Jesus, the Giver of Rest

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 15:13–21; Heb. 3:12–19; Heb. 4:6–11; Heb. 4:1, 3, 5, 10; Deut. 5:12–15; Heb. 4:8–11.

Memory Text: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9, NKJV).

Hebrews 1 and 2 focused on the enthronement of Jesus as the Ruler and Liberator of God’s people. Hebrews 3 and 4 introduce Jesus as the One who will provide rest for us. This progression makes sense once we remember that the Davidic covenant promised that God would give the promised king and his people “rest” from their enemies (2 Sam. 7:10, 11). This rest is available to us now that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.

Hebrews describes the rest both as a rest that belongs to God and as a Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:1–11). God made this rest, which was His, available to Adam and Eve. The first Sabbath was the experience of perfection with the One who made that perfection possible. God also promises a Sabbath rest because true Sabbath observance embodies the promise that God will bring that perfection back.

When we keep the Sabbath, we remember that God made perfect provision for us when He created the world and when He redeemed it at the cross. True Sabbath observance, however, besides first and foremost pointing us back to Creation, offers us a foretaste, in this imperfect world, of the future that God has promised.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 29.
The Land as a Place of Rest

Read Genesis 15:13–21. What did God promise Abraham?

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

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

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

Read Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. What two things does the Sabbath rest commemorate, and how are they related?

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

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

Read Hebrews 3:12–19. Why was Israel unable to enter into the promised rest?

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

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

God promises His children gifts that are beyond human reach. That is why they are based on grace and are accessible only through faith. Hebrews 4:2 explains that the promise Israel received “was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed” (Heb. 4:2, NIV).

Israel traveled to the borders of the Promised Land as a people. When the people were faced with contradictory reports, they identified with those who lacked faith. Faith, or lack of it, is contagious. That is why Hebrews admonishes its readers to “exhort one another” (Heb. 3:13), “to stir up one another to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24, ESV), and to “see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God” (Heb. 12:15, ESV).

In what ways can you help build the faith of fellow believers? How can you make sure that you never say or do anything that could weaken another’s faith?
The unbelieving of the desert generation prevented them from entering into the rest God promised. But God kept urging His people to enter this rest and not to harden their hearts. Paul repeats several times that God’s promise “remains” (Heb. 4:1, 6, 9, NKJV). He uses the Greek verbs kātaleipō and apoleipō, emphasizing that “the promise of entering his [God's] rest still stands” (Heb. 4:1, ESV). The fact that the invitation to enter this rest was repeated in the time of David (Heb. 4:6, 7, referring to Psalm 95) implied both that the promise had not been claimed and that it was still available. In fact, Paul suggests that the experience of true Sabbath rest has been available since the time of Creation (Heb. 4:3, 4).

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

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

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

**What spiritual decisions must you make “today,” that is, not put off for another time? What have been your past experiences when you have delayed doing what you knew God would have you do right away?**
Entering Into *His* Rest

**Read** Hebrews 3:11 and Hebrews 4:1, 3, 5, 10. How does God characterize the rest He invites us to enter?

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

**Read** Hebrews 4:9–11, 16. What are we called to do?

The Sabbath rest celebrates the fact that God ended, or finished, His work of Creation (*Gen. 2:1–3, Exod. 20:8–11*) or Redemption (*Deut. 5:12–15*). Similarly, Jesus’ enthronement in the heavenly temple celebrates that He finished offering a perfect sacrifice for our salvation (*Heb. 10:12–14*).

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

*How can we enter into His rest even now? That is, how can we, by faith, rest in the assurance of the salvation that we have in Christ, and not in ourselves?*
A Foretaste of New Creation

**Compare** Exodus 20:8–11, Deuteronomy 5:12–15, and Hebrews 4:8–11. What differences do you find regarding the meaning of the Sabbath rest?

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

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

This has always been clear in Jewish tradition. Life of Adam and Eve (in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, [New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1985], p. 18), a work composed between 100 B.C. and A.D. 200, said: “The seventh day is a sign of the resurrection, the rest of the coming age.” Another ancient Jewish source said: The coming age is “the day which is wholly Sabbath rest for eternity.”—Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah, A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 873. *The Othiot of Rabbi Akiba*, a later source, said: “Israel said before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, “Master of the World, if we observe the commandments, what reward will we have?” He said to them: “The world-to-come.” They said to Him: “Show us its likeness.” He showed them the Sabbath.’”—Theodore Friedman, “The Sabbath Anticipation of Redemption,” *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal*, vol. 16, pp. 443, 444.

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

2. What is the difference between true observance of the Sabbath and a legalistic observance of the Sabbath? How can we not only know the difference but also experience that difference in our own Sabbath observance?
Finding Peace
By Andrew McChesney

It was the worst day of Yeans’s life.
The witch doctor approached him in their village in southern Laos and announced that he was going to die.
“And there is no one who can help you,” the witch doctor said solemnly.
Yean was scared. People in his village believed that the witch doctor always spoke the truth. He could not lie.
Yean did not want to die. He was so frightened that he could not eat or sleep.
Soon his wife noticed that something was terribly wrong.
“What happened?” she asked.
Yean told her about his encounter with the witch doctor.
“I am going to die,” he said.
He didn’t know what to do. His wife didn’t know what to do.
Then he heard about a small group of Christians who gathered on Saturdays to worship. He had never been inside a Christian church, but he decided to find out whether the Christians could ask their God to help him.
Next Sabbath, Yean and his wife showed up at the Seventh-day Adventist church. He told the church members about the witch doctor and his fear of dying.
After listening, the members told him about Jesus. They said Jesus had the power not only to save him from the witch doctor’s prediction of death but also to offer him eternal life. In their Bibles was the promise: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, NKJV).
Yean was overjoyed when he heard about Jesus! He could claim the peace that only Jesus offers: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27, NKJV).
When he left the church, he was so happy that he could not keep the good news to himself. He eagerly shared the peace that Jesus had given him with other villagers. He walked home with a big smile on his face. It was the best day of his life!
Today, Yean is alive and well, and he is attending the church where he first found Jesus.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel to people in Laos and other countries of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, which will receive this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.
This mission story illustrates Mission Objective Number 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach... among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions.” Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.
Part I: Overview

Key Texts: Gen. 15:13–21; Heb. 3:12–19; Heb. 4:6–11; Heb. 4:1, 3, 5, 10; Deut. 5:1–3; Heb. 4:8–11.

Lesson Themes: The Davidic covenant promised rest to the enthroned king and his people. The logical progression of Hebrews concurs with this notion. In Hebrews 1 and 2, we see the preeminence of Christ as divine Ruler and Deliverer of His people. Hebrews 3 and 4 show Jesus’ superiority to Moses and Joshua as the divine Leader who provides rest. Sabbath rest in the Old Testament is portrayed in two versions of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). The former text stresses Creation, the latter Redemption. In Hebrews 3 and 4, Paul uses the Exodus generation (not their young children) as an example of unbelief and disobedience (Heb. 3:19) to show the detrimental consequence of being unable to enter into the land of rest in Canaan. Turning to his audience, Paul exhorts them with a quote from Psalm 95: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 4:7, NRSV), but, rather, enter into His rest (Heb. 4:9). What is this rest (in Greek, sabbatismos) that Paul speaks of? Why is Paul encouraging his audience to enter into it? These are the questions we shall address now.

Part II: Commentary

A Sabbath Observance Remains: Let us begin first by defining the “rest” of Hebrews 4:9. According to The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, the word rendered as “rest” in Hebrews 4:9 comes from the Greek sabbatismos, meaning “a resting [from previous activity],” which in later use comes to mean “a Sabbathkeeping,” from the verb sabbatizō, “to rest,” “to cease,” “to keep the Sabbath.”

“Sabbatizō is used seven times in the LXX [the Septuagint, the Jews’ Greek translation of the Old Testament], once of the literal seventh-day Sabbath (Ex. 16:30), once of other sabbaths (Lev. 23:32), and five times of the land’s resting in the sabbatical year (Lev. 26:34, 35; 2 Chron. 36:21). . . . Accordingly, the fundamental idea expressed by sabbatizō in the LXX is that of resting or ceasing from labor or other activity. Hence usage of the related Greek and Hebrew words implies that the noun sabbatismos may denote either the literal Sabbath ‘rest’ or simply ‘rest’ or ‘cessation’ in a more general sense. Thus, a linguistic study of the word sabbatismos in Heb. 4:9 leaves it uncertain whether the weekly Sabbath ‘rest’ is here referred to, or simply ‘rest’
or ‘cessation’ in a general sense. Context alone can decide the matter.

“The writer of Hebrews appears to use katapausis ['“ceasing from labor”'; see on Hebrews 3:11] and sabbatismos more or less synonymously:

“1. Because Joshua could not lead Israel into spiritual ‘rest’ (katapausis, v. 8), a sabbatismos (v. 9) remains for Christians. Consistency seems to require that what remains be the same as what was there to begin with. . . .

“2. From vs. 1, 6 it is clear that what remains for the people of God in NT times is a katapausis; in v. 9 it is said that a sabbatismos remains. To declare that what remains for ‘the people of God’ is the weekly Sabbath, is to declare that what Joshua failed to lead Israel into was the weekly Sabbath.

“3. The fact that in the LXX, the Bible of the NT church, katapauō (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 20:11) and sabbatizo (Ex. 16:30; Lev. 23:32) are used interchangeably to denote the seventh-day Sabbath, would tend to preclude the suggestion that the writer of Hebrews intended to make a distinction between the noun forms of these words in Heb. 3; 4.

“It may be noted, further, that the Jews of Paul’s time, whether Christian or non-Christian, were punctilious in their observance of the fourth commandment. Certainly, in writing to Jews, the author of Hebrews would not consider it necessary to prove to them that Sabbathkeeping ‘remaineth.’ If the conclusion of the extended argument beginning with ch. 3:7 is that Sabbathkeeping remains for the people of God, it would seem that the writer of Hebrews is guilty of a non sequitur, for the conclusion does not follow logically from the argument. There would have been no point in so labored an effort to persuade the Jews to do what they already were doing—observing the seventh-day Sabbath. Furthermore, in apostolic times the seventh-day Sabbath was observed by all Christians, Jew and Gentile alike, and any argument to prove the validity of the Sabbath in those early Christian times would have been pointless. Furthermore, it may be observed that the section of the book of Hebrews consisting of chs. 3 and 4 opens with an invitation to ‘consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus’ (ch. 3:1), and closes with an earnest plea to ‘come boldly’ before Him in order to ‘obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need’ (ch. 4:16). What relationship a protracted argument designed to prove that Sabbath observance remains as an obligation to the Christian church might have to the declared theme of chs. 3 and 4—the ministry of Christ as our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary—is obscure indeed.

“ ‘The rest here spoken of is the rest of grace’ (EGW Supplementary Material on Heb. 4:9; cf. GC 253). It is ‘the true rest of faith’ (MB 1).

“We enter into God’s ‘rest’ when we ‘consider’ Jesus (ch. 3:1) and listen to His voice (chs. 3:7, 15; 4:7), when we exercise faith in Him
(ch. 4:2, 3), when we cease from our own efforts to earn salvation (v. 10), when we ‘hold fast our profession’ (v. 14), and when we draw near to the throne of grace (v. 16). Those who would enter into this experience must beware of ‘an evil heart of unbelief’ (ch. 3:12), of hardening their hearts (chs. 3:8, 15; 4:7). They must strive to enter into God’s ‘rest’ (ch. 4:11).

“Those who enter into God’s ‘rest’ will ‘hold fast’ their ‘profession’ (v. 14). They will ‘come boldly unto the throne of grace’ to ‘obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need’ (v. 16).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 422, 423, comment on “Rest” in Hebrews 4:9.

On the rest spoken of in Hebrews 4:9, Ellen G. White frames the discussion in a sketch of the life of the great English Reformer, John Wesley: “In a day of great spiritual darkness, Whitefield and the Wesleys appeared as light bearers for God. Under the rule of the established church the people of England had lapsed into a state of religious declension hardly to be distinguished from heathenism. Natural religion was the favorite study of the clergy, and included most of their theology. The higher classes sneered at piety, and prided themselves on being above what they called its fanaticism. The lower classes were grossly ignorant and abandoned to vice, while the church had no courage or faith any longer to support the downfallen cause of truth.

“The great doctrine of justification by faith, so clearly taught by Luther, had been almost wholly lost sight of; and the Romish principle of trusting to good works for salvation, had taken its place. Whitefield and the Wesleys, who were members of the established church, were sincere seekers for the favor of God, and this they had been taught was to be secured by a virtuous life and an observance of the ordinances of religion. . . .

“Wesley and his associates were led to see that true religion is seated in the heart, and that God’s law extends to the thoughts as well as to the words and actions. Convinced of the necessity of holiness of heart, as well as correctness of outward deportment, they set out in earnest upon a new life. By the most diligent and prayerful efforts they endeavored to subdue the evils of the natural heart. They lived a life of self-denial, charity, and humiliation, observing with great rigor and exactness every measure which they thought could be helpful to them in obtaining what they most desired—that holiness which could secure the favor of God. But they did not obtain the object which they sought. In vain were their endeavors to free themselves from the condemnation of sin or to break its power. It was the same struggle which Luther had experienced in his cell at Erfurt. It was the same question which had
tortured his soul—‘How should man be just before God?’ Job 9:2. . . .

“Wesley, under the instruction of a Moravian preacher, arrived at a clearer understanding of Bible faith. He was convinced that he must renounce all dependence upon his own works for salvation and must trust wholly to ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ At a meeting of the Moravian society in London a statement was read from Luther, describing the change which the Spirit of God works in the heart of the believer. As Wesley listened, faith was kindled in his soul. . . . ‘I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.’ . . .

‘Through long years of wearisome and comfortless striving—years of rigorous self-denial, of reproach and humiliation—Wesley had steadfastly adhered to his one purpose of seeking God. Now he had found Him; and he found that the grace which he had toiled to win by prayers and fasts, by almsdeeds and self-abnegation, was a gift, ‘without money and without price.’”—The Great Controversy, pp. 253–256.

**Part III: Life Application**

**Thought Questions:**

1. How does the story of John Wesley illustrate the difference between resting solely in Christ’s merits and the futility of trusting in our own works to save us?

2. What is the rest in Hebrews 4:9 that remains for Christians?
3. Ellen G. White avers (declares) that the rest that Paul speaks of in Hebrews 4:9 is the rest of grace. How do we enter into this rest of grace?

Notes
Help us reach the 66% of the world’s population who are still waiting to experience the refreshing news about Jesus.

Your ongoing support of Mission Offerings will help change lives.

To ensure the mission river never runs dry, please write in “World Mission Offering” on your tithe envelope or visit Giving.AdventistMission.org.
A girl prays, and a raging fire goes out in Laos. Another girl prays, and her faith grows strong despite personal tragedy in Thailand. A man prays, and he has an unusual dream in Timor-Leste. What do they have in common? They are united by love for Christ and His mission in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, which will receive this quarter’s Thirteen Sabbath Offering.


Thank you for supporting Adventist Mission with your prayers and Sabbath School mission offerings.