD gives you rest from your pain and turmoil and harsh service in which you have been enslaved, that you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, ‘How the oppressor has ceased, *and how* fury has ceased!’” (Isaiah 14:3-4).

“For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,’ declares the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 34:11-15).

Hegg makes the further point of directing how Psalm 95 occurs within a series of texts to be considered the Apocalyptic Psalms, detailing how surrounding passages speak to the themes of the future Millennial Kingdom and reign of the Messiah:

“Indeed the context of the Apocalyptic Psalms (Ps 93-100) makes it clear that these are speaking of the millennial age when the Messiah reigns upon the earth...Psalm 95 situated in the middle of these Millennial Psalms and the very text which the author of Hebrews utilizes, is itself prophetic of the reign of Messiah in the millennium.”¹⁹

Hegg quotes from critical Psalm passages, epitomizing much of the rest that the author of Hebrews has in view:

“The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the LORD has clothed and girded Himself with strength; indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved” (Psalm 93:1).

“Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns; indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity’” (Psalm 96:10).

¹⁷ “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man *doing* whatever is right in his own eyes; for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. 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, 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” (Deuteronomy 12:8-11).

¹⁸ Hegg, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter 4*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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“The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many islands be glad” (Psalm 97:1).

“The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned *above* the cherubim, let the earth shake!” (Psalm 99:1).

Indeed, while one is reminded of the great world to come, ruled by the Messiah Yeshua—one is also reminded of the severity of the Lord’s justice toward those who are rebellious. With the theme of the widely faithless Exodus generation invoked, and with the future Messianic Kingdom being represented by the author’s appeal to “rest,” the observations of Lane should not go unnoticed:

“The generation in the desert did not trust the unproved word they had heard and so were disqualified from enjoying what had been promised. For the men and women addressed [here in the letter], who were called to faith on the basis of God’s final word spoken through the Lord (1:1-2a; 2:3)...[such] is clearly eschatological faith, a present grasp upon future reality.”²⁰

While the “rest” of the Lord is something that is available in His coming Kingdom, it is also something that to a wide degree can be a present reality now in the lives of men and women. Our author notably uses *eiserchometha* (Εἰσερχόμεθα) to describe this, appearing in the present middle indicative tense, indicating that a possible translation could be “We are entering” that rest. As the TLV puts v. 3a, “For we who have trusted are entering into that rest.” A more neutral rendering, would just be “enter” (NASU, RSV/NRSV/ESV, NIV/TNIV). To be critically recognized, is how God’s rest is not just something that Believers are to partake of as a part of their faith in Yeshua, but are in the process of entering into. As they are in the process of entering into such a rest, there remains the possibility that they *can leave that state*. While they can experience a state of realized eschatology in their lives—future realities to be partly experienced before their full consummation—they too can leave it by denying faith in the Messiah. As deSilva notes,

“[W]e are crossing that threshold into the ‘better’ promised land. But we must still ‘strive earnestly to enter’ since wavering on the threshold can still prove disastrous as it had in the past (4:11).”²¹

From this point to v. 5, our writer focuses on the concept of “rest,” as it relates to his audience’s present experience as those who have partaken of salvation. Specifically as Lane indicates, his “argument employs the rabbinic principle and interpretation that the presence of cognate vocabulary in two passages of Scripture is designated to call attention to their mutual relationship.”²² The specific terms that we have to look for in the Greek are the noun *katapausis*, “rest,” and the verb *katapauō*, “to rest.” The author of Hebrews takes a First Century Jewish way of interpreting Scripture, and applies it to the Greek language.

What is important to note is that while God’s rest is something that is to be fully realized in the future, it is not something from which Believers are totally separate. Even though Ancient Israel in the wilderness failed to enter the rest that He intended for them, and subsequent generations likewise followed, the author of

²⁰ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:98.

²¹ deSilva, 155-156.

²² Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:99.

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Hebrews writes that “God’s work had been finished ever since the world was created” (REB). As Paul Ellingworth indicates for v. 3, “God excluded the wilderness generation from his place of rest, and yet it had always been there, available for someone.”²³ That rest is now available, in part, to those who come to faith in His Son, Yeshua—but those who trust in Yeshua have to persevere. To give up *that rest* is to make a mistake worse than Ancient Israel made at Kadesh-Barnea, especially given the Psalm 95:10-11 appeal where the Lord said,

“For forty 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’” (NIV).

But the author of Hebrews has more than just the rest promised to the Exodus generation, which they reneged on; he foresees some, if not many, of his audience, reneging on the rest experienced by God subsequent to His completion of the universe. In the estimation of Donald Guthrie, “he wants his readers to switch their minds beyond the wilderness wanderings to the creation itself...What believers can now enter is none other than the same kind of rest which the Creator enjoyed when he had completed his works...”²⁴ The Eternal God is already experiencing the rest that the redeemed in Israel’s Messiah are to find themselves entering into. Entering into that rest begins by receiving salvation in Him (cf. Matthew 11:28-30), but will not culminate until one arrives at the the future intended for God own.

^{4:4} Our author employs similar terminology in v. 4 that he has used earlier (2:6)²⁵: “For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way” (RSV). This type of language is used not to haphazardly imply that “somewhere” God has said “something,” but rather to rhetorically stimulate the hearer’s mind to remember that *somewhere—where you should be familiar—God has decreed something*. Here, *the something* that the author of Hebrews knows his audience should be familiar with is Genesis 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.” This verse is too familiar to be forgotten by any Jew of the First Century, but also is too familiar that it can be easily overlooked in one’s personal theology and thus be taken for granted. How many First Century Jews were simply raised with the weekly *Shabbat* as an ingrained cultural reality, that they too easily forgot the essence of it, which is that God invites men and women to experience His rest?

The author of Hebrews, possibly being of Alexandrian Jewish stock, might have even employed the statement, “For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows” (NRSV), to remind his audience that Philo treats the Sabbath as the rest of God, as demonstrated in the following quotations:

“An on this account too Moses calls the sabbath, which name being interpreted means ‘rest,’ ‘the sabbath of God’...by ‘rest’ I do not mean ‘inaction’ (since that which is by its nature energetic, that which is the cause of all things, can never desist from doing what is most excellent), but I mean an energy completely free

²³ Paul Ellingworth, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 245.

²⁴ Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp 112-113.

²⁵ “But one has testified somewhere, saying, ‘WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM [Psalm 8:4]?’” (Hebrews 2:6).

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from labour, without any feeling of suffering, and with the most perfect ease” (On the Cherubim 87).²⁶

“And absence from all labour and fatigue is the most appropriate attribute of God...” (The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain 40).²⁷

Philo primarily talks about the physical and mental benefits of resting on the Sabbath, which are certainly important. The author of Hebrews may be building upon this, and extending it to the spiritual dimension of a person, emphasizing elements that can now be fully realized by faith in Messiah Yeshua. Of course, what is important to note is that the Sabbath—even though critical to understand and appreciate—is not superior to Yeshua. To give up Yeshua means giving up the rest that God intends to grant to all His people.

4:5 The author of Hebrews makes his important theological point about rest by employing the Hebraic technique of *gezera shava*, linking two words or concepts that share a common root. In v. 4 he writes, *kai katēpausen ho Theos en tē hēmera tē hebdomē* (καὶ κατέπαυσεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἐβδόμῃ), “And God rested on the seventh day,” continuing in v. 5 with, *ei eiseleusontai eis tēn katapausin mou* (εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατὰπαυσίν μου), “They shall not enter My rest.” The words he links together are the verb *katēpausen* and the noun *katapausin*. Lane points out that “The fact that the writer and those whom he addressed read the biblical text in Greek was crucial in this instance, since the MT used different Hebrew roots to describe God’s rest in the two passages.”²⁸ In Genesis 2:2, the Hebrew verb translated “rested” is *nishbati* (נִשְׁבַּתִּי), whereas in Psalm 95:11 the noun translated “rest” is *menuchah*. In the Greek, we see almost two identical terms, even though one is a verb and the other is a noun.

Our writer is building a case that *Shabbat* has both past and future elements that Believers in Yeshua are to consider. Warren A. Quanbeck summarizes quite well some of the thoughts that he may be considering:

“[The Sabbath] looked back to the creation of the world and was an enduring reminder to Jews that their God was no provincial deity but the God of the entire earth. It also served as a memorial of the covenant and recalled to the Jews their vocation as the people of God and their destiny to bring the knowledge of his name to all peoples. It looked forward to the rest that God promised to his people.”²⁹

The author of Hebrews is appealing to his audience’s likely knowledge of all the things that the Sabbath entails, not to demean it, but to demonstrate that it now takes on an *even more important symbolism for those who know Yeshua*. By giving up Yeshua, one not only gives up perpetual rest, but the responsibility of being a part of God’s chosen people. As deSilva puts it, “Like the wilderness generation, they stand at the threshold of the goal of their pilgrimage and must now act so as to embody that trust and obedience that does achieve the promised goal.”³⁰ But, will Hebrews’ audience learn from the mistakes of the past? If they

²⁶ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 89.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁸ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:95.

²⁹ Warren A. Quanbeck, “The Letter to the Hebrews,” in *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, 903.

³⁰ deSilva, 156.

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maintain their faith in Israel's Messiah, then they will enter into the grand rest surely promised to them!

4:6 Our author attests to the fact that for his audience "It still remains that some will enter that rest" (NIV). God is not at all unmerciful or unfair to His people, and the fact that there is still an opportunity for them to enter into all of the things that He has prepared for them, is evidence of this. The writer of Hebrews appeals to the failure of the Ancient Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea. He says that "those who first heard the good news failed to enter through unbelief" (NEB), but that the Lord's mercy and grace surely did not end with that generation. This is because "again he appoints a certain day, "Today"" (ESV) as the time that a man or woman can repent of sin and enter into the wonderful things that God has in store.

Generations of Hebrews prior to the coming of Messiah Yeshua were striving desperately to enter into the rest that God promises throughout the Tanach. Many individuals who had faith in the Savior to come were able to enter into some degree of that rest in their lives, and will surely be in God's Kingdom. But then, many others because of disobedience and a lack of faith were unable. The epitome of those who were unable to enter into God's rest was the Exodus generation, save faithful Joshua and Caleb. All those who saw God deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage died off in the wilderness.

Some would argue that Israel entered into its promised rest, as attested in the Book of Joshua, and what the author of Hebrews is arguing may actually be contrary to the Tanach. Is he arguing against previous Scripture?

"And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as He spoke to them; therefore turn now and go to your tents, to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan... Now it came about after many days, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side" (Joshua 22:4; 23:1).

Even while Joshua was able to lead the people of Israel into rest in the Promised Land, it was not the complete rest of the Lord. It was a physical rest that God promised for sure, but the rest of God is *something more than just physical rest* because in the Garden of Eden it involved Adam and Eve stopping their labors and communing with Him. Ellingworth observes, "The author of Hebrews comes near to contradicting such texts as Jos. 21:44 because...he does not even see Canaan as a positive antitype of God's own *κατάπαυσις* [*katapausis*]: to him it is merely something to be contrasted with that true rest."³¹ The rest experienced by Ancient Israel in the Promised Land, given the author's appeal to God's rest after completing the Creation (v. 4), is widely an incomplete or under-developed rest.

The author of Hebrews does not intend to contradict Joshua, but does interject elements to God's rest *beyond physical rest*. The author of Hebrews considers God's rest to be something that is not only physical, but a spiritual condition that must be settled in one's heart via faith—and from this all of the different aspects of God's rest can be experienced, leading to the Eternal State. Furthermore, we know that the rest Ancient Israel experienced in the Promised Land was only temporary, and not permanent, because the people quickly began rebelling against the Lord and succumbed to idolatry.

³¹ Ellingworth, 254.

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The Lord's rest is to eventually see Creation return to what He originally intended with man and woman: one abstaining from work and communing with Him. This is a rest that no one—*no matter how faithful to observe the Sabbath*—has ever completely experienced, because it ultimately involves Him being present among us like He originally was with Adam and Eve, in the Eternal State. Certainly, Believers can partake of that experience in part, but we have yet to experience it in its fullness because God's Kingdom has not been fully established. Many in our writer's audience were considering giving up on Yeshua—and this profoundly awesome rest is something that they would be giving up as a result. The author of Hebrews will emphasize in v. 7 that they still have a chance not to avoid punishment, **and that the day to turn back to the Lord is today, right now**—because He loves every human being He has created that much.

4:7 In v. 7 we see a confirming indication that the Greek Septuagint is the Bible of our author. He proceeds to quote from Psalm 95 once again, "saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted" (RSV). This psalm is anonymous in the Hebrew Masoretic text, but the LXX opens it with the words "An Ode. Pertaining to David" (Psalm 95:1, NETS). The emphasis of the Psalm, more than anything else, is what is important, because it is the repeated warning for a person **not to harden his or her heart against the Lord**:

"Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at the embittering, like the day of the trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried; they put to the proof and saw my works" (Psalm 95:7-8, NETS).

The important lesson that we see in this part of the treatise may be emphasized by the Apostle Paul: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). If the target audience of Hebrews included Jewish Believers living in Rome, then they should have already heard this word, and our author is only emphasizing something that Paul has already told them. When a person becomes a son or daughter of God via adoption through faith in Yeshua, he or she should not be prone to having a hardened heart against the Lord.

4:8 Had the Ancient Israelites fully entered into God's complete rest in the Promised Land, then "God would not have spoken later about another day" (NIV). Some Christian laypersons have interpreted these words to conclude that God would later supplant the seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday Church, but in the context of our author's argument this is nowhere close to his line of reasoning. He is speaking of the holistic rest that is typified by the weekly *Shabbat* for sure, but is only found in a person with a pure heart in right standing with the Lord. This rest is being able to stop one's labors, and be in the complete care of the Father, in communion with Him.

The author of Hebrews writes that Joshua was unable to give the Ancient Israelites this rest. What is important to understand is that to a person reading this letter, or hearing it read aloud as a sermon or speech, is that there is no distinction in the Greek between "Joshua" and "Yeshua." (In fact, the title of the Book of Joshua in the LXX is *Iēsous*, ΙΕΣΟΥΣ.)³² The text would be read aloud as *ei gar*

³² This is definitive proof against the errant and blasphemous claim that the Greek *Iēsous*, from which the English name "Jesus" is derived, actually comes from "Zeus" or from paganism. The Septuagint was the first Bible translation ever produced, translated by the Jewish Rabbis for Jews living in the Diaspora, and its Jewish translators coined the form *Iēsous*, the transliteration used for the names *Yehoshua* and *Yeshua*. *Iēsous*, contrary to what some people in the Messianic movement may think, is a

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autous Iēsous katepausen (εἰ γὰρ αὐτοὺς Ἰησοῦς κατέπαυσεν),³³ actually rendered in the KJV as “For if Jesus had given them rest.” Joshua, the successor of Moses, is often regarded as a figure who prefigured much of the ministry actions of Messiah Yeshua—but Joshua was notably not able to subdue the whole Promised Land, as the Tanach record attests:

“Now Joshua was old *and* advanced in years when the LORD said to him, ‘You are old *and* advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed. This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all *those* of the Geshurites” (Joshua 13:1-2).

Joshua, while bringing *some of the rest* that God had promised Israel in its Land, had not brought it in its entirety. The Lord tells Joshua near the time of his death, “there are still very large areas of land to be taken over” (NRSV). The complete rest, however—and all that it entails—to be experienced, is now available in Messiah Yeshua. Individuals can partake of it now on Earth, and experience the fullness of it at the consummation of His Kingdom.

The author writes, as it appears in the NLT, “God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come,” and the Common English Bible, “God wouldn’t have spoken about another day later on.” Is this, as some might conclude, some kind of “Sunday Church” or “Sunday Sabbath”? No. The author of Hebrews is using the term “day,” the Greek *hēmera* (ἡμέρα), as being synonymous to “time.” *BDAG* notes how *hēmera* can indeed be “an extended period, *time* (like [the Hebrew] יוֹם [yom]...),”³⁴ with the CJB actually having, “God would not have spoken later of another ‘day,’” with “day” being placed in quotation marks. Such an other day is rightfully concluded to be the proper entry into God’s rest, which is first detailed in Genesis 2:2 (v. 4). As Guthrie indicates,

“He argues, on the basis of God speaking of *another day*, that the day of Joshua’s action could not have been the fulfillment of the promise...[W]hat Joshua did had a merely transitory importance compared with the unchanging creation rest of God. Indeed, God’s idea of ‘rest’ is wholly different from man’s idea and the writer here uses the psalmist’s words to turn his readers’ minds towards a spiritual idea, the kind which can truly be called God’s rest.”³⁵

What is ironic, is that some laypersons, in trying to argue against the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath, often overlook an argument which is very much in favor of Believers honoring a remaining *Shabbat* memorial of what is to come.

4:9 Even though Joshua was unable to lead Ancient Israel into the complete rest that God intends for His people, our author says *ara apoleipetai sabbatismos tō laō tou Theou* (ἄρα ἀπολείπεται σαββατισμὸς τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ), “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (NASU), or “there doth remain, then, a sabbatic rest to the people of God” (YLT).

A wide number of those, from the Reformed Protestant tradition, have taken the assertion of Hebrews 4:9 to symbolize the Christian Sunday being a “new

name of Jewish origin. In fact, the names *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) and *Zeus* (Ζεὺς) or “Zeus” have two totally different spellings and pronunciations in Greek. For a further examination of this issue, consult the article “Sacred Name Concerns” by J.K. McKee.

³³ UBSHNT makes a distinction between *Yeshua* (ישוע) and *Yehoshua* (יהושוע), rendering v. 8 as *ilu he'b'yam Yehoshua al-ha'menuchah* (אִלּוּ הַבִּיאָם יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל-הַמְנוּחָה).

³⁴ *BDAG*, 438.

³⁵ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 115.

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Sabbath.”³⁶ Others have taken Hebrews 4:9 in the direction of it representing a “Sabbath rest” that is entirely spiritual and allegorical. And still, others have taken Hebrews 4:9 to highlight some definite physical actions to be appreciated on the part of God’s people—such as actually taking a Sabbath rest—so they might better understand future Kingdom realities.

Hebrews 4:9 is the only place in the Apostolic Scriptures where the term *sabbatismos* (σαββατισμός) is used, as the normal word for “rest” is *katapausis*. This term is derived from the verb *sabbatizō* (σαββατίζω), used in the LXX meaning, “to keep the Sabbath” (LS).³⁷ TDNT draws the conclusion that “This Sabbath rest (*sabbatismós*) which remains for God’s people will be the perfect sabbath of heavenly blessing toward which the pilgrim community is moving and which will mean cessation from its own labors.”³⁸ And indeed, in Jewish literature such as the Mishnah, one sees the significant sentiment expressed, regarding Psalm 92 (addressed previously), “On the Sabbath day they did sing, *A Psalm, A song for the Sabbath day* (Ps. 92)—A psalm, a song for the world that is to come, for the day which is wholly Sabbath rest for eternity” (m.*Tamid* 7:4).³⁹

In a resource like BDAG, *sabbatismos* is defined as, “sabbath *rest, sabbath observance* fig. Hb 4:9 a special period of rest for God’s people modeled after the traditional sabbath.”⁴⁰ LS has, “a *keeping of days of rest*, N.T.”⁴¹ Mounce and Mounce defines it with, “a *keeping of a sabbath; a state of rest, a sabbath-state*.”⁴² But what is most intriguing, about the term *sabbatismos*, is how various Hebrews commentaries have approached this term:

- F.F. Bruce: “This rest which is reserved for the people of God is properly called a ‘sabbath rest’—a *sabbatismos* or ‘sabbath keeping’—because it is their participation in God’s own rest...What then is this sabbath rest which awaits them? It is evidently an experience which they 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.”⁴³
- William L. Lane: “The term σαββατισμός [*sabbatismos*] appears to have been coined from the cognate verb σαββατίζειν [*sabbatizein*], ‘to observe/to celebrate the Sabbath.’ In its only occurrence in non-Christian literature (Plutarch, *Concerning Superstition* 3 [Moralia 166 A]), the term signifies Sabbath observance. In four other documents from the patristic period that are independent of Heb 4:9, the term denotes the celebration or festivity of the Sabbath (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 23.3; Epiphanius, *Against All Heresies* 30.2.2; *The Martyrdom of Peter and Paul*, chap. 1; *Apost. Const.*

³⁶ Cf. Joseph A. Pipa, “The Christian Sabbath,” in Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), pp 156-158.

³⁷ LS, 722.

Cf. Exodus 16:30; Leviticus 23:32; 26:34-35; 2 Chronicles 26:21 (LXX).

³⁸ E. Lohse, “the Sabbath,” in TDNT, 992.

³⁹ Neusner, *Mishnah*, pp 872-873.

⁴⁰ BDAG, 909.

⁴¹ LS, 722.

⁴² William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 2011), 1158.

⁴³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp 109, 110.

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2.36.2; discussed by Hofius, *Katapausis* 103-6). The term received its particular nuance from the Sabbath instruction that developed in Judaism on the basis of Exod 20:8-10, where it was emphasized that rest and praise belong together (cf. 2 Macc 8:27; *Jub.* 40:8; Ps-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 11.8). The term σαββατισμός [*sabbatismos*] stresses the special aspect of festivity and joy, expressed in the adoration and praise of God...In v 9 this nuance defines the character of the promised rest awaiting the people of God in the consummation."⁴⁴

- Peter T. O'Brien: "The noun *sabbatismos* is derived from the verb *sabbatizō*, which means 'to observe or celebrate the sabbath'. The term does not refer to a 'sabbath day' as such, but to the 'sabbath observance' or 'sabbath celebration', in context that have to do with both rest and festivity...*Sabbatismos* stresses festivity and joy, expressed in worship and praise of God, and is in line with Hebrews' picture of the future 'festive gathering' (12:22) in the heavenly Jerusalem."⁴⁵

The term *sabbatismos* does legitimately derive from *sabbatizō*, "to keep the Sabbath." Questions are naturally posited regarding how a redeemed Believer can experience or participate in future, grand realities of the "Sabbath rest" which will culminate in the Second Coming, Messianic Age, and eventually the Eternal State—and how it relates to the weekly Sabbath. The *sabbatismos* to be experienced by God's people is properly oriented toward the future realities of the Kingdom to come, although much of it can be indeed experienced by God's people now.

How one should approach v. 9 has been a cause of great discussion among Christian examiners, but even more so for many in the Messianic community. On the one hand there is a strong sense of realized eschatology here, which we see later exemplified in Revelation 14:13: "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" Ellingworth indicates that "σαββατισμός [*sabbatismos*] is not contrasted with κατάπαυσις [*katapausis*], and the main distinction between them appears to be that they denote respectively temporal and spatial aspects of the same reality."⁴⁶ The author of Hebrews is rightfully concluded as emphasizing to his audience that there is a *greater Sabbath rest* than solely keeping the weekly *Shabbat*. This is a Sabbath rest that will only be fully realized in eternity.

The challenge, with properly applying our author's words, is the unfortunate fact that many contemporary Christians have thought that the Sabbath experience is something that is to be exclusively found passively, and not at all by keeping a weekly Sabbath in some active manner (and even if a bit misplaced, even on Sunday). Yet, can the redeemed really hope to understand the eternal rest in God's Kingdom, unless they understand the principle of taking one day out of the week, and rest for a time that God has decreed to be holy and sanctified? David H. Stern usefully remarks that "The usual translation 'There remains a Sabbath rest,'

⁴⁴ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:101-102.

⁴⁵ O'Brien, *Hebrews*, pp 170, 171.

⁴⁶ Ellingworth, 255.

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minimizes the observance aspect and makes the role of God's people entirely passive."⁴⁷ Stern's CJB has rendered v. 9 with, "So there remains a *Shabbat*-keeping for God's people."⁴⁸ The rendering offered by Lane in *WBC* also has the appreciable, "Consequently, there remains a Sabbath celebration for the people of God."⁴⁹ **The main point to be taken from the term *sabbatismos* is to recognize that there is a Sabbath keeping dynamic to Sabbath rest.**

If God's people can make a commitment to keep the weekly Sabbath, then they can be better primed to understand all of the dimensions of the future, eschatological rest that He has promised. The essence or substance of the Sabbath is to be found in Messiah Yeshua (Colossians 2:16-17), and is realized in Believers' right relationship to God in Him, as opposed to meticulous rule-keeping. A mature follower of Yeshua should be able to balance the weekly *Shabbat* and its requirements, and greatly appreciate the promised rest and blessings that are to come in God's restored Kingdom. This "*Shabbat*-keeping" (CJB) is to be more than just keeping a commandment of God; it is to be a celebration of all the things He has done for us *and will do for us* in the future!

The author of Hebrews is hardly a figure who should be regarded as anti-Sabbath. But what the author of Hebrews undeniably is, is *pro-rest*—with *all of the major dimensions* of God's rest for His people in focus. Hegg's conclusions on the multiple components of rest to be considered, should be very well taken:

"[T]he rest which was promised to Israel and which they experienced once having entered the Land, was not the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise. It was, rather a forshadow and illustration of the eternal rest which the redeemed people of God would have in the world to come—that world that will be fully restored through God's redeeming power. Moreover, this promised rest is both spiritual and physical (for the two cannot be finally separated), and this is experienced in part now by those who place their faith in Yeshua and will be experienced in fullness in eternity. Thus, 'there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,' envisions what we now enjoy in part and what we will experience fully when we enter into the eternal Sabbath—the world to come which never ends.

"Thus, the phrase 'So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God' considers the weekly Shabbat as the continuing revelation of God to His people of that eternal rest which He promises to those who, by faith, lay hold of the salvation which Yeshua has procured for His people. The attempt of many Christian commentators to prove via our text that the author of Hebrews has transformed the Shabbat from a weekly observance into a non-time oriented 'spiritual Sabbath' is to miss entirely the point of this text. While surely our author's focus is on a much larger scope than only the observance of the weekly Shabbat, there is no sense whatsoever that he has thought to change or in some measure redefine the Torah's Sabbath commandment, which requires one to cease from their ordinary work on Shabbat and to sanctify it as distinct from the other six days of work. Nor is there any suggestion in our text that the author has diminished the necessity to obey the fourth commandment in observing the seventh day of the week as a Shabbat unto Adonai."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 673.

⁴⁸ The TLV has the more standard, "So there remains a *Shabbat* rest for the people of God."

⁴⁹ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:93.

⁵⁰ Hegg, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter 4*.

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4:10 Anyone who “enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his” (RSV). An excellent place where Believers can start experiencing such rest, does not just involve partaking of Yeshua’s salvation—but also by appreciating the weekly Sabbath. By abstaining from their work, God’s people can enter into a special one-on-one time with their Creator. Guthrie summarizes what Messiah followers need to be focusing their attention upon, quite well:

“God’s people share his rest. What he did, they do. By becoming identified with him, they enter into his experiences. There is no doubt that the writer is implying that the believer’s present sabbath rest is as much a reality as God’s rest.”⁵¹

Hebrews 4:1-10 application The author of Hebrews has a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted view of God’s rest—which he did not want any of his audience to see forfeiting, by possibly abandoning the Messiah: “Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience” (4:11). The Exodus generation did not enter into the Promised Land, because of its lack of faith. To give up on Yeshua the Messiah, is to give up on the eschatological rest promised to those who will enter into the restored Kingdom of God.

Not enough Christian leaders and teachers today have addressed the issue of Divine rest, especially as it should be something that each one of us quantitatively partakes of on a weekly basis. If any contemporary evangelical pastors do teach about Divine rest, most will focus only on the spiritual, or eschatological aspects of rest in the Millennial Kingdom and eternity. As Messianic Believers, we have to learn to balance the current and futuristic aspects of God’s rest in our personal and corporate theology. The examples we see throughout the Tanach is that God’s rest is realized when His people are in their own Promised Land with Him present among them. This is obviously complicated today, given the dispersment of the Jewish people in the world—no different than it was in the First Century—and is something that can only be really solved subsequent to the Second Coming.

God’s rest is surely available to those who do indeed know the salvation available in His Son. But, God’s rest is also surely accessible to individuals who keep His *Shabbat* holy. And, we are to never forget how there is also the end-time hope of a rest when Yeshua the Messiah rules over Planet Earth.

As today’s Messianic movement grows and expands—and many more people, Jewish and non-Jewish, are witnessed observing the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat* together—we will require a better handle on recognizing how various examiners have approached Hebrews 4:1-10 and its emphasis on Believers having a Sabbath rest (v. 9). In his resource *Hebrews for Everyone*, N.T. Wright, while widely believing that the Torah’s seventh-day Sabbath was for past history, does still think that the principle of one-day-in-seven is important for Believers today:

“By the time of Jesus, the parts of the Mosaic law which dealt with **sabbath** observance had become such a tightly drawn legal system that people were forgetting their purpose, which was to help people by giving them rest, not to add burdens to them by forbidding things like healing. Jesus had to break through all that, as we see in the **gospels**. But nowhere does the New Testament deny that the principle set out in Genesis 1 remains important: a day of rest once a week, corresponding to God’s day of rest at the end of creation.”⁵²

⁵¹ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 116.

⁵² N.T. Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 35.

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Wright's statements are to be appreciated on the level of recognizing how many of his academic peers, think that even the principle of one-day-in-seven is to be dismissed.

A somewhat allegorical view of what Believers' Sabbath rest is to involve, but one that is not at all demeaning of physical rest, is summarized by Louis H. Evans, Jr., broadly approaching this from his Presbyterian tradition:

"The theme of obedience and rest is important to us today in our hectic and demanding lifestyles. God's plan for accomplishing His design is that leaders are to assist other saints in the discovery, development, and deployment of their abilities and gifts of the Spirit. If this is not done, pastoral leaders carry tremendous burdens as did Moses in Exodus 18 and Numbers 11. On Jethro's counsel, however, Moses altered his leadership style and shared the mountainous responsibilities with his selected elders from all the tribes. They bore the burden with him. These elders were recognized for their strengths of honoring God, of being trustworthy, capable, and above taking bribes. In obeying God's counsel through Jethro, Moses and the people went to their places in peace, a symbol of the rest promised to God's people, who do things His way. When we leaders fail to honor God's created strengths in others, holding all the responsibility to ourselves, we sacrifice the peace and suffer the loss of rest. In that circumstance there is no cessation of labor. Relentless demands grind us down until our physical strength turns to wind-blown powder, our emotions are flighty as a frightened bird, and our spiritual enthusiasm lies as a crumpled cloak damp with the dew of discouragement.

"Those who find the rest of God are those who discover the strategy of God, submit to His timing for events, and appropriate the resources God provides, refusing to fall to the temptation of distrusting or judging the capabilities of others. The job gets done; we can put down the tools; we can enjoy the sabbath rest."⁵³

Evans' statements speak to how teachers, leaders, pastors, rabbis, etc. in the Body of Messiah do incur a wide amount of strain, given the demands of their position. There is a necessary delegation of responsibilities to others, so that no one person gets unnecessarily overloaded. What I personally appreciate, about what Evans has drawn attention to, is a principle that I learned in my Exegesis of Exodus class at Asbury Theological Seminary (Fall 2007), when our class discussed the Ten Commandments, and got to the Fourth Commandment. Rather than debate whether or not the Sabbath was changed to Sunday, or abolished—our instructor instead focused on how those in our class would be going into full-time ministry, **and how each of us would need to learn to "draw our borders."** We would each have to gauge what our strengths and weaknesses would be for ministry service, and as such would need to learn to fight for *our free time*. For, it is in such free time, that those who serve as teachers, leaders, pastors, or rabbis **get to experience physical rest, refreshment, and decompression**. If we do not draw our borders, then there are legitimate fears of being overworked, exhausted, burned out—and even the onset of significant health problems involving heart attacks and strokes.

More frequently than not, Hebrews 4:1-10 has been approached by contemporary evangelical Christians as depicting *an entirely spiritual* condition,

⁵³ Louis H. Evans, Jr., *The Preacher's Commentary: Hebrews*, Vol 33 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 103.

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which the redeemed are either experiencing now, or will experience in the future. Lane, commenting on v. 11, is not entirely incorrect in saying, “The Sabbath observance now demanded of the community is diligence to enter God’s rest through the exercise of faith in the word of promise and the response of obedience to the voice of God in Scripture.”⁵⁴ Lane’s issue is not that God’s own are to strive to enter into the future rest found in His coming Kingdom; Lane’s issue is that he defines Sabbath rest as something widely removed from the institution of the Sabbath. Ben Witherington III is more forthright in his conclusion that the apparent “Sabbath rest” God’s own are to experience, is something entirely removed from the institution of the seventh-day Sabbath, which has now been supplanted by a first day of the week “Lord’s Day” commemoration (discussed further):

“Dead works [6:1] are those that do not but might be thought to contribute to our salvation. Our author does not talk about works righteousness, as does Paul, and justification by faith is not a big issue in our homily. Our author is concerned with pointless works, not works righteousness. It may be that the Jewish Christian audience assumed that by some particular Jewish form of sabbath observance they might enhance their chance to enter the rest of God. Our author would seem to deny this. As far as we can tell, the church very early on assumed the practice of observing a new special day for Christ—the Lord’s Day, celebrating the resurrection (Rev 1:10). Thus it is unlikely that our author is saying that even Jewish Christians have now a rest by keeping the sabbath. More likely what he means is that the audience has a rest here and now by living by faith in Christ and ceasing from dead works. Like God, they are to cease from works that no longer need to be undertaken.”⁵⁵

From this perspective, any attempt by God’s people today—especially Messianic Jewish Believers—to observe the seventh-day Sabbath could not be regarded as “redundant works,” but instead would be classified as “pointless works” at best, but more likely “dead works.” The Sabbath rest of Believers is to just live by some sort of faith, and in the process actually dismiss the institution of the Sabbath. Another way of approaching this would be that by God’s people dismissing a weekly Sabbath rest, they will actually be found looking forward to God’s future Kingdom likened unto an everlasting Sabbath. *Such logic is frequently confounding...*

Stern has a much fairer approach in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, appropriately concluding that Hebrews 4:9 is not dismissive of the institution of the Sabbath, and also drawing out how the *sabbatismos* of God’s people does involve their exercise of faith and trust in the Messiah:

“Christians often assume that the New Testament does not require God’s people to observe *Shabbat* and go on to claim that Sunday has replaced Saturday as the Church’s day of worship...But this passage, and in particular v. 9, shows that *Shabbat*-observance is expected of believers. From Co 2:16-17, which says that *Shabbat* was a shadow of the things that were to come, but the substance comes from the Messiah, we learn that the essence of *Shabbat*-observance for believers is not following the detailed rules which *halakhah* sets forth concerning what may or

⁵⁴ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:102.

⁵⁵ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 182.

Hebrews 4:1-10 Sabbath and Rest in the Apostolic Scriptures

may not be done on the seventh day of the week. Rather, as v. 10 explains, the *Shabbat-keeping* expected of God's people consists in trusting and being faithful to God (vv. 2-3).⁵⁶

One of the most interesting and surprising places where the Sabbath institution is lauded from Hebrews 4:9, is in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* entry on "Sabbath" by Gerhard F. Hasel. While it is uncertain whether this writer makes reference to the seventh-day Sabbath as something still of value for God's people, or some kind of new "Sunday Sabbath," the multi-dimensional approach he takes is what should really grab our attention. Physical Sabbath rest is asserted to be an appropriate, outward sign, of the internal rest that Believers experience via knowing the Messiah, as they look forward to the future rest to culminate in the eschaton:

"Hebrews 4:9 states, 'There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.'...The author of Hebrews affirms in Heb 4:3-11, through the joining of quotations from Gen 2:2 and Ps 95:7, that the promised 'sabbath rest' still anticipates a complete realization 'for the people of God' in the eschatological end-time which had been inaugurated with the appearance of Jesus (1:1-3). 'Sabbath rest' within this context is not equated with a future, post-eschaton sabbath celebration in the heavenly sanctuary; it is likewise not experienced in the rest that comes in death. The experience of 'sabbath rest' points to a *present* 'rest' (*katapausis*) reality in which those 'who have believed are entering' (4:3) and its points to a *future* 'rest' reality (4:11). Physical sabbath-keeping on the part of the new covenant believer as affirmed by 'sabbath rest' epitomizes cessation from 'works' (4:10) in commemoration of God's rest in commemoration of God's rest at creation (4:4=Gen 2:2) and manifests faith in the salvation provided by Christ. Heb 4:3-11 affirms that physical 'sabbath rest' (*sabbatismos*) is the weekly outward manifestation of the inner experience of spiritual rest (*katapausis*) in which the final eschatological rest is proleptically experienced already 'today' (4:7). Thus 'sabbath rest' combines in itself creation-commemoration, salvation-experience, and eschaton-anticipation as the community of faith moves toward the final consummation of total restoration and rest."⁵⁷

Hebrews 4:1-10 is a critical text for today's Messianic Believers who want to properly honor the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*—in all of its important facets. The seventh-day Sabbath, for sure, affords God's people the opportunity to physically rest, and to a degree experience the rest that God Himself enjoys (4:3b-4, 10). In order to finally enter into this rest—which will only come at the arrival of the future Kingdom of God in eternity—we must each heed the lessons of the past, when the Exodus generation failed to have faith to enter into the Promised Land (4:1-2, 5-6). We have the responsibility to persevere in our Messiah faith, as He is the One who brings rest from the guilt of sin. Most overlooked, by too many of our fellow Christian brothers and sisters, is how by observing the weekly Sabbath or *Shabbat*, we indeed get to capture a small part of the greater Sabbath to come to the redeemed in eternity!

⁵⁶ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 673.

⁵⁷ Gerhard F. Hasel, "Sabbath," in *ABD*, 5:855-856.