

In These Last Days: The Message of Hebrews Jesus, the Giver of Rest

Lesson #5 for January 29, 2022

Scriptures: Genesis 15:13-21; Hebrews 3:12-19; 4:1,3,5-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

1. So far in Hebrews, we have seen that Hebrews 1&2 talk about the relationship of Jesus to all His children/creatures, including angels, prophets, Moses, etc. **Hebrews 3&4 talk about all those in the past, particularly the children of Israel, who failed to enter the “rest” that God had promised them.** But, in these chapters, **Jesus is introduced as the One who will provide that rest.** That rest was promised to Abraham and even David as recorded in 2 Samuel 7:10-13 when God communicated with him through Nathan, the prophet.

2 Samuel 7:10-13: ¹⁰⁻¹¹ [The LORD instructed Nathan to tell David:] “I have chosen a place for my people Israel and have settled them there, where they will live without being oppressed any more. Ever since they entered this land, they have been attacked by violent people, but this will not happen again. **I promise to keep you safe from all your enemies** and to give you descendants. ¹²When you die and are buried with your ancestors, **I will make one of your sons king and will keep his kingdom strong.** ¹³**He will be the one to build a temple for me, and I will make sure that his dynasty continues for ever.**” [sic]—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 2 Samuel 7:10–13). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{†‡}

2. **God recognizes that the ultimate rest is in a correct and perfect relationship with Him.** That relationship can be practiced by carefully observing the seventh-day Sabbath according to biblical guidance. However, unfortunately, as recorded in Hebrews 4:1-11, Israel did not experience that rest.

Hebrews 4:1-11: ¹Now, **God has offered us the promise that we may receive that rest he spoke about.** Let us take care, then, that none of you will be found to have failed to receive that promised rest. ²For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. **They heard the message, but it did them no good, because when they heard it, they did not accept it with faith.** ³We who believe, then, do receive that rest which God promised. It is just as he said:

“I was angry and made a solemn promise:

‘They will never enter the land where I would have given them rest!’ ”

He said this even though his work had been finished from the time he created the world. ⁴For somewhere in the Scriptures this is said about the seventh day: “God rested on the seventh day from all his work.” ⁵This same matter is spoken of again: “They will never enter that land where I would have given them rest.” ⁶Those who first heard the Good News did not receive that rest, because they did not believe. There are, then, others who are allowed to receive it. ⁷This is shown by the fact that God sets another day, which is called “Today”. [sic] Many years later he spoke of it through David in the scripture already quoted:

“If you hear God’s voice today,
do not be stubborn.”

⁸ If Joshua had given the people the rest that God had promised, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹As it is, however, there still remains for God's people a rest like God's resting on the seventh day. ¹⁰For those who receive that rest which God promised will rest from their own work, just as God rested from his. ¹¹Let us, then, do our best to receive that rest, so that no one of us will fail as they did because of their lack of faith.— *Good News Bible*.^{*†‡} [When you read the book of Judges, does it seem like they were “settled” and obtained “rest” in the land of Canaan?][‡]

3. **Let us briefly review the history of our world up to that point.** The people before the flood refused to believe in God or to trust Him; and except for Noah and his family, they died in the flood. The people immediately after the flood at the Plain of Shinar did not trust God's statement that He would not send another flood, and they built that tower of Babel which God destroyed. Then, God scattered them by “confusing” their language so they could not communicate. Despite all that God had done for them in getting them out of slavery in Egypt, the Israelites did not trust God to take them into the land of Canaan according to His plan. (See **Exodus 23:20-33**.) Instead, they asked for spies to be sent into the land to investigate before they entered. Then, they rejected the advice of Caleb and Joshua and accepted the false report of the other ten spies.
4. They decided that they should go back to Egypt. When God told them not to do that and that He was sending them back into the wilderness for 40 years to die there, they rebelled again and tried to go in and conquer the land on their own without God's help. They suffered a terrible defeat.
5. Even after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, being fed by manna, and having water provided every day, they were still not ready to let God take them into the land following His plan. So, God finally allowed them to fight their way in using their own swords and spears, killing everyone as they did so. (See **Deuteronomy 20:10-18**. Contrast Exodus 23:20-33.)
6. How could God take them into His rest when they rebelled at every opportunity despite all that God had done for them?
7. It was always God's plan that we remain in a perfect relationship with Him. But, of course, that plan was broken when Adam and Eve believed the lies of Satan and ate the fruit, introducing sin to this world.
8. In **Genesis 15:13-21**, God had warned Abraham that his descendants would go through some very difficult times but that, eventually, they would come back and claim the land in which he was wandering. The whole story of Abraham and his descendants down through slavery in Egypt is fairly well known. But, all during that time via messages handed down from their ancestors, they knew that their ultimate possession was supposed to be the land of Canaan.
9. What they did not recognize or follow was the fact that the only way to enjoy rest and security in the land of God's blessings was to: (1) Follow His plan for their lives, (2) Learn to trust Him, and (3) Have faith in His plans for them. They must not adopt the horrible religious practices of the people living in Canaan.

Deuteronomy 12:1-14: ¹ “Here are the laws that you are to obey as long as you live in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Listen to them! ²**In the land that you are taking, destroy all the places where the people worship their gods on high mountains, on hills, and under green trees.** ³**Tear down their altars and smash their sacred**

stone pillars to pieces. Burn their symbols of the goddess Asherah and chop down their idols, so that they will never again be worshipped at those places.

⁴ **“Do not worship the LORD your God in the way that these people worship their gods.** ⁵Out of the territory of all your tribes the LORD will choose the one place [Later, it was designated to be Jerusalem.] where the people are to come into his presence and worship him. ⁶There you are to offer your sacrifices that are to be burnt and your other sacrifices, your tithes and your offerings, the gifts that you promise to the LORD, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your cattle and sheep. ⁷There, in the presence of the LORD your God, who has blessed you, you and your families will eat and enjoy the good things that you have worked for.

⁸ **“When that time comes, you must not do as you have been doing. Until now you have all been worshipping as you please,** ⁹**because you have not yet entered the land that the LORD your God is giving you, where you can live in peace.** ¹⁰When you cross the River Jordan, the LORD will let you occupy the land and live there. He will keep you safe from all your enemies, and you will live in peace. ¹¹**The LORD will choose a single place where he is to be worshipped, and there you must bring to him everything that I have commanded: your sacrifices that are to be burnt and your other sacrifices, your tithes and your offerings, and those special gifts that you have promised to the LORD.** ¹²Be joyful there in his presence, together with your children, your servants, and the Levites who live in your towns; remember that the Levites will have no land of their own. ¹³You are not to offer your sacrifices wherever you choose; ¹⁴you must offer them only in the one place [Jerusalem] that the LORD will choose in the territory of one of your tribes. Only there are you to offer your sacrifices that are to be burnt and do all the other things that I have commanded you.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡} [Why do you think God chose just one place?][‡]

10. The fourth commandment handed down to the children of Israel on those tablets of stone at Mount Sinai and repeated by Moses 40 years later in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, pointed out two things of which the Sabbath was supposed to remind them:

(1) **The Sabbath was to remind them of creation,** and that God was their ultimate Father. He also was/is the One who sustains their/our lives every minute. But, it is so easy for us as modern humans to get caught up in everything that is happening around us and everything we think is important right now that **we desperately need the Sabbath to pause and think of what is really important. That is what is called *the tyranny of the urgent!***

(2) **The Sabbath was also to remind them of all the incredible things that God had done to get them safely out of Egypt.**

11. But, getting them out of Egypt was only the beginning. It proved so much easier to get Israel out of Egypt, that it was to get “Egypt” out of Israel. The challenge was next to get them into the land of Canaan, following God’s directions. But, as Hebrews 3:12-19 tell us, they failed to enter the land as God had promised. Shortly after leaving Mount Sinai because they did not trust God—they did not believe and did not have faith,—they chose rather to believe the false report of the 10 spies rather than the reports given by Caleb and Joshua who were following God’s directions. All the spies agreed that it was a beautiful land. They came back with one bunch of grapes so large that it had to be carried

on a pole between two men! They could look back a short time and remember all the incredible things that God had done for them. Why had they forgotten God's promise to take them into the land? The report of the 10 spies was directly contradictory to itself.

12. Every day, they experienced: (1) The food, (2) The water, (3) The protection, and (4) The guidance that God gave them. Think of all the things that God had done for them already.

Exodus 40:36-38: ³⁶The Israelites moved their camp to another place only when the cloud lifted from the Tent. ³⁷As long as the cloud stayed there, they did not move their camp. ³⁸During all their wanderings they could see the cloud of the LORD's presence over the Tent during the day and a fire burning above it during the night.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

13. But, still, they refused to accept God's guidance or follow His instructions.

Nehemiah 9:15–17: ¹⁵ "When they were hungry, you gave them bread from heaven [manna], and water from a rock when they were thirsty. You told them to take control of the land which you had promised to give them. ¹⁶But our ancestors grew proud and stubborn and refused to obey your commands. ¹⁷They refused to obey; they forgot all you did; they forgot the miracles you had performed. In their pride they chose a leader to take them back to slavery in Egypt. But you are a God who forgives; you are gracious and loving, slow to be angry. Your mercy is great; **you did not forsake them.**"—*Good News Bible*.^{*††}

14. Paul reminded us that what happened to them should not happen to us unless we lack faith. The entire adult population of Israel except for Caleb and Joshua and Moses died in their wanderings in the desert and had their bodies scattered across the wilderness. Why was it so difficult for them to trust God?

15. So, what can we do today to build our own faith and the faith of those fellow believers who worship with us? Reading again:

Hebrews 4:4-8: ⁴For somewhere in the Scriptures this is said about the seventh day: "God rested on the seventh day from all his work." ⁵This same matter is spoken of again: "They will never enter that land where I would have given them rest." ⁶Those who first heard the Good News did not receive that rest, because they did not believe. There are, then, others who are allowed to receive it. ⁷This is shown by the fact that God sets another day, which is called "Today". [*sic*] Many years later he spoke of it through David in the scripture already quoted:

"If you hear God's voice today,
do not be stubborn."

⁸If Joshua had given the people the rest that God had promised, God would not have spoken later about another day.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Israel under Joshua did not completely clear the land as God had instructed. Compare the story of the tribe of Dan as recorded in Judges 18.][†]

16. This promise which they failed to comply with was repeated as David reported in Psalm 95 and as Paul reported in Hebrews 4:6-7. But, even they did not fulfill all the requirements. So, **God continues to invite 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*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, January 25.[§]

17. And what are we told about our lack of faith? Is it similar to how lack of faith affected Israel?

Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and **Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward.** But in the period of doubt and uncertainty that followed the disappointment, many of the advent believers yielded their faith.... Thus the work was hindered, and the world was left in darkness. Had the whole Adventist body united upon the commandments of [696] God and the faith of Jesus, how widely different would have been our history!

It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be thus delayed. God did not design that His people, Israel, should wander forty years in the wilderness. He promised to lead them directly to the land of Canaan, and establish them there a holy, healthy, happy people. But those to whom it was first preached, went not in “because of unbelief.” Their hearts were filled with murmuring, rebellion, and hatred, and He could not fulfill His covenant with them. [Could that ever be true of us?]

For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord’s professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years.—Manuscript 4, 1883.—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism** 695.3-696.2.^{†‡}

18. So, we can see that God’s invitation is still open to all those who will exercise faith. But, it requires a time of decision. Will we join God’s side permanently and irrevocably? Or, will we continue to fall back and by default join Satan’s side in the great controversy?
19. With all these warnings before us, how could we make the mistake of repeating the errors of the past? **Hebrews reminds us that it is those of us here on this earth who are the rebels to which God’s plan is specifically focused. But, the plan of salvation includes beings in the entire universe as well.**

Hebrews 2:14-16: ¹⁴ Since the children, as he calls them, are people of flesh and blood, Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature. He

did this so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death, ¹⁵and in this way set free those who were slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. ¹⁶For it is clear that **it is not the angels that he helps. Instead, he helps the descendants of Abraham.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

20. How does that fit with what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; and Colossians 1:19-20? It fits very well. Notice the following passages by Ellen White.

Through the plan of salvation a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ, the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and results of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* February 13, 1893, par. 12.† *The Signs of the Times*,* December 22, 1914, par. 4^{€†}; *The Messenger*,* June 7, 1893, par. 5^{€†}; *Bible Echoes*,* July 15, 1893, par. 3^{€†}; *That I May Know Him** 366.4.€†

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, **will draw all unto Me.**” John 12:31, 32. **The act of [Jesus] Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan.** It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 68.2-69.0 (1890).†† [Contrast *Reflecting Christ* 50.3-4 (1985) in which the wording is “draw all **men** unto me,”† suggesting Jesus died only for humans and, thus, **leaving out the beings in the rest of the universe who are also key in the great controversy.**]†

21. Are we preparing or are we prepared for the second coming? How many Seventh-day Adventists are actively studying their Bibles, praying earnestly, and witnessing to their friends and neighbors? **Can we explain the three angels’ messages in a way that people can understand? Is that not supposed to be our final message to the world? Try inviting some Adventist friends over to your house for a meal sometime and after the meal, ask them if they can explain the three angels’ messages in plain language?**
22. So, what kind of rest is God offering us? In Hebrews 4:1,3,5,10, Paul made it very clear that the Israelites in the past did not accept God’s invitation and did not trust Him and, thus, failed to enter “the rest.”
23. **The Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus 20 and the repetition in Deuteronomy 5 invite us to remember what God has done for us and for our predecessors.**

24. It is God's intention that the Sabbath rest is to celebrate what God has done all the way from creation down through Mount Sinai down through the life and death of Jesus Christ and to our day. Jesus is now established on the throne in heaven, and He is waiting for us to comply with the conditions so we can join Him. And what are we still lacking? Reading again:

Hebrews 4:8-11: ⁸If Joshua had given the people the rest that God had promised, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹As it is, however, there still remains for God's people a rest like God's resting on the seventh day. ¹⁰**For those who receive that rest which God promised will rest from their own work, just as God rested from his.** ¹¹**Let us, then, do our best to receive that rest, so that no one of us will fail as they did because of their lack of faith.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

25. In these verses, God is inviting us not only to remember what happened in the past but also to look forward to God's plans for us in the future.

26. Have you found Sabbath observance to be a foretaste of heaven?

Isaiah 66:22-23: ²²“Just as the new earth and the new heavens will endure by my power, so your descendants and your name will endure. ²³On every New Moon Festival and every Sabbath, people of every nation will come to worship me here in Jerusalem,” says the LORD.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

27. Jewish tradition upholds this idea about the Sabbath.

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.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Thursday, January 27].^{†‡§} [Content in brackets in the paragraph above is in the source.][‡]

28. **Have we learned how to make the Sabbath a foretaste of heaven?**

29. In light of the fact that so many of our Christian friends have rejected the Sabbath and worship on Sunday, notice these very interesting comments.

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, January 28.†§

Ellen White wrote:

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** 288.2-289.1.†

30. **Do we clearly understand the differences between observing the Sabbath as God intends as a foretaste of heaven, and doing it in a legalistic manner, just to fulfill the requirements?**

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 [*sic*] [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 [*sic*] 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, [*sic*] the Bible of the NT church, *katapauō* (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 20:11) and *sabbatizō* (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.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 422, 423, comment on “Rest” in Hebrews 4:9.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 65-66]. [Note that the brackets and the content in brackets are in the Bible study guide except for *sic* in brackets (which is added three times) after “LXX” which is not in italics in the paragraphs.]^{‡§}

31. What is the rest noted in Hebrews 4:9 that remains for Christians?
32. **Ellen G. White states that the rest that Paul spoke of in Hebrews 4:9 is the rest of grace. How do we enter into that rest of grace?**
33. Are we ready to enter into a partnership with God on the basis of a true faith-relationship that will prepare us for entrance into His kingdom?

*©2021, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. *Electronic version. †Bold type is added. ‡Brackets and content in brackets are added. §Italic type is in the source. ¶Compared with the first source, this source has punctuation and/or capitalization differences only. €This source has minor wording differences compared with the first source and may also have punctuation and/or capitalization differences.*

Last Modified: December 20, 2021