

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #43

A Rest for the People of God

Kenny Kitzke

LawstSheep Ministries

In the last two Programs, I covered how a period, or count, or cycle, or frequency of SEVEN appears to be a foundational characteristic of our Creator and His creation of life itself. This fortifies a preeminence of the seventh-day Sabbath as the correct day that the Lord of the Sabbath sanctified as holy.

Today, I am going to discuss another Sabbath-related subject: that is the idea of a seventh-day “rest” that remains for the people of God. If you consider yourself to be among the people of God, what rest remains for you? Do you know exactly what our Creator was promising that you would have?

The promise is found in Heb. 4: 9:

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

I have seen Sabbath-keepers try to use this verse to claim that the Fourth Commandment is repeated in the New Testament and is therefore binding on Christians. As much as I would agree that the Fourth Commandment was not abolished or changed for “New Covenant” believers, I do not agree that this is the teaching or relevance of this verse.

On the other extreme, I have seen Sunday-keepers claim that this verse shows that the Fourth Commandment is abolished and a new kind of “rest” is available for Christians under the “New Covenant.” They would enhance their interpretation by continuing with the following Verse 10:

For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

The idea presented is that if you are in-Christ, you have entered His rest so He becomes the Sabbath rest for us and we can cease from the “work” of Sabbath-keeping. I do not agree that this is a valid interpretation either.

As we unfortunately have found in other cases, our English Bible translations can lead us astray from the truth in the word of God. Whether off-base translations are accidental, or intentionally biased, is next to impossible to determine. I personally get suspicious when I find teachers choosing a certain Bible that has a verse or word rendition that supports their conclusion without acknowledging that Bible’s conflict with most other translations.

Two approaches can help us understand more correctly what these inspired scriptures were intended to communicate. One is to go to the most original texts and make sure we understand the words and concepts as they were written; not using only modern English

vernacular for easier reading. The other is to ensure that we investigate the broader context of the verses and compare them with other relevant scriptures to garner understanding.

We can't possibly understand this teaching correctly if we misunderstand to what the word "rest" in this key verse is referring. What "rest" is to remain for the people of God in light of the whole counsel of God? In Heb. 4: 9, the Greek word translated "rest" is Strong's #4520 or "sabbatismos." Now, are you listening? We find the English word "rest" used two times in Heb. 3 and nine times in Heb. 4. But, not one of them is referring to sabbatismos. In fact, this is the ONLY time this Greek word is used in the entire New Testament! Something different must be intended. Are you ready to learn what the LORD intended for you?

The Greek word for "rest" in the rest of Hebrews 4 (excuse the pun) is Strong's #2663 or #2664. And, it has the meaning of settling down, desisting, ceasing or reposing: things we might say are coming to rest or are ceasing action. Since this is NOT the word used when describing the "rest" that remains for the people of God, it must mean something different than ceasing from physical work. But, what could that be?

When we don't have another textual useage to guide our understanding, we need to go to the construction of the word itself. Sabbatismos is in fact derived from "sabbaton," the Greek word for the Hebrew "Shabbath" or what we in English call a Sabbath. So, we can see why some Sabbath-keepers think this verse instructs Israelites who have accepted Jesus, or others, NOT to abandon the seventh-day Sabbath. They would say the Sabbath remains to be kept by the people of God.

However, there is a serious flaw in this reasoning. Had this been the intention, the correct word would have been sabbaton. A deeper analysis is certainly called for to understand what God was trying to convey to His people in using sabbatismos.

And, to help our understanding, we must be clear about who are His people? Who are the people of God? To whom was God speaking with this promise? Interestingly, the Book of Hebrews itself is somewhat mysterious. The Book does not identify its author. Early Eastern Church fathers held that it was the Apostle Paul. In the Western Church, Tertullian (155-230 AD) proposed the author was Barnabas, a Levite who was in the Jewish dispersion. Other early Church writers suggested it was the gospel writer Luke or even Clement of Rome from the first century.

During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther proposed the author of Hebrews was the Jewish Christian, Apollos from Alexandria. More modern era speculations have included Epaphras, a fellow laborer with the Apostle Paul, or Silas (also called Silvanus by the Apostle Paul) who was a known leader in the Church at Jerusalem and an inspired teacher. Silas accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch after the famous Jerusalem council. For you ladies, even Priscilla has been postulated as the writer of Hebrews.

As the author of Hebrews remains mysterious, so does the genesis of the writing. When

was it written? To whom exactly was it written? It seems the original readers spoke Greek and were familiar with the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Neither they, nor apparently the author, had been taught directly by Jesus. They had suffered persecution for their belief in Jesus and were being persecuted at the time of writing, apparently by Jewish authorities. These Hebrew Christians needed assurance of their position within the people of God.

What does seem pretty certain is the author and recipients were early Jewish Christians dispersed outside of the Promised Land of Israel. They would have been intimately familiar with the exodus, the law of God and the Sabbath rest. We can see the relevance here as the Sabbath, and its commanded rest from work, was a sign for the chosen people of Israel whom God had delivered from slavery in Egypt as we read in Deut. 5: 15:

And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

And in Ex. 31: 13:

Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you."

Don't be confused. Read your Bible carefully. The LORD declares them to be His Sabbaths. They are not the Sabbaths of Moses. They are not the Sabbaths of Israel. They are not the Sabbaths of the Jews. The Sabbath itself is not even the sign. The sign between the LORD and His chosen people was the people keeping, observing and obeying His Sabbaths. Has the sign between God and His people been changed to Sunday by a Pope? I don't think that makes any sense at all. Sunday is just another day of the seven. It is the rest from normal vocational work for 24-hours that is the sign of the people of God.

What changed was that although Israel was the original people chosen to be the LORD'S people to bear this sign of knowing Him, that in Christ, all who would believe in Jesus as the Savior, including the Gentiles who were once not a people of His, would become not only the people of God but even the sons of God by adoption and be KNOWN by Him.

Note that in first Peter, the Apostle characterizes the chosen people of God, Israel (referred to at the time of Christ as Jews since the nation of Israel no longer existed), as those who rejected the living stone and stumbled over it, that stone being Jesus. Peter goes on to contrast them with those who are the living stones of Christ, built up a spiritual house (not a physical genetic house or genealogy) and a holy priesthood (obviously not of the tribe of Levi) in 1 Pet. 2: 9-10:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people that you might proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of

darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Every Sabbath which I remember and keep holy with the people of God, I feel that I display this sign between me and my Lord. Praise His holy name! Halleluyah! May we glorify Him and worship Him on His Sabbaths in song with praise and with gladness from a grateful heart:

Verse 1

In six days God made earth and seas and heavens,
He sanctified and blessed the seventh day.
God hallowed it and rested from His labor,
So we can worship Him and follow His way.

Chorus

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy:
A rest for the people of God, a true delight.
The Son of Man, He reigns as Lord of the Sabbath,
And shows His brethren how to do what's right.

Thank you, Melissa Ising. What a gift of voice you have! If you would like an audio cassette of that song, would you please contact me? You'll hear the address for LawstSheep Ministries at the end of the broadcast. Send me your address and include a contribution if you can. I will be happy to share this loving and respectful song of praise for the Lord of the Sabbath with you and your brethren.

With this background, we can make more sense of the context in which there remains a rest for the people of God. Returning to Hebrews 3, we see the evidence of the "rest" which God has in mind. The author of Hebrews references Psalm 95 which is referring to the children of Israel who rebelled against the LORD in the wilderness on route to the Promised Land.

As we read in Heb 3: 16-19:

For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Are you getting the picture? The rest that God offered the children of Israel was a rest from slavery under a human Egyptian Pharaoh or king. If they would obey Him, and accept Him as Lord and King, He would give them rest in a land flowing with milk and honey by His own hand, NOT by their own works. This is not a reference to merely a rest from your daily labor on the seventh day. It is a rest from an old way of life while entering into an entirely new way of life in joy and freedom granted by God to His

people.

Since the original chosen people of God did not enter His rest which was offered, that promised rest remains for the broadened group deemed the people of God. This becomes more clear as we read Heb. 4: 1-5:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,'" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Now we can see that those of us who hear the gospel, and by faith believe, DO enter this promised rest of God and profit from it. This is wonderful news brethren! Notice too that the works God rested from were from the foundation of the world. This gets us back to the creation week. In Heb. 4: 4-5:

For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."

Now can we clearly see the link to the seventh-day Sabbath rest of God: the sabbatismos? After His work, or works, were completed, He rested from that work and a new era of the life and time of mankind began. This era or time of mortal man will also end as the millennial Kingdom of God begins and after that the eternal kingdom of heaven follows.

First Jesus will be among us as King of kings reigning for a 1,000 years. And, we shall rest in Him as His glorified priests and kings over all the earth. The whole earth shall be ruled from Jerusalem in Israel; the very Promised Land rest that the unbelieving and disobedient people of Israel God swore would not enter. But, when Jesus turns this Kingdom over to the Father and God Himself finally dwells with man, we shall actually enter His eternal heavenly rest in the new Jerusalem.

Once again, the idea of the seventh day, or the seventh period of 1,000 years in the era and history of mankind, jumps out of us. It is so exciting to have the salvation plan of God so clearly revealed to those who study and keep the Sabbaths and Feasts of the LORD. I praise the Father for giving us His Son as Lord of the Sabbath. Amen!

What a great opportunity our gracious God has given His people to learn about His plan and the ways that we need to live in order to obey His commandments. I can't help but recall just a few months ago when I kept the Feast of Tabernacles. Families met daily to realize how we are wandering in the wilderness waiting to be able to enter that Promised Land called the Kingdom of God. We cannot rebel. We must obey the commandments of God to enter that Kingdom; and to enter His rest in it.

The children's Bible studies and crafts were amazing. Most of the eight mornings they met and did crafts or skits and songs teaching them about the Feasts of the LORD and His Sabbaths. The children would then attend services taking an additional two hours. They were quiet and respectful of the parents and the entire congregation the entire time. Not one exception for a whole week. No fights. No fooling around. Obedient and innocent and trusting children who reminded you of what Jesus said we should be like if we expect to enter the Kingdom of God . Remember what He said in Mark 10: 13-16:

Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But, when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

What a contrast this is compared to a less than an hour Sunday school that I attended as a child growing up in the Church of Rome now called the Roman Catholic Church. I do not remember those meetings with "sisters" garbed in their black habits as very enjoyable or educational. I remember being "prepped" for a Holy Communion and a Confirmation sacramental ceremony that certainly appeared to be religious. I had responses to memorize and to repeat on cue. What did I learn about God, or His holy days, or His plan of salvation? Not much. Could I quote a single verse from scripture or explain the gospel of Christ or what was expected of the children of God? I am sorry to say, "no."

These children who left the world for over a week to attend the Feast of Tabernacles were keeping the commandments of God with obvious joy and love for one another. They were trusting and innocent and a pleasure to be with during worship or during a picnic. They so touched my heart all week long, it will not be quickly forgotten.

I could not help but think about how little our children are taught in public schools today to behave and respect their parents and teachers. The news is full of school stories that defy imagination. Children full of rebellion and evil. School doors are guarded with metal detectors. Police or hired guards are patrolling the halls. Psychologists are on call to counsel children over unspeakable acts and threats done by even middle school children to one another or their teachers or administrators. Is it any wonder that so many of these Sabbath and Feast-keeping children are home-schooled and full of joy to not be in a governmental, public school?

I think of the fatherless teenage boy I have mentored. He hated middle school. He refused to go to school. He does drugs and drinks alcohol. He stays out all night. He usually has a steady girlfriend but they keep changing. He drifts between various social service institutions for troubled teens eventually getting a reprieve to live in public housing with a grandma he knows as Mom.

And, what a place that is! People without jobs. Kids with too much time on their hands. A place where the police are constantly called to stop crime. A place where people are

threatened, attacked and robbed. A place where guns are discharged in the night.

My mentee was caught stealing money from other “residents” at a half-way house. He was caught burglarizing a Doctor’s office. He has little hope in life. Suicide lingers like a fog around his head. How my heart aches for him. He is not just immoral, he is amoral.

He has not had a chance to learn the ways of God. He does not listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd. He listens to the most vile rap music and plays violent and sexually explicit video games for hours on end. How I wish he had a father who thought every Sabbath was a time of rest, worship, learning and fellowship for the people of God. A time he could study and interact with kids who honor their parents and share the blessed hope of eternal life in Christ.

Will such lost kids understand anything about the rest that God has promised to them if they will believe and obey? How could they? Who would teach them? If they won’t go to school, how are you going to get them to go to a holy convocation? Will they hear a single teaching from the lips of the Lord of the Sabbath? How many Christian children, or even their parents, could explain what the word of God is teaching in Heb. 4: 6-7?

Since therefore it remains that some must enter it (referring to His rest), and those to whom it was preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

After a long time, we still have our chance today--this very Sabbath day. Not just our chance but a chance for all our children and family. Yet, after all the bad examples that the Israel of God provided for the church of God to learn from, how many Christians still deny the Lord of the Sabbath and His examples of the love for God and for one another that He provided for His church, His children, which He wanted to come to Him?

Can you characterize your life as innocent as a young child and obedient to the will of their loving father? Are you counting on entering His rest based upon what Jesus did while you live in whatever way that seems right to you but ignores the written commandments of God?

Have you ever wondered if a simple intellectual belief in Christ and a religious acknowledgement of Him as Savior in some Church service along with some wondrous works in His Name will automatically result in your salvation in the Kingdom of God? It can be very troubling what the Lord of the Sabbath actually said about many who call themselves His disciples and Him their Lord.

We find these reflective and sober words of our Savior, the self-proclaimed Lord of the Sabbath, in Mat. 7: 21-23:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven,

but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

What is lawlessness? It is living apart from the law of God. And what law of God is it that applies to us? Is it some new "law of Christ" loosely defined in scripture as belief? Or might it be the Law of God specifically written with His very own finger in stone for His people to obey in order for Him to be their God and Him to know them?

If we skip to the end of the Bible, to the revelation of God to man given by Jesus to the Apostle John, we find some language about the saints of God that is difficult to misinterpret. Reading in Rev. 14: 12-13:

Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" Yes, says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

There is a rest coming for the people of God. These saints will have the faith of Jesus AND practice keeping the commandments of God. Don't take my word for it. Trust the word of God who became the Son of Man and the Lord of the Sabbath and will soon be the King in whom we can rest forever.

Are you ready to enter His rest in His Kingdom? Or will you trust the opinion of a religious leader of what you need to do to be in heaven right after you die? Remember what we learned from the letter to the Hebrew believers. In Heb 4: 8 it says:

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.

That day is the "sabbatismos." It has been described today in your hearing. It remains for you IF you are willing to believe and obey to enter into His holy rest and inherit His Kingdom as a child of the living God.