

Have We Entered Our Rest?

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The Bible speaks of a rest for the people of God. What is that rest? Have Christians already entered into the rest?

One of the reasons it's important that we understand the correct answers to these questions is a false teaching that we, if we profess faith in Christ, have **already entered** the rest of which the Bible speaks. It's alleged that "Christ is our rest." Then it's further reasoned that since we've already entered the rest, typified by the weekly Sabbath, that we no longer need to keep the Sabbath, because what it typifies has already been fulfilled. I want to show you that the premise of that teaching is false.

Nowhere does the Bible say Christ is our rest, or Jesus is our rest. The Bible does say, in the context of patiently waiting on God's deliverance from evil doers, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass" (Psalm 37:7). The context shows clearly that those who wait patiently on God, in faithful obedience to him, will ultimately be rewarded, while the wicked are punished. It says, "The righteous shall inherit the land, And dwell in it forever" (Psalm 37:29). Of the righteous it says, "The **law** of his God is in his heart; None of his steps shall slide" (Psalm 37:31). The message is that we must continue in faith while awaiting our future reward: "Wait on the LORD, And keep His way, And He shall exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it" (Psalm 37:34).

If Christ is our rest, it is in the sense that he will lead us into the rest that he has promised. Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-29). It's interesting that this statement of Jesus is found in the context of a controversy over how (not whether) the Sabbath is to be kept. The Pharisees found fault with Jesus' disciples for plucking a few heads of grain to satisfy their hunger as they walked through a field on the Sabbath. But as Alfred Edersheim, an authority on Jewish practices at the time of Christ, admits, "...it was clearly not a breach of the Biblical, but of the Rabbinic Law" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2.56).

The Pharisees had added many contradictory and burdensome rules to God's commandment regarding the Sabbath. Jesus rebuked the scribes for imposing these burdensome requirements when he said, "they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move [or remove] them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:4). According to Edersheim, these rules of men "could be laid on, or moved away, according to the varying judgment or severity of a Rabbinic College" (*ibid.*, 1.103).

Obedience to the holy law of God, however, as opposed to manmade tradition, is not grievously burdensome. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his

commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3, ASV). In walking faithfully in Christ's footsteps, obeying the law of God as he did, we can experience a certain tranquility and peace even in this age. "Great **peace** have those who love Your **law**, And nothing causes them to stumble" (Psalm 119:165). And "Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD, And teach out of Your **law**, That you may give him **rest** from the days of adversity, Until the pit is dug for the wicked" (Psalm 94:12-13). But the Scriptures make clear that the ultimate "rest" of which Jesus and the prophets and apostles spoke must await the return of the Messiah and his reign of righteousness.

In the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were under God's direct rule he gave them work to do (Genesis 2:15). But their work was not a bondage of heavy toil, it was not a struggle for survival, they were not enduring affliction. Only after they sinned, things changed: "Then to Adam He said, Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil [KJV: "sorrow"; Hebrew: יִתְצַבֵּעַ ('its̄tsâbōn) , pain, labor, hardship, sorrow, toil] you shall eat of it all the days of your life; Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; And you shall eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken: For dust you are, And to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

Life in this world under Satan's oppressive and harsh rule is typified by the bondage endured by the Israelites in Egypt. "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor [margin: harshness], And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage -- in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor" (Exodus 1:13-14). But God called them out of Egypt and led them into the wilderness, a type of our calling and our struggle towards the "rest" which awaits us in God's Kingdom. Paul wrote of this in the book of Hebrews.

The Sabbath is throughout Scripture connected with the idea of a rest, a ceasing from one's own work or related ideas. In fact the Hebrew word for Sabbath comes from *shabath*, which means to *rest* in a wide variety of senses. Paul understood that the Sabbath and the other Holy Days are typical of God's plan of Salvation. As he wrote in Colossians 2:16-17 they are [*not were*] a shadow, or figure, of *things to come*. The Sabbath is a living type of entering the promised spiritual inheritance of God.

While Israel was trekking through the wilderness they had not, of course, entered the rest -- the promised inheritance. At best they could only look forward to the prospect of entering the land of promise. But after they entered and took possession of the promised land it is said in the book of Joshua that God had given them rest (Joshua 1:13-15; 21:43-45). They had entered into rest only upon having received the promised inheritance.

What occurred with the Israelites is only a physical type of a greater, more meaningful, spiritual promise pertaining to the Church, spiritual Israel. But as most of the Israelites who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness, not having

received the promised inheritance because of faithlessness and disobedience, Paul warns in the book of Hebrews, chapters three and four, that we too could fall short. Paul is discussing our subject throughout chapter 3 and at least most of chapter 4. To get the full understanding of what he is saying one needs to read both chapters.

Some key verses that help us understand when and under what conditions we enter the rest promised to us are as follows: Hebrews 3:6 -- we are ultimately and finally concluded members of God's family only if we hold fast *to the end*. Hebrews 3:14 -- "For we have become partakers of Christ **if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end....**" "Confidence" -- *hypostasis* -- means in this context our firm trust in whom and in what we have believed. We must hold firm in that trust *to the end* to have then become partakers of Christ fully.

Hebrews 4:3 -- "For we who have believed do enter that rest...." "Do enter" in the Greek [*eisérchomai*] is in the present tense; the meaning is we "are entering." It implies a *process*. Israel was in the process of entering the physical "rest" in the promised land as they journeyed through the wilderness. And we are involved in a process now to be concluded when our entrance into the promised rest of God's Kingdom has been fully accomplished. Hebrews 4:10 -- "Let us therefore be **diligent** [labor -- KJV] to enter that rest, **lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.**" We must **labor** (Greek: *spoudazo*, "to exert one's self, endeavor, give diligence" -- Thayer's) to enter (compare Luke 13:24; Philippians 3:12; Hebrews 10:36). If we had already entered we would not be laboring, in the sense it's meant, we'd be resting. These verses, and Paul's analogy taken as a whole, shows clearly that we have not entered the rest, but that it **yet remains** for us to enter it.

The rest Paul speaks of, the promise to which we look forward, is God's Kingdom, both the literal rule of God's Kingdom on earth as prophesied and the spiritual inheritance we'll enjoy as members of the divine family. There are many Scriptures that show this but for illustration I want to quote one from the Old Testament and one more from the New Testament. "Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places..." (Isaiah 32:16-18). The millennial rest begins after Christ returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. After he has put down his enemies and established peace under his rule Israel and the world will have rest, as described in the Scripture quoted.

"...it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled **rest** with us **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven** with His mighty angels..." (2 Thessalonians 1:4-7). Our rest will begin **when** Jesus Christ returns, and, as other Scriptures show, we are born, as it were, into the Kingdom of God, sharing fully in the nature of the Father and Jesus Christ and partaking of their glory.

Every week as we keep the Sabbath we should be reminded of the promises God has made and be looking forward to them (See "[Why Christians Should Keep the Sabbath](#)"). And we should be reminded that the condition of our entering into God's rest is that we **remain steadfast** to the end. To those who think they've already entered the rest, and need not keep the Sabbath, the lesson is lost. Let's not let the lesson be lost to us.

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