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A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God

4: 1-13

A Sabbath-rest for the people of God DIG: What is the author warning his readers about from the story of Isra'el's rebellion? Why was it not enough for Isra'el to merely know the truth? Why is hearing not enough? Why do people fail to enter God's rest? What are several synonyms for rest? What is the significance of today? What is the proper response to the warning in verses 1 and 11? What does it mean that the LORD's Word is alive? At work? That it cuts right through? What are the three activities to continue in God's Word?

REFLECT: What kinds of tasks or jobs do you think we will perform as rulers with Yeshua in the New Heaven and New Earth? When you fall short in your spiritual walk, is it more a product of drifting, doubting, or disbelieving? What makes you say that? In what ways would you like to have more rest in your spiritual life? When you think of a restful place, what images come to your mind? Heaven will provide rest from this world. What are the things from which you will have the most rest?

Hebrews 4 continues the warning to informed but unresponsive Jews that the author had just warned (**to see link click [As - Today, If You Hear His Voice, Do Not Harden Your Hearts](#)**). They not only knew the basic truths of the gospel, but had even renounced Judaism. Nevertheless, they did not trust in **Yeshua** as **the Messiah**. Hearing the gospel doesn't mean anything unless you believe it. The warning, of course, applies to anyone who is hesitating in committing fully to **Jesus Christ**, and can be summarized: **Don't harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness where you put God to the test (3:7-8)**. The **Israelites** left Egypt, but they often longed to go back. They refused to trust **the Lord** completely and, oppressive as it was, the old life still had a strange appeal. They halted at the crucial point of decision (**Numbers 13-14**). As a result, they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land and into **God's rest**. So it is with many who are drawn to **Messiah**. Unbelief forfeits **rest** - that is the point he is making.

There are several meanings of **rest**. It means the end of trying to please **ADONAI** with our feeble, fleshly works; **God's** perfect **rest** is a rest in free grace. It also means to be at peace with **YHVH**. We are free from running from philosophy to philosophy, from religion to religion, from life-style to life-style. We are freed from being tossed around by every doctrinal wind, every idea of fad, that blows our way. **Rest** means we have absolute confidence in **the LORD's** power and care. We can depend on **Him** for all our needs now, in the future, which includes the Messianic Kingdom, the Eternal State (see the commentary on **Revelation Fq - The Eternal State**), and the New Jerusalem (see the commentary on **Revelation Fs - The Eternal New Jerusalem**). In other words, forever.¹⁰³

Therefore, let us be terrified of the possibility that, even though the promise of entering His rest still remains (4:1a CJB). The writer uses two different Greek words for **rest** in this chapter. The one used most often is *katapausin*, which is used eight times in **Chapters three and four: 3:11 and 18; 4:1, 3 (twice), 5, 10 and 11.** Apart from the book of **Hebrews**, this word is used only once in the entire New Covenant. It is unique to this writer and means a *cessation of activity*.

Any one of you might be judged to have fallen short of it (4:1b CJB). Not trusting in **Ha'Shem** is something to be feared (**Matthew 10:28**). Just as **Isra'el** never entered Canaan's **rest** at **Kadesh-Barnea** because of unbelief, the author warns not to miss **God's salvation rest** because of unbelief. It wasn't too late! Some of the Messianic community probably thought it was. But they had no reason to fear because the promise still remained. However, they needed to act and not put their decision for **Christ** off any longer. As long as a person has the opportunity to decide, they can decide. People are never too far-gone for **God** to deal with them. As long as the heart is sensitive to what **the Holy Spirit** is saying, as long as they can hear **His** call, they have time to be saved. **ADONAI's** rest is still available, but only **He** knows how long that will be for each person.¹⁰⁴

For Good News has also been proclaimed to us (first-century believers), just as it was to them (the generation that came out of Egypt). But the message they heard didn't do them any good, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith (4:2 CJB). From the human side, the first requirement for **salvation** is **faith**. Hearing the gospel is vital, but it is not enough. The ancient **Israelites** heard **YHVH's Good News** of **rest**, but it didn't do them any good because they didn't believe it. It's tragic that hell is going to be populated with people who will say: **Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in Your name and in**

Your name drive out demons and in Your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew You. Away from Me, your evildoers (Matthew 7:22-23; Luke 13:26-27)! Their knowledge and their works were not united with faith.

The Jews were especially proud to be descendants of Abraham. But **Yeshua** warned them that true children of Avraham believe and act as Abraham did (**John 8:39**). Rabbi Sha’ul reminded his fellow **Israelites** that **a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God (Romans 2:29)**. Spiritually, then, an unbelieving **Jew** is a contradiction in terms.

If you run a red light, you’re not innocent just because you know the driving rules. Knowing the law doesn’t mean you don’t have to pay the penalty. Again, Sha’ul says: **For circumcision is indeed a value if you do what Torah says. But if you are a transgressor of Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision (Romans 2:25 CJB).**¹⁰⁵

The Jewish writer to the Hebrews brought two themes together in order to make it exceptionally clear that Yeshua’s Sabbath rest was superior to that of Moses.

The first of these was creation. ADONAI ceased from **His** work and gave **the seventh day** as an eternal marker showing that not by works, but by **faith**, could one **enter** into **His** completed work. **For it is we who have believed who enter that rest (4:3a CJB)**. Moshe, in writing **Genesis**, recorded no evening for the seventh day of creation, revealing that it is finished, yet open . . . an unending blessing for all who would receive **YHVH’s** invitation by **faith**. In a somewhat startling statement, **the Father** speaks of **His** own “refreshment” on **the seventh day (Exodus 31:17)** and invites **His** people to be **refreshed** as well.¹⁰⁶

The author again quotes **Psalm 95:11** and points out that **the wilderness** generation did not enter **God’s rest** even though **He** had promised it since creation. **It is just as God said, “And in My anger, I swore that they should not enter My rest” (Hebrews 4:3b quoting Psalm 95:11 CJB)**. **He swore this even though His works have been in existence since the founding of the universe (4:3c CJB)**. **Psalm 95 was sung on Shabbat in the Temple and remains a part of the Shabbat liturgy in the synagogue today. So it is**

natural for the author to make his point about **rest** by introducing a quotation from another **Shabbat-related passage** (used nowadays in the home service before the Friday night meal).¹⁰⁷



For there is a place where it is said, concerning the seventh day, “**And God rested on the seventh day from all His works**” (Hebrews 4:4 CJB quoting Genesis 2:2 CJB). Adam and Eve were completely righteous when they were created. They walked and talked with **YHVH** as regularly as they walked and talked with each other. They were at rest, in its original and fullest sense. They relied on **ADONAI** for everything. They had no anxieties, no worries, no pain, no frustrations and no headaches. They didn’t need **the LORD’s** forgiveness, because they had never sinned. They didn’t need **His** consolation, because they were never grieved. They didn’t need **His** encouragement, because they never failed. They only needed **His** fellowship, because they were made for **Him**. This was their **rest** in **God**.

But something terrible happened. When the Adversary began to question **God’s** word, integrity and love, Adam and Eve chose to believe the old Serpent. When they lost their trust in **Ha’Shem**, they lost their **rest**. And from that time until now, mankind has not only been sinful, but restless. The entire purpose of the Bible, and the entire working of **YHVH** in human history has one purpose: bring mankind back into **His rest**.

To accomplish that, **God** had to remove the barrier that had separated us from **Him**. So **He** sent **His Son** to provide a way for our **rest**. Through **Christ’s** death we are again offered rest, the **rest God** had always intended for us to have. Even the people who lived before the cross were saved on the basis of **faith** in what **ADONAI** was going to do through **His Son. Messiah** bore sins past, present and future, and through **Him God’s rest** has been available to anyone who believes.

Those who sinned while wandering in **the wilderness** not only forfeited Canaan. Unless they exercised personal **faith** in **God** sometime during the forty years, they

also forfeited eternal life – of which Canaan was merely a symbol.¹⁰⁸

And once more, our present text says, “They will not enter My rest” (Hebrews 4:5 CJB quoting Psalm 95:11 CJB). Therefore, since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and those who received the Good News earlier did not enter because of their disobedience, again God fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David, so long afterward, “Today, if you hear God’s voice, don’t harden your hearts” (4:6-7 CJB). When mankind lost ADONAI’s rest, God immediately began a recovery process. Through His Son, Yeshua Messiah, some would be restored because YHVH’s purpose must be fulfilled. He created mankind for fellowship and His plan would not be denied, either by a rebellious Adversary or by disbelieving humans. Because the LORD wants us to be saved, we can be saved. Only disobedience keeps us apart from His embrace.

The opportunity for God’s rest remains, but it will not remain forever. The Ruach ha-Kodesh demands immediate action to be saved. Rabbi Sha’ul said: **Now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation (Second Corinthians 6:2 KJ).** When Ha’Shem looked down on Noah’s civilization that was about to drown, He said: **My Spirit will not put up with humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years (Genesis 6:3 NLT).** In other words, people have no more than their lifetime to believe God. The average life expectancy today is much less than 120 years; and, of course, none of us has a guarantee of even living past today because ADONAI limits the time for salvation. In Messianic Kingdom, people will have to the age of 100 to believe that Christ is the Messiah or they will die (see the commentary on [Isaiah Kq - The Wolf and the Lamb Will Feed Together, and the Lion Will Eat Straw Like the Ox](#)). But for us, this is God’s today, right now – the only day, the only opportunity we can be sure of.¹⁰⁹

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later of another day (4:8 CJB quoting Psalm 95:7-8 CJB). Canaan rest for Isra’el is a picture of the spiritual rest we find in Christ when we surrender to Him. True rest doesn’t come through Moshe, or David, or Joshua, it comes through Yeshua Messiah. When we come to Him in faith, we find salvation rest (Matthew 11:28). When we yield and obey Him by faith, we enjoy submission rest (Matthew 11:29-30). As a result, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1), and the peace of God (Philippians 4:6-8). It is by believing that we enter into His

rest (4:3a).¹¹⁰ Whatever physical or earthly benefits **ADONAI** may give us, **His** ultimate promise is to give us spiritual **rest**. Some of **the LORD's** children are some of the most physically afflicted people imaginable. Yet, they are in **YHVH's** **salvation rest**.

So there remains, then, a Sabbath-rest (Greek: *sabbatismos*) **for the people of God**. The writer of **Hebrews** here uses a second Greek word found in this chapter for **rest**. It is used only here in the entire B'rit Chadashah. It doesn't refer to **Shabbat**, but rather to **Shabbat-observance**, or **Sabbath-celebration**. The emphasis is not on the cessation of daily activities but rather on the *celebration* of **YHVH's** life-sustaining presence among them (**Exodus 31:12-17**). This is the ideal **rest**. Is provided by **God Himself**.¹¹¹ **For anyone who has entered God's rest has also rested from their own works, as God did from His (4:9-10)**. This **rest** is also in the future. In **his** vision on Patmos, **Yochanan** heard a **voice from heaven** saying: **Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on**. And **the Holy Spirit** agreed with this, by saying: **Yes, they will rest from their labor**, and receive a reward, **for their righteous deeds will follow them (Revelation 14:13)**. **Hebrews 4:10** anticipates that final day when we will cease from all our effort and work in this life and enter into the presence of **Messiah**. That is the essence of **Sabbath-rest**.¹¹²

Shabbat-observance is expected of all believers. From **Colossians 2:16-17**, which says that **the Sabbath** was a shadow of the things that were to come, but the substance come from **Messiah**, we learn that the essence of **Shabbat-observance** for believers is not following the detailed rules which *halakhah*, or Oral Law (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**), sets forth concerning what may or may not be done on the seventh day of the week. Rather, as **verse 10** explains, **the Shabbat-rest** expected of **God's people** consists in **resting from their own works, as God did from His**; it consists in trusting and being **faithful to God (verses 2-3)**. Although the specific "works" from which the readers of this letter were to rest were animal sacrifices (**6:4-6**), by implication all self-struggle, in which one relies on one's own efforts instead of trusting **God**, is to be avoided; and in this the author is making the same point as Sha'ul does in **Romans 3:19** to **4:25**.¹¹³

The second theme deals with redemption. **God** enabled **His** beloved to rest in Canaan as the result of a redemptive miracle. Now **ADONAI's** great redemptive sign-post, **Yeshua Messiah**, gives an invitation to a heavenly gathering where

those **standing on the sea of glass** will sing two songs, **the song of Moses (the servant of ADONAI)** and **the song of the Lamb (Revelation 15:3a)**. Jesus is **God's Sabbath rest** for all who will **trust** in **His** finished work. **He** becomes the focal point of **rest** by virtue of **His** have been **sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people (9:28)**.

As early as the first century, the friendly greeting *shalom alechem* (peace upon you) would bring the response *alechem shalom* (upon you peace). The word *shalom* also referred to a *finished product*; in fact, when the last stone of Solomon's Temple was in place, many Jews spoke of the building as *shalom*, or *complete*.

No greater theme was ever expressed to the people of **God** than that which proclaimed their wholeness, their true *shalom*, in **the Messiah**. **The rabbis correctly believed that *Shalom* was one of God's names, for Isaiah's prophecy called Him Sar Shalom, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)**. Now the wholeness of **YHVH** is available: **For He is our peace (Ephesians 2:14)**. Those who trust in **Him** have become a completed building, a holy **temple** in which **His Ruach** dwells (**Ephesians 2:22**). This clear word of *shalom*, of comfort, is counterbalanced by a compelling challenge: **Therefore, let us do our best to enter that rest; so that no one will fall short because of the same kind of disobedience (4:11 CJB)**.¹¹⁴ **The wilderness** generation died a physical death. Those to whom this warning was given, would die in their sins and be lost forever if they didn't repent. Therefore, the example of **the wilderness** wanderers should have been a deterrent to the Messianic community in the first century, and a deterrent to us today, from committing the same sin of unbelief.

See, the Word of God, that which offers **rest** to the believer, **is alive! It is at work and is sharper than any double-edged sword** (Greek: *machairan* meaning *a short dagger*) - **it cuts right through to where soul meets spirit and joints meet marrow, and it is quick to judge the inner reflections and attitudes of the heart**. The immediate context of this verse means that the readers who were hesitating in **trusting Christ**, who were considering falling back into Judaism, had better be urgent and **doing their best** in seeking to **enter God's rest**, because **the Word of God is alive! Before God, nothing created is hidden, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account (4:12-13 CJB)**. Unbelief will not go undetected. **The Word of God** not only saves us and comforts us, but it is also a tool of judgment and execution. In the day of the Judgment (see the commentary on **Revelation Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment**), **His Word** will expose all **the** rebellious

hearts that have not **trusted** in **Him**. The **naked** truth of unbelief will be exposed and no flimsy, half-hearted profession of faith, or no list of good works will matter before **Him**. All the disguises will be ripped off and only the real you will be seen.

For us today, **God's . . . gracious Word can make you into what He wants you to be and give you everything you could possibly want (Acts 20:32 The Message)**. Spiritual growth is the process of replacing lies with truth. **Yeshua** prayed: **Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth (John 17:17)**.

Sanctification, or spiritual growth, requires revelation. As Rich Warren states so well in his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, **the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make us like the Son of God**. In other words, to become like **Jesus**, we must fill our lives with **His Word**. The Bible says: **So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (Second Timothy 3:17)**. When **the LORD** speaks, things change. Everything around you – all creation – exists because **YHVH** spoke it into existence. Without **His Word** we wouldn't even be alive. As **James** points out: **He chose to give us birth through the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all that He created (James 1:18)**.

The Bible is far more than a doctrinal guidebook. **God's Word** generates life, creates faith, produces change, frightens the devil, causes miracles, heals hurts, builds character, imparts joy, overcomes adversity, defeats temptation, infuses hope, releases power, cleanses our minds, brings things into being, and guarantees our future forever! We cannot live without **the Word of God**! Never take it for granted. You should consider it as essential to your life as food (**Job 23:12**). However, millions of believers are plagued with spiritual anorexia, starving to death from spiritual malnutrition. To be a healthy disciple of **Jesus**, feeding on **God's Word** must be your first priority. **Messiah** said: **If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples (Yochanan 18:32)**. In day-to-day living, continuing in God's Word involves **three activities**.

Accept the authority of the Word: It must become the authoritative standard in your life: the compass you rely on for direction, the counsel you listen to for making wise decisions, and the benchmark you use for evaluating everything. Resolve that when **God's Word** says to do something, you will trust it and do it whether it makes sense to you, or whether you feel like doing it. **Obedience is better than sacrifice (First Samuel 15:22)**.

Assimilate the truth of the Word: It is not enough just to believe the Bible; you must fill your mind with it so that **the Spirit of God** can transform you with the

truth. There are five ways to do this.

First, you receive **God's Word** when you listen and accept it with an open, receptive attitude (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Et - The Parable of the Soils](#)).

Second, read the Bible daily. If you will read the Bible for fifteen minutes a day, you will read completely through it in one year. Daily Bible reading will keep you in range of **ADONAI's** voice. This is why **YHVH** instructed the kings of **Isra'el** to always keep a copy of **His Word** nearby: **It is to remain with him, and he is to read it every day, as long as he lives; so that he will learn fear ADONAI his God and keep all the words of the Torah (Deuteronomy 17:19a CJB)**. But just don't keep it **with** you, **read it every day**.

Third, study the Bible. The difference between reading and studying the Bible is asking questions and writing down your thoughts on paper or computer. **But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect Torah that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy (James 1:25 NCV)**.

Fourth, memorize **God's Word**. Your capacity to **remember** is a **God-given** gift. You may think you have a poor memory, but the truth is, you have millions of ideas, truths, facts and figures memorized. You **remember** what is important to you. If **God's Word** is important, you will take the time to memorize it. Select a few Bible verses that have touched you and write them down on a 3 by 5 index card that you can carry with you. Look at them, read them aloud, and when you can copy them over and over. Use all three of the ways you learn; see it, touch (write) it, and hear it. **Remember** that repetition is the mother of learning, so review, review, and review. **Remember with Christ taught and let His words enrich your lives and make you wise (Colossians 3:16a LB)**.

The fifth way to assimilate **God's Word** into your mind is to reflect on it, which the Bible calls **meditation**. For many, the idea of meditating conjures up images of putting your mind in neutral and letting it wander. This is the exact opposite of biblical **meditation**, which is focused thinking. You select a verse and reflect on it over and over again. **How blessed are those who reject the advice of the wicked, don't stand on the way of sinners or sit where scoffers sit! Their delight is in ADONAI's Torah; on his Torah they meditate day and**

night. They are like trees planted by streams - they bear their fruit in season, their leaves never wither, everything they do succeeds. (Psalm 1:1-3 CJB)

Apply the principles of the Word: Receiving, **reading, studying**, memorizing and **meditating** on **God's Word** are all useless if we fail to put them into practice. We must become **doers of the Word (James 1:22)**. This is the hardest step of all, because the Adversary fights it so strongly. He doesn't mind you going to messianic synagogue or church as long as you don't do anything with what you learn. Don't fool yourself, just because you've read something doesn't mean you're internalized it. **Jesus** said: **Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24)**. **Messiah** also pointed out that the blessing of **ADONAI** comes from obeying the Word, not just knowing it. **He** said: **Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (John 13:17)**. I cannot overstate the value of being a part of a small Bible study discussion group. We always learn from others truths we would never learn on our own. Other people will help you see insights you would miss and help you apply **God's** truth in a practical way.¹¹⁵