

**HEBREWS 3-6 THE SABBATH AS A SYMBOL OF THE MILLENNIAL REST**

After Paul compares Jesus to Moses and shows how *superior* Christ is to him, he again cautions the Jewish Christians about the danger of *denying* Christ by using the *analogy* of the first Israelites *not* entering the Promised Land and finding "rest."

He warns, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested me, tried me, and saw my works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.' So I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter *my rest*.' Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from *the living God*; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:7-13). We see the "Holy Spirit" is equated with "the living God" and is *not* a third Person.

Paul is quoting from Ps. 95:7-11, using it as an *analogy* between the "rest" the first Israelites missed by not entering the Promised Land, and the "rest" Christians can also miss if they don't enter the kingdom of God. He had already said in Heb. 2:5 that the goal of the saints was to inherit "the world to come," which is *the kingdom of God*.

G. H. Lang's *Commentary on Hebrews* agrees, "For the Christian this *hope* is to be realized *at the 'redemption of the body'* (Rom. 8:23). Thus the sequence of thought has reached *the Second Coming of our Lord...the millennial reign of Christ*." Also, Lang denounces why *this millennial hope* is *not* taught today by traditional churches, "By *the third century*, the *hope* of the gospel had been too generally *abandoned*, though they still professed the *faith*; they avowed salvation to come through Christ and His death, but had *given up His return as the true hope of a Christian*. As a consequence, the many who named the Name [Jesus] readily accepted the *proposal of the world to become the official State religion*, and the *presence and the power of God* in the churches that *did so, soon ceased*. Thenceforth it has been the *minority that have confessed the hope and walked in Abraham's path as a stranger among the peoples*, and *always it has been among such that the spiritual glory of God has been displayed*" (note on Heb. 4:1-4). Brethren, we are now among those privileged few that still teach about this great hope and truth!

So Paul encourages them to remain steadfast, "For we have become *partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end*, while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' 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*" (Heb. 3:14-19).

Note he uses the terms "partakers of Christ" or more accurately, "*partners of Christ*," which again relates to this "mystery of the fellowship" or the *koinonia* of Eph. 3:9. As F. F. Bruce brings out, "The meaning of the phrase '*partners of Christ*' is the... participation with Him in...the unshakable [coming] kingdom of chapter 12:28" (*New International Commentary on Hebrews*, p. 68).

So the focus is on *persevering* in the faith by not rejecting Jesus as Lord and on being *obedient* to God to enter *the future rest* in the kingdom of God.

The Knowledge Bible Commentary affirms, "...the *inheritance* itself can hardly be divorced from *his presentation of Messiah's kingdom* and His '*partners*' share in that. If this needed explicit confirmation, it could be found in Heb.12:28."

Paul again has to remind the Jewish Christians, "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. 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*'" (Heb. 4:1-5).

So Paul now uses the analogy of *the Sabbath* as a *type* of a *Millennial rest* for God's people. If they go back to Judaism, they won't enter *this new rest*, just as the first generation of Israelites failed to do.

Bruce explains of the “interpretation that was *widespread* in the early Church, according to which *the seventh day* of Gen. 2:2 is a *type of the seventh age of righteousness* which is to follow six ages of sin’s dominions. The identification of the *rest of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews with a coming millennium on earth has, indeed, been ably defended...*” (pgs. 74-75). In a footnote, he quotes the 2nd century *Epistle of Barnabas* to show this widespread belief: “Pay attention...to the meaning of the words, ‘He finished it in six days.’ It means that in 6,000 years the Lord will bring everything to completion...‘And He rested the seventh day.’ This means when His Son comes and brings to naught the period of the Lawless One and judges the ungodly...*then He will rest properly on the seventh day*” (1964, p. 74).

Paul continues, “So that as it is clear that some have to go in, and that the first hearers of the good news *were not able to go in* because they went against God’s orders, *after a long time*, again naming a certain day, he says in *David*, ‘Today’ as he had said before, ‘Today if you will let his voice come to your ears, be not hard of heart,’ for if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have said anything about *another day*. So that there is still a *Sabbath-keeping* for the people of God. For the man who comes *into his rest* has had rest from his works, as God did from his. Because of this, let us have a strong desire to *come into that rest*, and let no one go after the example of those who went against God’s orders” (Heb. 4:6-10, BBE).

David Stern notes, “Greek *sabbatismos*, [is] used only here in the New Testament. In the Septuagint, the related Greek word *sabbatizein* was coined to translate the Hebrew verb *shabat* when it means ‘to observe *Shabbat*.’ The usual translation, ‘There remains a Sabbath rest,’ minimizes the observance aspect and makes the role of God’s people entirely passive...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 (see 1C 16:2N). But this passage, and in particular v. 9, shows that *Shabbat-observance* is expected of believers...as v. 10 explains, the *Shabbat-keeping* expected of God’s people consists in resting from one’s own works, as God did from his; it consists in trusting and being faithful to God” (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*).

Here is a vital *proof* that the Christians at the time *were keeping the Sabbath*, for besides keeping it as

being the Fourth Commandment, they also viewed it as a “*shadow of things to come*” (Col. 2:17). They had realized the symbolism of the Sabbath as *the seventh millennium rest* remains as a goal for the people of God! So the Promised Land that the Israelites entered under Joshua was *not* the ultimate fulfillment of the “rest” God had promised, but the true one fulfilled when Christ returns. The *JFB Commentary* affirms, “This verse indirectly establishes *the obligation of the Sabbath*, for the type *continues* until the antitype supersedes it...*the typical earthly Sabbath must continue until then*.” Hence, when we rest on the Sabbath, we not only look *back* to Creation Week, but we look *forward* to that “rest” of the coming *Millennial Sabbath* – that one-thousand year rest.

As it says in 2 Thes. 1:5-7, “And God will use this persecution to...make you *worthy of His Kingdom* ...and will provide rest for you...*when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven*” (NLT). *Expositor’s* adds, “Buchanan [in *Anchor Bible Series*] has a long note on *rest* in which he surveys a number of opinions and *rejects all spiritualizing interpretations*. He thinks many scholars read *their own ideas* into ‘rest’; and thinks it *impossible* for the word to be used in a non-national, non-material sense.” Buchanan says, “*Physical sabbath-keeping* on the part of the new covenant believer as affirmed by ‘sabbath rest’ *epitomizes* cessation from ‘works’ in commemoration of God’s rest at creation and *manifests faith* in the salvation provided by Christ. Heb. 4:3-11 affirms physical ‘sabbath rest’ is the weekly outward manifestation of the inner experience of spiritual rest...” (pp. 855-856).

Paul adds, “Let us therefore be *diligent to enter that rest*, lest anyone fall according to the same example of *disobedience*. For *the word of God* is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:11-13).

He reminds them here it is *the Word of God* that will be used to judge and condemn them if they relapse. Nothing will be hidden from Jesus Christ’ merciful but righteous gaze, as everyone’s Judge.

Yet he comforts them by stressing Christ’s *loving nature* as the new *High Priest*, “Seeing then that we have a *great High Priest* who has passed through the

heavens, Jesus the Son of God, *let us hold fast our confession*. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come *boldly* to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16).

Bruce says, "So here he repeats that Christians have in heaven a *high priest* with an *unequalled capacity for sympathizing with them* in all the dangers and sorrows and trials which come their way in life, because He Himself, by virtue of His likeness to them, *was exposed to all these experiences*. Yet He endured triumphantly every form of testing that man could endure, *without any weakening of His faith in God or any relaxation of His obedience to Him*" (pgs. 85-86).

About Jesus as a *High Priest*, he adds, "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are my son, today I have begotten you.' As He also says in another place: 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest 'According to the order of Melchizedek' of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become *dull of hearing*" (Heb. 5:1-11).

Here, Paul explains how Jesus Christ can be still *our new High Priest*, although He was from the tribe of Judah and not Levi. He qualified by being *the Son of God* and putting on flesh, suffering for us and becoming a *truly compassionate High Priest*, being heard by God (John 12:27). He was also designated by God the Father as a High Priest of a *higher order* than that of Aaron—the *order of Melchizedek*, and now *supersedes the Aaronic and Levitical orders*. As

Bruce brings out about Jesus, "Even Christ, the Son of God, did not assume the high priestly dignity by His own initiative; He was called to it by God, who acclaimed Him as *His Son* in the words of Ps. 2:7...And the same God...has also acclaimed Him as [the] perpetual high priest...Jesus, who was acclaimed by God as the Davidic Messiah in Ps. 2:7, was also acclaimed by God as *High Priest* in Ps. 110:4" (pgs. 94-95).

He knows this *new truth* about Christ being the *new High Priest* is *hard to accept* among Jewish Christians, for the Temple order *was still active*. So he says, "For though by this time *you ought to be teachers*, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come *to need milk and not solid food*. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

Again, *the Word of God* is the standard for doctrine, and those who do not "grow" in grace and knowledge (2 P. 3:18), will fall far behind.

Paul thus continues his stern warning, "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the *elementary principles of Christ*, let us *go on to perfection*, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, *if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*, since they *crucify again* for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, *whose end is to be burned*" (Heb. 6:1-8).

For these Jewish Christians, in particular, the warning is that if they go back to Judaism, they will *lose the hope* of their great salvation they found when converting to Christianity, and they do *not* have a second chance. Remember, we all have just one opportunity to obtain our salvation.