

The 'Rest' Of Hebrews 4

Our Rest Is Yet Unfulfilled

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This sermon is directly linked to last night's message, and explains and expounds upon one word. In a bit broader sense, it explains and expounds upon one chapter. In a still broader sense, it encompasses a huge concept that involves most of the Bible and that on which our lives are intended by God to be consumed—as living sacrifices.

That one word is "rest." The one chapter is Hebrews 4 and the one huge concept is God's promises to Abraham. In a major way, this sermon is also united to the series given just before the Feast, and it is very much part of the meaning of this holy day. The word "rest" also ought to give us implications of the Sabbath.

There is no doubt that Hebrews was, at the time, written for the benefit of 1st century Jews. Even the book's title makes that point clear. There is also no doubt that those to whom it was written were in spiritual trouble. As time sped by and Christ had not yet returned, doubts crept in, and they were gradually slipping away from their confidence and boldness in God.

Hebrews 2:1-4 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with different miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

The slippage of their faith is first made clear here. The overall theme used by the author to appeal to those whose faith was slipping is that Jesus Christ and all that He represents—including His gospel, His death for sin, His office as High Priest in the New Covenant—is so far **superior** to anything else ever offered to mankind (anywhere, anytime) that it is beyond comparison.

Chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews focus on faith—a particular kind of faith, the kind that produces obedience. And very important to those to whom it was written (because of the doubts eroding their faith) is perseverance. Here is where the book begins to impact

on us, I believe, as well.

Remember that Jesus warned—and this is the link with last night's sermon—that we must endure to the end in order to be saved. The people to whom Hebrews was written were slipping away. Not because of intense persecution, although there was some of that, but it was not really intense. It was because of doubt eroding their faith as they awaited Christ's return. The issue is clear that they must hang in there (hang on); and at the same time continue to grow.

Of all people to whom God had given conversion at that time, the Jews should have understood the Kingdom of God promises God made to Israel. They probably did understand the Jews' traditional concept, but they might not have understood the Christian concept of those very same promises.

As Jews, they thought—and Jews still do to this day—that the Kingdom promises would be fulfilled by means of Israel being restored as an independent nation of this world and led by a Davidic king, rather than the future millennial and eternal Kingdom prophesied first by Jesus and later by the apostles. So there was a difference there between the two.

Even the apostles believed this at first, and that is why they gave this question to Jesus in Acts 1.

Acts 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

This traditional concept was difficult for the 1st century Jew to allow to be cleansed from his mind. What made this concept more difficult to let go of is that it is not entirely wrong. That is, the Jews' traditional concept is not entirely wrong. Israel had been the Kingdom of God on earth, and it will be again—but not yet. Something else must occur first.

Their concept is why the early chapters of Acts show the Jews living in a communal state, sharing their prosperity while they awaited Christ's return. They no doubt thought that it would happen any day.

By way of a parallel, today some people in the Church of God are out there focusing so much on prophecy that it is almost to the exclusion of anything else. It is almost as if nothing else matters, and this is not right. Those people are at serious risk.

Neither was it right for the 1st century Jews to believe what they did, but I think it is far more understandable. But I wonder how many, during the 1st century, did not patiently endure what they wrongly hoped for, became discouraged and then fell away as doubts arose.

I feel certain, based on what I observe in the church today, that Christ's failure to return when people hoped He would is a major disappointment. That subject is the backdrop of the book of Hebrews, and the book's purpose is primarily to get people to refocus on the Christian concept of the promises, and to build faith that produces obedience and perseverance.

Hebrews 3:12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

Note that word "departing." That is the same word that is translated in English many times as **apostasy**. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in apostatizing (departing) from the living God."

Hebrews 3:13-18 But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; while it is said, "Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation." For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was He grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses [corpses] fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not?

That is, those whose faith waned—faith in God, faith in the promises that God gave to Abraham.

Hebrews 3:19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

This section is exceedingly clear as to why so many Israelites failed in the wilderness. Their faith broke; and down it went when doubts arose that God would ever bring them into the land, and how they hoped that He would. Not only *when*, but also *how* they hoped He would.

In other words, brethren, the problem was that they were operating on their own time line—the one they believed in. It is no wonder that James tells us that we have need of patience. Our trust breaks down when God does not respond within our preconceived ideas of when He should. So we get depressed, discouraged, and filled with anguish, and that is when we are most likely to do something stupid.

Hebrews 4:1-3 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said, "I have sworn in My wrath, 'If they shall enter into My rest,'" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Here is a powerful warning that means exactly what it says. If we do not believe God any more strongly and clearly than the Israelites in the wilderness, we will not enter God's rest.

A peculiarity of Hebrews 4:1-3 is that the term *rest* appears three times in these three verses, and it is used a total of nine times in this one chapter. We have all heard that repetition is the best form of emphasis. And God certainly is drawing our attention to something important in times like the Hebrews faced. That much repetition ought to be enough to make us understand that there is something here very important to our spiritual well being. It is clear that the author knew that the Jews needed to be reminded and encouraged regarding this term's meaning.

One of the usages of that word ought to bring the Sabbath to mind immediately. That, indeed, is one of the things that the author implies in this chapter, but it is not the only thing that the author is drawing attention to here by using the term "rest."

Three different Greek words are used by the author and then translated into the one English word "rest." The first word is *katapausis*. In Strong's, it is 2663, and it means "reposing down, abode, rest." The second word is *katapauo*. It is 2664, and it means "settled down, or (caused to) desist, cease, rest." As you can probably tell, these two are related to one another and from the same root. The third word is *sabbatismos*. It is number 4520, and it means "the repose of Christianity, rest, Sabbath." It, brethren, is a horse of a different color from the other two, as used in this chapter.

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From where would a Jewish Christian of the 1st century and a modern Christian draw his understanding of the author's use of the term *rest* in this sort of context? Well, the roots of this term go all the way back to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The roots of the use of this word are not just a matter of its specific meaning, or of the promises themselves; but also the fact that the Bible clearly shows that much of Abraham's, Isaac's, and Jacob's lives were lived in a rather nomadic and itinerate way despite the fact that they were materially prosperous and had a rich relationship with God to go along with that prosperity.

A settled life they did not live. A settled life was always something hoped for—something off in the future, when their responsibilities would permit them the stability that other people seemed to have. Despite the exceeding wealth of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham never owned a piece of property other than Sarah's gravesite.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed: and he went out, not knowing where he went.

Brethren, do you know where you are going all the time? I will tell you, if God is leading you, you do NOT. He knows, but we do not. That is one major reason why faith is absolutely necessary, because where He leads us might be scary. It might be painful. On the other hand, it might be wonderfully beautiful and peaceful—for a while.

Hebrews 11:9-10 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Hebrews 11:13-14 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

Here is an overall statement that shows us the general pattern of nomadic life of those to whom the promises were given. But we are going to go back to the book of Genesis to see a few of the details.

Genesis 12:1-7 Now the Lord had said unto Abram, "Get you out of your

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country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you. And in you shall all families of the earth be blessed." So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, "Unto your seed will I give this land." And there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.

It is interesting that, as the story opens, Abram and his family are already on the move. In fact, Genesis 12:1 has an abrupt sense to it. That is, the sense that Abraham had to break from his nation, and from his kinfolk, without informing them. "Get going." And Abraham did!

One thing is sure, he could not tell them where he was going—because he did not know. Have you ever had trouble telling people what you believe? What you know? There is something wrong with you, and they just cannot see it. And you cannot tell them in specific detail because you do not know either. You only know in an overall sense.

God had promised these things, but the promise was also filled with a great number of uncertainties as well. So this sense of instability, of rootlessness, of not really belonging even to where they were presently living, typifies Abraham and his seed. It is not just Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It comes all the way down, brethren, to you—to this day. It pictures restlessness as contrasted to rootedness.

Genesis 17:7-8 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you. And I will give unto you, and to your seed after you, the land wherein you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

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It begins to be seen here that a covenant they made with God and the promise of land to settle into are directly related. The implication is that they will be, eventually, in a permanently-given land. Notice the word "everlasting." A permanently-given land—permanent as contrasted to their itinerate lifestyle. And in that land they would be free to establish a righteous family society. I say "family" because it applied to Abraham *and his seed*. Eventually, you see brethren, the whole society is going to be one family. But that is way off into the future, even today yet.

This feeds right into Hebrews 4:4, as we will begin to see as we go along. The implication is that there will be a permanently-given land—permanent as contrasted to their itinerate lifestyle—where they would be free to establish a righteous family society based on the worship of God. The story thread goes on to show that, until that is achieved, they would be continually abused, harassed, and tempted by either their immediate neighbors or the neighboring nations. The harassment is especially shown in the life of Isaac; to a lesser extent Jacob; and then things like the imprisonment and temptation that took place in Joseph's life.

We all know that eventually the Israelites were in Egypt, where they grew to over two million strong—experiencing a depressing and seemingly hopeless existence as slaves. It is there in Egypt that we see two-plus million of Abraham's descendants milling about in a land that is not theirs. Then they become freed, through God's intervention, only to experience more privation, temptation, and rootless wandering in the wilderness.

The pattern is clear. Abraham and his descendants will, for the most part, be unanchored—looking forward to something and some place else. They are rootless pilgrims. Is the "rest" beginning to mean something? There is a time coming when we will not be pilgrims, but it has not happened yet.

Brethren, because God is still on His throne and He is carrying things out, you can expect that your life is going to contain a fairly large portion of rootlessness. Remember that one whole generation (of those above age 20) lost their lives in the wilderness when they lost sight of the promises and what their ancestors experienced before them.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Even in the freedom that they experienced in the wilderness, the nation's life—of

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Abraham's children—is unsettled. Taking root and resting in peace is always in the future. And this period of time, even after they came into the land, was followed by the tumultuous period of the judges. Then, finally, a brief and wonderful prosperity and peace under David and Solomon. And then again a tumultuous existence for about 300 years, as divided kingdoms—at times under righteous kings, but mostly unrighteous ones. This was followed by the captivity to Assyria and to Babylon. Thus the concepts of what "kingdom land" and "rest" meant to 1st century Jews was formed and hardened because they could look back on the history of their people.

The word **rest** (in a national sense) came to be a code word that they used to convey the time when Israel would come into their own kingdom and land, under a righteous king. Today we might use the term "Millennium," or "Kingdom of God," to essentially convey the same concept. To them, though, it meant rest from political turmoil, evil social pressures, warfare; and separation from the temptations of foreign cultures and foreign religious practices that plagued them throughout their history.

It included peace, and prosperity, and leadership, and influence of a quality that they had never experienced in a long, long history. But, as promising as it was, the 1st century Jew, in his view, was quite limited in that it focused on an earthly kingdom. Very many of them missed the full intent of what Jesus preached.

Do you remember the two men on the road to Emmaus when Jesus was resurrected? I am going to use them as an example of how they missed much of what Jesus said when He was preaching to them.

Luke 24:13-17 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned [They were talking this back and forth, wondering what happened.], Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were held that they should not know Him. And He said unto them, "What manner of communications are these that you have one to another, as you walk; and are sad?"

They then launched into a description of what it was that they were talking about, and why they were sad.

Luke 24:24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said. But Him they saw not.

Jesus' response is really interesting.

Luke 24:25-26 Then He said unto them, "O fools [How would you like Jesus to call you a fool?], and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?"

Boy, He really chewed them out (as we might say today). What this does is typify how much the people missed in connecting Old Testament scriptures and Old Covenant concepts with what Jesus was teaching. He called them "fools" for not understanding teaching that He undoubtedly felt should be plain to them as He magnified the promises into their spiritual realities.

But, you see, the code word "rest" did not mean the same thing to them as it should have meant to them, since they heard Jesus' preaching. How hard is it for you and me to get old concepts and old ideas out of our minds? To be washed by the water of the Word, or that we hang on to them?

It was a long time before their spiritual understanding of this subject (that we are talking about here today) reached the level that it needed to be—to sustain faith in the face of the fact that they might die before Christ returned. Despite their misunderstandings, the concepts of land, kingdom, and rest are carried over from the Old Testament and greatly expanded upon by Jesus' teaching. I want to give you just a little sample, showing how He reinforced what He was teaching.

Matthew 9:32-36 As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never so seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He casts out devils [demons] through the prince of the devils [demons]." And [I want you to especially notice this:] Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

The word "fainted" would be better translated today into the term "distressed." The

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people were distressed. Notice the way Jesus interpreted what was causing the distress. They were scattered abroad. Does that remind you of anything today? How about the Church of God being scattered abroad? And why there are certain depressions that are floating around in people's minds because of this circumstance?

Do you not know that God knows that we are scattered? And that He was the one who did it? And from this scattering is going to come things far better than if we had stayed as one body in the Worldwide Church of God. You know where that body went! Do you still want to be a part of it?

The scattering has a negative effect that we have to be aware of, because it causes distress. We think of former glories, and how nice it was then when there was 140,000-150,000 of us keeping the Feast of Tabernacles all over the world. It made us feel strong and like we were really part of something. Maybe God wants to see "How will you react when you are not really part of something that is big and respected? Will you still stay with Me? Or is your loyalty to Me hinged on being part of something big and respected? Will you stand alone?" That can be distressing.

These things are still being worked out. But what I want you to see here is that, when Jesus went to places, He preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God and He **healed**. Do you understand why He did that? Everything that He did and said was designed to clarify and reinforce aspects of the promises given to Abraham, because that is where our hope is. Jesus confirmed those promises, and they are as solid as anything can be because of that confirmation.

And the healings, what did they do? They were signs to the people who were hearing the preaching that this is what is going to happen when these promises are fulfilled. Healing will come along with it. God, through Jesus Christ, was not only giving the message; but He was also picturing the benefits of **the rest**.

Acts 28:30-31 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house [This was in Rome.], and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Paul was a typical example of all of the apostles, who also preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God; but they made it clear that it was going to be a Kingdom one had to be **qualified** for. Here we are coming back into the picture. Herbert Armstrong was chastened—I guess you might say yelled at considerably—because people said you did

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not have to qualify, when he would use that word. But let us go to II Thessalonians 1:3-5, where Paul wrote:

II Thessalonians 1:3-5 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith grows exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other abounds; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure: which is a manifest token [meaning, plain evidence] of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be **counted worthy** of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.

Salvation is NOT something God just gives away without the reciprocates of those promises meeting clear responsibilities. Brethren, it is in meeting these responsibilities that much of the rootlessness that we now face as we make our pilgrimage to our place of rest appears.

There is something intriguing—some information regarding "the rest"—that is contained right within the promises. We are going to take a look at this, going back to Genesis 12 once again. I will not read everything here, but in Genesis 12:1 Abraham is simply promised a land. "A land that I will show you," God said. But by verse 7, the land is designated as Canaan.

What I am headed off on here, so that you can follow, is that you will see that the promises are gradually expanded. God knew exactly what He was doing. But we cannot grasp everything at once, can we? We cannot. And so God gives us a little bit here, a little bit there, and we can begin to see the promise growing into something that is so awesome that we cannot contain it!

Genesis 15:18 And in the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "Unto your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

Remember, it was just Canaan (just a couple of chapters ago). Now the promise is expanded from the Nile River to the Euphrates River. That is a pretty sizable increase already in the amount of land that God is going to give to Abraham.

Genesis 17:8 And I will give unto you, and to your seed after you, the land wherein you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting

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possession; and I will be their God.

So it is not temporarily given. He has made it very clear: "It is yours, and your seed's, forever."

Genesis 22:17 That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.

There are two things here. We see that the number of Abraham's children is going to be what you might say virtually uncountable. But right then, there was only really Isaac. That was it. Ishmael did not count yet. But eventually even he will be included within it as well.

In addition to that, Abraham's descendants are promised the gate of their enemies. We would have to see the whole context here. The context really is all nations of the earth will be blessed because of Abraham's descendants. So the phrase "gate of their enemies" implies worldwide possession of multiple gates.

So you can see that the promise is expanding—Canaan, between the two rivers, and now we are getting implications of worldwide possession. It keeps getting more and more specific.

Genesis 26:3 [Here God is speaking to Isaac.] Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for unto you, and unto your seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham your father.

Now countries are added to the promise that is given here. It appears that the 1st century Jews at first overlooked the implications of the expansion of the promises. This principle is very important to understanding the promise's spiritual aspects as well. In other words, as the promises' physical aspects expand in their magnitude, so also does the spiritual. And now, from the apostle Paul, we will make this very clear.

Romans 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Abraham and his descendants will inherit the entire earth; but, you know what, even this is promised in the Old Testament. You can write down these verses and pick up the story flow [later]—Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, 18. But we will pick it up beginning in verse 21.

Daniel 7:21-22 I beheld [Daniel said], and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them: until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.

Remember that it is now earth-wide.

Daniel 7:27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.

When you put all of these verses together, that makes it pretty clear. So the inheritance of the saints is ***the eternal inheritance*** of the earth. This is all part of the discussion that is going on in Hebrews 3-4, and it is introduced by the term *rest*.

Up to this point we have seen that the gospel was preached to the Jews in Jesus' day, and then by the apostles on a much wider scale throughout the Middle East and beyond following Jesus' death and resurrection.

In Matthew 24, which is an end-time prophecy, we find that the end has not come yet. But Jesus said, in verse 14, that the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to the entire world. In Matthew 28:18-19, it makes it even more specific—that it is going to be preached in every nation (all nations).

Now, we are going back to Hebrews 4 once again. We will just concentrate for a moment or two on something that is, in a sense, rather curious.

Hebrews 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them?

Do you see what that says? The gospel of the Kingdom of God was preached to the

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Israelites in the wilderness! How complete the message was, I do not know. But I do know this—God does not lie. What was preached to them truly was the gospel, and the author implies without qualification that it was the same as the one preached to us.

Hold that thought of the gospel being preached to them, as we move ahead. Remember that he is talking about **the rest**.

Hebrews 4:6 Seeing therefore it remains that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:9 There remains therefore a rest to the people of God.

There are two thoughts here. The rest remains. To whom does "the rest remains" apply to? It applies to the people of God. So it remains. That promise remains to be fulfilled to some, and that "some" is what he designates as the people of God (in verse 9).

Is not this epistle written to members of the Church of God? And the epistle, unlike the Old Testament scriptures, was NOT written to the nation of Israel.

It is right here that we begin to be able to clearly establish one of two possible alternatives. One is that the promise of everlasting inheritance of the land and "the rest" implies that it has been transferred from the physical nation of Israel to the spiritual children of Abraham—that is, the children of God. The second alternative is that not even from the very beginning did God ever intend the physical nation entering into the land under Joshua as anything more than a type of the spiritual children of Abraham entering the Kingdom of God. And, since God's plans were completed from the very beginning, I believe this second alternative is the one.

Where do I get the idea that God's plan was completed from the very beginning? It comes right out of verse 3.

Hebrews 4:3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said, "As I have sworn in My wrath, if they shall enter into My rest:" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

God had this all planned out before He started. You can confirm this in Ephesians 1:4 and also in II Timothy 1:8-9. Both say that these things were finished from the foundation of the earth. I think this gives us some sort of an idea, an ability to catch just

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a little bit of a grasp of the immensity of the thinking of God.

When we stop to think that, usually if a man builds a building (whether it is a house, office building, or whatever), he draws up the plans before he does it. But—because men are not God—the plans have to be adjusted, and altered, and changed; and we sometimes start all over again, maybe with a new plan. But God's mind is such that He had everything figured out before He began!

That is so awesome, when you figure what just the earth is like or what just our little universe is like within the Milky Way, and what the Milky Way is within all of the heavens. What a Mind! And yet we worry. We will see that Jesus clarified some things here, just in case there would be a question.

Matthew 21:42-43 Jesus said unto them, "Did you never read in the scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

Jesus clarifies this in Luke 12.

Luke 12:32 "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Do you know what? Jesus was not even satisfied with that. He wanted to make us sure that we understand what is going on here. So Paul wrote:

Romans 9:6-9 Not as though the word of God has taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel. Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, "In Isaac shall your seed be called." This is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, "At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son."

What Paul is explaining here is that, just because one is physically an Israelite—a descendant of Abraham—it does not qualify them as recipients of God's promise. They

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will NOT receive "the rest." It is given only to those whom Paul identifies as **the children of promise**. He uses Isaac as his example. Isaac was begotten in Sarah's womb by a miracle, because she was beyond the age of childbearing. In like manner, the spiritual children of God are the product of a miraculous transformation of their nature. That is, by God's grace they are converted. As Paul writes:

Galatians 3:26-29 For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

One more verse on this, just to nail down completely who the children are who are going to receive "rest."

Galatians 6:15-16 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule [that is, live their lives by faith], peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

What Paul is saying is that there are now *two Israels*: one physical and one spiritual. And God owns only one of them—that is, the Israel of God (the spiritual children of God).

When we look back on Israel's history, what they produced in their societies was a syncretism of biblical truth and paganism, which was hardly the pure religion that God gave them. My recent sermon series described a modern parallel in which Hellenistic Christianity is a syncretism of biblical truth and Gnosticism. Listen to what Jesus testified regarding the Pharisees of His day:

Matthew 23:15 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell [Not a child of God, but a child of the grave—of Hades.] than yourselves."

Is it easy to see why they are *not* going to be part of "the rest" of God? Of course, this goes back again to the thought in Hebrews 4 and why it says what it says. Let us go look at that.

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Hebrews 4:8 For if Jesus [Joshua] had given them rest, then would He not afterward have spoken of another day.

No, He would not have spoken of another day. Israel never lived up to their responsibilities—even under leaders as great as Joshua and David. The author is saying, when the children of Israel went into the Promised Land under Joshua, that did *not* count as the fulfillment of "the rest" of Hebrews 4. That is, of the promise. It was only a type that we can learn from.

With that verse, the central issue for the Church of God is broached. We to whom this epistle is written are being warned that the same destiny can befall us IF we repeat the failure of Israel to faithfully persevere through our commitments. And, brethren, we have so much more to lose than they did!

Remember that I told you before that in Hebrews 4:3, this verse is telling us that the plan of God was completed before God even started the creation. But there is something else that is also mentioned here. It is a little bit difficult in the King James Bible, because it is not translated correctly. It says:

Hebrews 4:3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said, "As I have sworn by My wrath, if they shall enter into My rest..."

It is that last phrase which is not translated properly. Exactly the same phrase appears in Hebrews 3:11, and there it is translated properly. "I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter into My rest.'" That is the way it should read.

Hebrews 4:3 "...They shall not enter into My rest," although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

The author is making a contrast. True believers *do* enter into God's rest, even though it has not yet occurred. The unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness did *not* enter into the promised "rest," even though God's purpose was formulated from before Adam and Eve. This is what it means when it says that His works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Of course, that is reinforced by Ephesians 1:4 and II Timothy 2.)

So what is the author saying here in verse 3? He is saying that God had *parallel programs* operating, going on, at one and the same time. While God was dealing with

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Israel, working things out physically, He also had a parallel spiritual purpose going on. Thus, God had two major parts of one purpose that He intended from the very beginning.

Now, there is significant overlapping between the two. While He was dealing with Moses, and Joshua, and David (for example), He was also dealing with the other Israelites—only physically. At some time in the future, the two parts are going to be drawn together into one grand-smash finale when both become one.

From your understanding already, you ought to be able to see that is still a long way off. It will not occur until after the Millennium. It will not occur until after the Last Great Day. That is how far ahead God was thinking. Thousands of years in advance, He had everything envisioned in His mind as to how He was going to work these things out. He said, "I am going to have two things going on at once." One is setting an example that you should or should not follow.

Then there is the other one. This is the one that really counts, brethren. And it included Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, the prophets, and on and on. How many there were, I do not know. But Revelation 7 and 14 seem to indicate that, when this portion of the plan [is done], those who truly do enter into **the rest** will only number 144,000 out of the 40 or 50 billion that have lived.

You can see that God's purpose is being worked out in small increments. They may seem big to us, but they are small increments. Those of us who are converted, we have weighty responsibilities. And we need to consider: "Is it worth it to really devote ourselves to God? To receive the inheritance?"

Well, we just saw that Paul said God wants to see people who are **approved**. That part of the plan of God falls on our shoulders. Will we repeat the same misbehavior as the Israelites of old? This is why the example is given. God is saying, "Do not do this. It is the easy thing to do. Instead, control yourself. Discipline yourself. Believe what I tell you, and throw yourself into it." Is it worth it?

Hebrews 4:9 There remains therefore a rest to the people of God.

If we had looked at something a little bit more thoroughly, we would find that—all the way back in Psalm 95—David understood that entering the land under Joshua did *not* count as the fulfillment of God's promise. That is why he wrote: "Today, if you will hear His voice." God's spiritual program was still going on.

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David knew what was coming. He may not have known it to the fullness that we do. But he knew then that what was happening with the Israelites was only a type—and that he was involved in a different program that was running parallel to what his fellow countrymen were experiencing.

Please understand, brethren, the same thing has happened to you and to me. God has two programs going on at the same time. Hebrews 4 is written to assure you that **the rest** still lies ahead! It has not been given yet. (I mean the one that really counts.) And so he says:

Hebrews 4:10 For he that is entered into His [*sabbatismos*] rest...

This is the only place in the chapter where that [Greek word] is used.

Hebrews 4:10 ...he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from His.

"There remains therefore," brethren, "***a keeping of the Sabbath***" is what he said. That is, a keeping of *the rest*. We are seeing a spiritual aspect of the Sabbath. The weekly Sabbath is a type of the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham.

I want you to listen to Alan Knight, the author of *Primitive Christianity in Crisis*. I want you to listen to this paraphrase that he made of this paragraph here in Hebrews 4. He shortened it with very interesting and succinct statements. It is so understandable.

Do not lose faith in God's promise of kingdom rest. Do not turn back as your forefathers did. Christian salvation is a continuation of the kingdom promises first made to Israel, all of which were in place from before the world began and are symbolized by God's rest on the seventh day of creation.

That is why we are today to continue observing the weekly Sabbath as Christians. Sabbath observance continues because our kingdom and its rest are yet to come.

If the kingdom promise and God's rest had been completely fulfilled by ancient Israel, then there would be no more Sabbath observance.

Therefore, press forward in continued obedience and persevere in faith. And,

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as you need to gather every Sabbath, be encouraged by this sign God has given us of the certainty of the coming of His kingdom rest.

So the whole point of Hebrews 3 and 4 is that **the rest** has not happened yet. It still lies ahead. "Today," brethren, "if you will hear His voice," David said.

Now, I want you to consider these important aspects of the weekly Sabbath:

1. The Sabbath memorializes when God ceased from His work that first week.

I want you to understand that the word "Sabbath" does **not** mean rest. Sabbath means stop! That is what God did. On the seventh day, He **stopped** what He was doing on the other six days. Rest is the result of stopping. But, in an argument over the Sabbath, Jesus said, "My Father works, and I work."

You see God stopped, we will say, 'the physical reconstruction of the world destroyed by Satan and his demons' in His preparations for mankind and that part of His purpose. So He stopped that, but the spiritual work went right on. This is why Jesus said that the priests are blameless when they do God's spiritual work on the Sabbath.

2. The Sabbath is a sign of the fact that God's entire plan of kingdom rest was complete, and ready to be carried out, from the foundation of the world.

3. The Sabbath celebrates the physical creation.

4. The Sabbath typifies the Millennium, when Israel will be restored to its inheritance and thus able to worship God as He commanded—as they earlier neglected to do.

5. The Sabbath typifies the eternal kingdom rest of the children of God born into His Family and prepared to rule under Jesus Christ.

Thus, New Covenant salvation is a sabbatarian promise, wrapped in sabbatarian symbolism, and accompanied by sabbatarian institutions that serve to remind us to keep focused on God's promises.

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6. Weekly Sabbath observance is a key ingredient towards keeping our eyes toward the kingdom promise.

Especially verse 10 argues that Sabbath observance is a sign of entering into the eternal spiritual Kingdom of God. Thus, Sabbath observance celebrates both the physical and spiritual creation—because when the physical ended, the spiritual began.

7. Sabbath keeping is the sign that identifies God's people to Him, and Him to them.

And so, in Hebrews 3:15: While it is said, "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation..." so that we do not fall in the same way Israel did.