

## 4. The Sabbath

PAUL WAS anxious that Israel's experience should not be repeated by his readers. As Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness, so nearly forty years had now elapsed since Christ's ascension. The Israel of Paul's time was no more ready to enter into God's rest than was Israel in the time of Moses. The great events that Jesus had foretold were imminent: their glorious city and the temple were about to be laid in ruins. God had waited nearly forty years for the people to adjust themselves to the new order; the new covenant had been ratified by the blood of Christ; the old had been done away with; and it was time that its symbol, the temple, should be taken away. But Israel still clung to the old ceremonies. A generation had passed since the Aaronic priesthood had become ineffective, but the Jews still adhered to it. Thus far they had not "entered in."

To the apostle the parallel between Israel at the time of the ratification of the old covenant and Israel at the time of the establishment of the new covenant was clear, and also ominous. Would Israel repeat the failure of the fathers? There was every indication that they would. But God would not let them do this without one last appeal to save them from making this fatal mistake. Paul therefore recounts to them Israel's experience, and tells them to beware lest they also should seem to come short.

Israel's failure properly to regard the Sabbath was one chief cause for their rejection by God, as is evident from a reading of the twentieth chapter of Ezekiel. This was not because of their failure to observe the day itself, but rather because of their failure to understand what the Sabbath symbolized—conversion, complete dedication to God, sanctification, rest, fellowship, holiness.

Hebrews 4:1-5. "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, 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. For he spoke in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest!"

The apostle discusses God's rest that Israel failed to enter, and connects it with the seventh-day Sabbath. This New Testament reference to the Sabbath of creation and its intimate relation to holy living, makes this section a noteworthy contribution to Christian doctrine and sanctification. It is not the question of a day merely, but of a life—a life of dedication and holiness. This life Israel of old rejected, and with it also its sign of sanctification, the Sabbath. There is danger that men may do the same thing today.

Verse 1. "Promise being left." The present tense here used marks a present and continuous leaving behind, and also a present and continuous invitation and admonition to enter. The promise had continually been held out, but each generation had rejected the promise, and thus closed its probation. Paul's generation was about to do the same, but while there was still time, God would make one more attempt. The door was still open, and the promise was still left, but there was no time to lose. They were in danger of coming short of it, as had Israel of old. This God would prevent if He could.

"His rest," not rest in general, not even the rest, but His, God's, rest. Of this we shall hear more.

Verse 2. "The gospel," the glad tidings. This was preached to us, and it has been preached to them. The reading of this verse is interesting. It is not, "Unto them was the gospel preached as well as unto us," but the reverse: "Unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them." Through types and ceremonies, in sacrifices and rituals, the fathers received a knowledge of the gospel.

"Did not profit them." They received little profit from the preaching, because the word was not "mixed with faith." This becomes more emphatic when we learn that the reading is not the word preached, but the word heard, or the word "of hearing": "The word of hearing [margin] did not profit them, not being mixed with faith."

This statement throws a solemn responsibility on preachers, but equally so on hearers. Success in preaching does not depend upon the speaker only. It may, indeed, not depend upon him at all. Even Christ was limited by the receptiveness of the hearers. "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Matthew 13:58. It is possible for the hearers completely to nullify the preaching. It is well to have this in mind. There are times when the pulpit is less to blame than the pew.

We are wont to throw the blame on the preacher for the meager results that preaching brings. This may be the place where the blame belongs, for there are too many mediocre preachers, men with no vital message to communicate to others, men who themselves have not been touched by the celestial flame, who

preach tame, dull, lifeless discourses that weary both God and men. Doubtless there are many men today who should be preaching instead of following the plow, but there are a large number of preachers who would do more good for humanity if they would engage in some other line of work than preaching.

Although this is true, it is equally true that the responsibility for unsatisfactory results does not always rest upon the minister. And it is this phase of the question with which our text deals. It puts the blame squarely on the hearers. They did not mix faith with hearing. They heard the words, perhaps, but their faith was lacking.

Noah persuaded only seven people to go with him into the ark. That was a small result indeed for such a time. Yet few would blame Noah, though he would not long remain on the pay roll were he preaching today. We conceive that this admonition of Paul's in regard to preaching and hearing would do much good if heeded today. We most certainly need better and more efficient preachers. But we just as certainly need better hearers. It would be well for each to apply this to himself personally.

Verse 3. "We which have believed do enter." The last verse in the third chapter affirms that Israel "could not enter in because of unbelief." Here the author states that "we which have believed do enter." This shows that the rest was still open, for at the very time when Paul was writing, some were entering. They could not enter because of unbelief. We which believe do enter.

The rest that the believer enters is here called the rest in the original, not merely rest or a rest. It is unfortunate that the definite article the is left out, for it points clearly to His rest in verse 1, which is God's rest. The point which the apostle makes is that the door is still open, and "we which have believed do enter," or better, are entering. God has not cast away His people. As proof of this the apostle says that some are now entering in. Moses did not bring Israel in. Joshua did indeed lead Israel into Canaan, but not into God's rest. God, therefore, had made call after call to each succeeding generation. Even in Paul's day His house was not yet filled. There was room for others to enter; and they did enter, they were entering in.

"If they shall enter." This is the same construction that in chapter 3, verse 11 is rendered "They shall not enter." It is merely an emphatic way of stating that a certain thing shall not be done; and wherever this statement is found, as here in verse 5, it should read, "They shall not enter." It is confusing to the ordinary reader to find an identical expression translated two different ways.

The thought in this part of verse 3 is therefore this: "We which have believed are entering into God's rest. But of the others who believe not, God has sworn that they shall not enter into his rest."

"Although the works were finished." From the very beginning of the creation of this world God had in mind to provide rest for His people. This is evident from the fact that after the six days of creation God rested and invited men to rest with Him. God did not call Adam and Eve into being merely to present to them a life of labor and continued work. Hence, the very next day after their creation, the second day of their life, He invited them to rest and spend the day with Him. They had had one day of labor; now came the day of rest. In these two days they had a complete taste of life as God intended it for them. They could now choose intelligently and evaluate God's wonderful gift of life. God had given them a sample of what He had in store for them. This was done not a thousand years after creation but as soon as "the works were finished from the foundation of the world."

Paul here uses this fact to prove that God from the very beginning had in mind to provide His creatures with fullness of life, a complete, satisfying life, a life that combined just the right proportions of labor and rest. In their wilderness wanderings during those forty years, they saw but little promise of rest. Year after year went by, and still they were on the march. In Egypt they had homes, settled abodes, where they could rear their children and live in comparative peace, even though they had to work hard. They had their flesh pots and were not dependent upon manna from heaven for their sustenance. Altogether, as they compared their present position with that in Egypt, they were clear that Egypt held many advantages over the wilderness. If this were all God had to offer them, they had better go back to Egypt again. God had promised them rest, but there was no rest in sight.

Why did not God lead them into the Promised Land? For the reason that they were not spiritually prepared. The moment they were ready God could take them in, but not before. Their entrance was dependent upon their spiritual condition.

This was the crux of the situation. God would give them rest from their wanderings, rest from their enemies, as soon as they had rest in their souls. The assurance had been given them, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Exodus 33:14. This was the rest that Jesus meant when He said, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls." Matthew 11:28, 29. This was the call that came to Israel at the time of the captivity: "Stand you in the ways, and see, and ask for the

old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." Jeremiah 6:16.

"Rest for your souls." This was the rest into which God would bring them, the rest in which God was chiefly interested and the people least. The people were chiefly interested in getting into the land of Canaan and finding rest from their wanderings. But the condition for this rest was rest in God, rest for their souls.

Continually came the thought to the mind of the children of Israel in the wilderness, Will God ever bring us into the Promised Land? We have been in the wilderness ten, twenty, thirty years, and we are as far from Canaan as ever. Are we all to die here? Will we never get in? Will we never gain our rest?

Paul is answering these questions in the verse before us. Yes, God will bring you in. He will give you rest. This, indeed, has been God's purpose from the time "the works were finished from the foundation of the world." After His work was finished He rested. The rest was as definitely a part of His program as the work. Yield yourselves to the fashioning hand of God, and He will give you rest-rest for your souls, and rest from your wanderings.

This argument Paul is now applying to his own generation. The Jews had been God's chosen people; but, despite this, it seemed to them that they had suffered more than any other nation. True, they were in the land, but they certainly had not had rest from their enemies. And now a crisis was approaching. They doubtless did not know what we now know: that this was their last opportunity. The last call was about to sound. Would they heed the call of Jesus and come to Him that they might find rest for their souls?

But was it not too late now? No, says Paul, some are entering; "we which have believed do enter." That meant that others might enter also.

Verses 4, 5. "The seventh day." The rest of the soul, in which God is vitally interested, is closely connected with the Sabbath. Rest in God means oneness with God, a complete dedication of the whole being to Him, every obstacle to perfect communion removed.

The rest of the soul means entire sanctification, a yielding of all to the Master, a sinking into God. Of this experience the Sabbath is the sign. "I gave them my Sabbaths," says God, "to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them." Ezekiel 20:12. He says further that "They shall be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God." Verse 20.

In these verses God combines sanctification and the Sabbath, saying that the latter is a sign of the first. These are companion statements to those in the fifty sixth chapter of Isaiah: "Blessed is the man that does this, and the son of man that lays hold on it; that keeps the Sabbath from polluting it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." Isaiah 56:2. To "the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant," God says, "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters. I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off." Verses 4, 5. And lest any think that this has reference to the Jews only, God adds: "The sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keeps the Sabbath from polluting it, and takes hold of my covenant. Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." Verses 6, 7.

These statements all make it clear that the Sabbath is closely connected with true Christianity, with rest in God, with sanctification, so closely that God calls it a sign of sanctification.

As God rested the first Sabbath with His own in the Garden of Eden, perfection met the eye everywhere. There was nothing to hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain. And as "God did rest the seventh day from all his works," He saw a finished creation; the whole world united in His praise, and everywhere were harmony and love. The Sabbath was the perfect setting for this occasion, the pearl of all days, the day for which the other days had been a preparation. And so "on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." Genesis 2:2, 3.

"God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it," and "did rest the seventh day from all his works." Genesis 2:3; Hebrews 4:4. This day which He in the beginning sanctified and upon which He rested, became the sign of sanctification, of holiness, of rest in God. Hebrews calls it "his rest," "my rest," "that rest." (Hebrews 3:18; 4:1,3,5,11.)

With this background it can easily be understood why God should call attention to the seventh day when He speaks of entering into His rest, as in the fourth verse before us. The Sabbath is so closely

connected with rest in God, with sanctification, that He could not do otherwise.

"In this place again." The author is here repeating what He said before, that the disobedient shall not enter. It is an affirmation of the statement in Hebrews 3:18, "To whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not."

Hebrews 4:6-11. "Seeing therefore it remains that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: again, he limited a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time. As it is said, To day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

We do not know the number upon which God has decided as necessary that His house may be filled. God's command is to "go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." Luke 14:23. His house was not filled in the time of Israel, for "they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief." Verse 6. It was not filled in the time of David, for then "would he not afterward have spoken of another day" in which they might enter. Verse 8. It was not filled in the apostle's day, else there could be no invitation to labor "to enter into that rest." Verse 11. It is true now as it was then, that there "remains therefore a rest to the people of God." Verse 9. There is still room, room for all; but the door will not remain open forever. In the parable of the ten virgins the fateful words are recorded, "And the door was shut." Matthew 25:10.

Verse 6. "Some must enter therein." This has reference to the rest of God, the true rest of the soul. As noted before, though Israel entered Canaan, few of them entered into God's rest.

But some must enter. God will have His house filled. Men's unbelief may compel God to change His method of working, but in the end God's eternal plan will be carried out.

Verse 7. "He limited a certain day," rather "appoints." This day is "to day if you will hear his voice." In the original "certain day" and "to day" are in apposition, "to day" defining what is meant by "certain day."

Verse 8. "If Jesus had given them rest." It is unfortunate that the word "Jesus" is used, when it should be "Joshua," as is noted in the margin. Of this Alford says, "Our translators, in retaining 'Jesus' (the Greek form of Joshua) here, have introduced into the mind of the ordinary English reader utter confusion. It was done in violation of their instructions, which prescribed that all proper names should be rendered as they were commonly used."-The New Testament for English Readers, vol. 2, p. 640.

The apostle here meets the objection that would arise in the minds of some, that though Moses did not lead the people into the Promised Land, Joshua did, and that therefore God's purpose was fulfilled when Joshua led Israel into Canaan.

But this is the very thing that the apostle affirms is not what God had in mind. As stated before, it was not enough for Israel to enter the land. God wanted them to enter His rest. At the time the psalm from which this quotation is taken, was written, Israel was already in Canaan, and had been there many years; but though they were in the land, they had not entered God's rest. Hence, God made another call, "in David."

"Another day." If Joshua had given them rest, God's intent would have been fulfilled. But Joshua did not give them rest. He merely led them into Canaan. That Joshua did not give them rest is indicated in the "if". "If Joshua had given them rest." This statement is conclusive proof that God by "rest" means more than entering Canaan for there was no if in regard to entering Canaan. They were there already; and in David's time, when this psalm was written, they had been there hundreds of years. But Joshua had not given them rest. God therefore invites them to enter today.

Verse 9. "There remains therefore a rest to the people of God." The Greek word for "rest" in this verse is different from the word for "rest" in the other places. Here it is sabbatismos, a word that derives from Sabbath, and may be translated "keeping of Sabbath," or "Sabbath keeping." The text therefore reads, "There remains therefore a keeping of Sabbath to the people of God."

"There remains." Neither Moses nor Joshua nor David had succeeded in bringing Israel into the rest of God. There remains therefore a keeping of Sabbath, or as Franz Delitzsch translated it, "There remains therefore still a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."

In explanation of this DeFlusch says: "The promise is still open, its fulfillment not yet exhausted: there is still reserved for the people of God, still to be expected by them, as a church of believers, a σαββατισμος, the keeping of a Sabbath, the enjoyment of a Sabbath rest. So it is, and must be; for the

Sabbath of God, the Creator, is destined to become the Sabbath of all creation." Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, vol. 1, p. 197.

"Remains" means that it is left, left over, not appropriated. This is exactly the meaning here. It is not a new Sabbath; it is the same Sabbath as in Eden, as in the time of Moses, Joshua, and David, as in the time of Jesus and Paul. It is the same Sabbath that has always been and that remains.

Farrar says: "Since the word used for 'rest' is here a different word from that which has been used through the earlier part of the argument it is a pity that King James's translators, who indulge in so many needless variations, did not here introduce a necessary change of rendering. The word means 'a Sabbath rest,' and supplies an important link in the argument by pointing to the fact that 'the rest' which the author has in view is God's rest, a far higher conception of rest than any of which Canaan could be an adequate type. The Sabbath, which in 2 Macc. xv. 1 is called the Day of Rest,' is a nearer type of Heaven than Canaan." -The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, p. 68.

Verse 10. "For he that is entered into his rest." This verse has been interpreted in two ways, depending upon the meaning of the first "he." Some take "he" to refer to Christ, that is, He, Christ, has entered into God's rest. Others take "he" to refer to man in general, so that the meaning would be, "Whoever has entered into God's rest." There is nothing in the context that shows to whom "he" refers. We are therefore left to determine for ourselves its meaning.

As has been noted before, where there are two interpretations of a text, and neither of them does violence to sound exegesis, ordinarily each of them contains something of value. This is true of the interpretation of "he" in the present instance. If by "he" is meant Christ, then it is true that He entered into God's rest, and ceased from His labors, as God did from His. Whether we take God's rest here to mean the rest which is the heritage of the saints and into which they enter upon conversion-the same rest to which God has issued so many calls as recorded in this section of Hebrews-or we take it to mean the rest mentioned in verse 4, where "God did rest the seventh day from all his works," Christ entered into just such rest. (Matthew 11:28, 29; Luke 4:16.)

If on the other hand we take "he" to mean man in general, the interpretation would be: "Whoever enters into God's rest, whoever is genuinely converted, bath also ceased from his own works as God did from his." The word "ceased" is the same word that is translated "rest" or "rested" in the other instances where it occurs in this section-as in verse 4, "God did rest," and is the same word that is translated "rest" in the verse before us; so that the reading therefore would be: "He that is entered into God's rest, he also bath rested from his own works as God did from his."

If we ask how God rested from His works, we find the answer in verse 4: "God did rest the seventh day from all his works." As we incorporate this answer into our interpretation of the text, we get this result: "He that is entered into God's rest, he that is truly converted, rests on the seventh day as God did." The Sabbath is God's sign of sanctification. (Ezekiel 20:12.) But a sign is of little value without the reality for which it stands. Whoever, therefore, keeps the Sabbath holy, must himself be holy. This is the same as resting from, or ceasing from, our own works.

We can but believe that God had a purpose in linking the Sabbath with true conversion and sanctification. The story of Israel's disobedience, as recorded in the twentieth chapter of Ezekiel, clearly reveals that failure to keep the Sabbath holy loomed large in their rejection by God. This, however, as has been noted before, meant more than the keeping of a day. The day was important, but it was nevertheless only the outward sign of an inward experience, a sign of holiness, a sign of sanctification. Their failure to recognize and observe the Sabbath revealed an inward state of rebellion, a disinclination to obey God, which necessitated a purge of the rebels. (Ezekiel 20:38.)

Many years, many centuries, God bore with Israel. And now, in Paul's day, just before the destruction of Jerusalem, He makes one last plea. He rehearses the story of the failings of their fathers, tells the children why the fathers failed to enter into the true rest of God, and pleads with them not to follow in their fathers' footsteps, but to turn to God while it is yet called today.

This plea, though addressed to the apostolic church, is also an appeal to every nominal Christian wherever found to turn to God and enter into His rest. It is an appeal for a complete return to the Father's house, a return to His rest, a return to God's glorious Sabbath.

Verse 11. "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest." Let us be diligent, eager, earnest, in our effort to enter into God's rest.

"After the same example." Vaughan comments on this: "Lest any one fall (by placing his foot) in the mark left by the step of the Exodus generation." This enforces the lesson previously impressed, that we are to beware lest we follow the footsteps of those who grieved God by their disobedience.

Hebrews 4:12-16. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need."

Verse 12. "Word of God." When it is said that the Word of God is quick and powerful, the specific reference is to the writings of the Old Testament, as the New Testament had not yet been written and made a part of the canon. This emphasizes what is said in the first chapter, that it was God who spoke through the prophets of old.

Delitzsch translates verses 12 and 13 as follows: "For full of life is the word of God, and full of energy, and more cutting than any two edged sword, and penetrating even to a dividing asunder of soul and spirit, as well as the joints and marrow, and passing judgment on the thoughts and intents of the heart. Nor is any creature hidden from it: but all things are bare and exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." - Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Volume 1, p. 202.

There are those who hold that "the word of God here means Christ personified. However, it seems more natural to refer it to the spoken and written Word of God, particularly the latter.

The Word of God is no dead record of the past, but a living force, as the word "quick" indicates. God is "the living God," and His Word is the living Word. (Hebrews 3:12.) Although this is true of the Word of God in general, it has here specific reference to what has just been said of God's rest and warnings to those who "seem to come short of it." (Verse 1) A. T. Robertson, in Word Pictures, says it has reference to what has been "quoted about the promise of rest and God's rest, but true of any real word of God." - Volume 5, p. 363. Lange's Commentary says: "It is clear from the context that the passage is designed to justify and enforce the preceding warning (ver. 11) terminating emphatically and designedly with its suggestive ἀπειθείας [apeitheias (unbelief or disobedience)]." - Hebrews, p. 93. Vincent, in Word Studies, has the same opinion, putting it in these words: "The message of God which promises the rest and urges to seek it, is no dead, formal precept, but is instinct with living energy." - Volume 4, p. 426. Delitzsch is very clear. Quoting verses 12 and 13, he comments: "We may take it for granted, and as undeniable, that the only logical connection of these two verses with what precedes, as well as with what follows, is to be found in their expressing the living and inexorable energy of that word which, as it formerly brought death upon Moses' contemporaries through their disobedience to its injunctions, so now imposes on the church of Jesus Christ the duty of earnest striving after the promised salvation." - Commentary on the Epistles to the Hebrews, vol. 1, p. 202.

When the author therefore says that the Word of God is living and active, or energetic, we understand this to be true of the whole Word of God, but that it is here cited to enforce what has been said of God's rest and the punishment that came to those who were disobedient.

It is to be expected that unbelievers would scoff at God; but how can we account for so-called Christians making light of God's Word and His commandments, and in particular the commandment dealing with the seventh day? It is this very Word and commandment that are here under consideration, and which the apostle affirms are living and active. God knew that some who would read these admonitions and warnings would disregard the commandments as being a dead letter of the law. It is for such, and for all, that He affirms that the fourth commandment is still living and active.

This also is the significance of the first "for" in verse 12. Let all beware, he says, not to follow in the footsteps of the Exodus people who were disobedient, for the Word of God is still living and powerful, and the commandment is not outdated. They suffered because of their disobedience. The Word is no less powerful now than then.

In making this application of the words under consideration, we are not straining a point to support our view on the Sabbath and the law of God. From the quotations cited it can be seen that we do not stand alone in this interpretation. In fact, to have these verses state a general theory and not make any application to the subject under discussion, seems entirely without reason. The author has brought illustrations from the experience of Israel to show how they failed to enter into God's rest; how they were disobedient and grieved God. He has connected the rest of God with the seventh day, a most pertinent point, as it was the pollution of the Sabbath that was one of the reasons for Israel's rejection by God, as recorded in Ezekiel. He has pleaded with his people not to follow the example of the wilderness people but to enter God's rest while

it is still called today, reminding them that there remains a keeping of Sabbath to the people of God. And now, lest any think that the warning and admonitions have no present application, that the seventh-day Sabbath is a dead letter, he reminds us that the Word is living and active, that it is sharp and piercing as a two-edged sword, and not an ineffective, ceremonial requirement.

"Powerful" is the Greek word *energes*, whence we derive the English word "energy." God's Word is alive, living, as God is living; and it is also active, powerful, energetic. These words almost personalize the Word, and endow it with characteristics that we ordinarily associate with personality. They remind us of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 who had power to shut heaven, who could turn water to blood and smite the earth with plagues. (Verses 13-16)

The Word is not only living and energetic but sharper than any two-edged sword. A sharp sword will lay open the joints and marrow, and so the Word will pierce into the innermost recesses of the soul and spirit, and lay bare the thoughts and intents of the heart.

As a surgeon cuts into human tissue and decides what shall be removed, so the Word of God judges the thoughts and motives of the heart with unfailing accuracy. The word "discerner" in the original is a verbal adjective blending the ideas of divining, discriminating, judging. This is what the Word does to men's motives and thoughts. It not only acts as judge of our actions but lays bare the hidden springs and motives that men may attempt to conceal.

Verse 13. What has been predicated of the Word is now attributed to God. The picture is a striking and powerful one. Nothing is hid from God. Everything is as an open book to Him. The soul stands naked in His presence.

This view of God is terrifying, or comforting, according to the relation men sustain to the judge of all. The hypocrite, the proud, the impure, the self righteous tremble at the thought of the all-seeing eye of God. The trusting, the earnest and honest, the downtrodden and humble soul rejoices that God knows and understands all. No man can ever deceive God. He weighs men's actions and motives in the balances of the sanctuary. And His decisions are just.

Verse 14. "A great high priest, that is passed into the heavens." Rather, "through the heavens." Christ is here presented as being at the "right hand of the Majesty on high." Hebrews 1:3. He is here called "Jesus the Son of God," a combination of the human and the divine, coupled with the title "Son." This text is used by some as proof of the restoration to Christ of all the attributes which He had as God, so that in His humanity He now exercises all the prerogatives formerly reserved for the Godhead.

"Let us hold fast," cling tenaciously to, keep on holding on. "Profession" means confession, faith, doctrine.

Verse 15. "High priest." The preceding verse mentions the "great" high priest. The greatness of Christ is the subject throughout the epistle. He is greater than angels, than Moses, than Joshua. And now He is presented not only as an apostle and high priest (chapter 3:1), but as a great high priest. Is He greater than Aaron, who was a great priest indeed? This the author will soon discuss. In the meantime he assures us that though Jesus is great, He is still one who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; for He has been tempted in all points like as we are, but without sin.

Too often men lose the fellow feeling they formerly possessed when elected to high position or place. Thus the chief butler, when restored to royal favor, completely forgot his fellow prisoner, though Joseph had befriended him. (Genesis 40) This being a common human failing, we are assured that Jesus is not like that; that He has not lost His contact with us, though He is seated at God's right hand.

"Cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." This means not merely that Christ feels kindly toward us and pities us, but that He suffers with us and is one with us in all things.

"Weaknesses" might be a better word than "infirmities." Christ suffers with us as we suffer, but He does more. Many of our difficulties are a result of infirmities, not of outright rebellion or wicked stubbornness, but a lamentable weakness that makes us give in instead of resisting, and causes all manner of difficulty. Even this condition Christ understands. He may not be able to excuse us, but we may be assured that He feels with us and understands; for He Himself was tempted in all points like as we are, or as a literal translation might give it, "in the way of resemblance."

Was Christ ever weak? Physically, yes. Go with Him to the wilderness, and there find Him battling to the death with evil while weakened from a forty-day fast, His bodily powers gradually diminishing as the temptations increase. A person in the strength of manhood can resist much more than one bodily weakened. Christ was weakened physically to the point of complete exhaustion, but not for a moment did He yield. He was at no time morally weak.

Weakness may be comparatively innocent, though often it is caused by sin. But let all know that

whatever may be the condition, or cause of failure, Christ understand ' s. He has had temptations "in the way of resemblance" to ours, and He has the remedy.

Real life is measured not by a sequence of events but by an attitude toward principles. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much," is a principle of wide application. Luke 16:10. It is not necessary for one man to be tempted in the precise way or in every detail as another man in order to be able to understand and sympathize. But he must meet temptations and trials that are typical of mankind. Christ did this. The sharp rebuke to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan," is most revealing as to Christ's inner temptations, perhaps unsuspected by others.

(Matthew 16:23) Everything about Christ intimates an unusual acquaintance with men's problems and an understanding sympathy. This could be attained only through an identification of trials in all conditions of life.

Verse 16. "The throne of grace." This expression in Christian terminology has always been closely connected with prayer, and hence with the mercy seat. It was at the mercy seat the high priest supplicated God for forgiveness on the Day of Atonement. We are invited to come there to find grace to help in time of need.

## **The Rest of God**

When God had taken Israel out of Egypt, He said to Moses, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Exodus 33:14.

To Moses and to Israel this was good news. At that time Israel was in the wilderness, and had no settled place of abode. As year after year passed and they were still in the desert far from Canaan, their hearts longed for rest—the rest that would come to them after their journeying were ended and each man could sit under his own vine and fig tree.

This rest, however, could not be obtained by simply entering the land. Enemies were occupying Canaan; giants were there: the Amorites, Amalekites, Perizzites, Philistines, and others. Even though Israel should enter Canaan, there were long years of fighting ahead. Simply crossing Jordan would not bring them the promised rest.

In God's plan, however, this was provided for. Said God:

"For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off... I will send My fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come; and I will make all your enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land." Exodus 23:23-30.

These promises were given on conditions, "If thou shall indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto your enemies, and an adversary unto your adversaries." Verse 22.

Israel, however, was more interested in entering the Promised Land than in fulfilling the conditions for entrance. The promises they remembered; the conditions they forgot. As a result God permitted them to wander forty years in the wilderness, hoping that they would at last find themselves, fulfill the conditions, and enter. But they learned little from their wandering, and most of them died in the wilderness and never saw the Promised Land.

To this experience reference is made in Hebrews, where God says that Israel shall not enter into His rest. He calls attention to the seventh-day Sabbath, and links it with Israel's refusal to enter into His rest, admonishing them not to "fall after the same example of unbelief." Hebrews 4:11. As the history of Israel's experience is studied, it is clearly seen that the Sabbath was closely bound up with Israel's entrance into the Promised Land, and that their failure to enter was largely caused by their pollution of the Sabbath.

## **GOD'S TRUE REST**

God's rest is a spiritual experience into which the soul enters upon conversion. In the unregenerate man there is unrest and strife; an evil conscience makes life a burden; the heart is filled with wicked thoughts;

worldly ambitions hold sway; envy and pride bring heartache and sorrow; impurity dominates the mind; and man is at war with his fellow men, with himself, and with his God. Then comes the blessed day of surrender. The soul casts itself upon the mercy of God and is accepted. The former things pass away, all things become new, and all things are of God. He enters a new world, becomes a new man, has a new name, is a different person. At last there is peace in his heart-his sins are forgiven. At last his soul is at rest; he has found God. Gone are the accusations of conscience; gone his wicked ambitions, his envy and pride, his love of the world, his love of sin. He is a completely new creature. He has entered God's rest. He has heeded Christ's call, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30.

This is the rest that was promised to Israel when God said to Moses: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Exodus 33:14. It was of this rest Jeremiah spoke when he said, "Stand you in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." Jeremiah 6:16. Isaiah says, "The Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou was made to serve." Isaiah 14:3.

This call to rest has sounded throughout all time and is still sounding. Many have heeded it, but more have rejected it. The call rings out in every generation: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." Luke 14:23.

The writer of Hebrews connects this rest with God's rest at creation when "the works were finished from the foundation of the world.... And God did rest the seventh day from all his works." Hebrews 4:3, 4. The connection between the rest into which God invites the believer and His own rest at creation, though close, may not be immediately apparent; a little reflection, however, will make it clear.

When God had finished His six days' work at creation, that which had been planned from eternity at last found visible expression. The earth stood forth in its pristine beauty, the angels rejoiced, the sons of God shouted for joy, and the morning stars sang together. With what amazement and wonder the angels watched the gradual unfolding of the wisdom and the power of God as "he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." They saw light infiltrate the darkness, and beauty begin to take form. When, as the climax, God took lifeless clay and out of it formed a man. When out of the man He took a rib and built it into a woman; when the man and the woman met, one the perfect complement of the other; when the angels understood that what had been created was for the sake of the beings just formed. When they began to fathom though as yet only vaguely-that all this had a bearing on sin, which so mysteriously had appeared in the universe and which threatened to disrupt the previous harmony of heaven. When they realized that God in His goodness had permitted them to witness the supreme divine prerogative of the Godhead, the creation of life, and that they themselves would be called upon to have some part in the unfolding drama of the eradication of sin from the universe, their joy knew no bounds. Christ, by whom God had made the worlds, had been exalted before their eyes. (Hebrews 1:2) They had seen Him create; they had seen Him breathe life into a lifeless form and create a man in His own image, a candidate for immortality, capable of reaching even greater heights than those of which they themselves were capable. Wonderful was their God, and equally wonderful was the one whom they had just seen reveal the power of the Godhead.

The day following the creation of man was the greatest of all days. God understood, of course, what the angels but dimly comprehended, and man not at all-the meaning and cost of creation. He saw the future. He knew of sin and the dark days coming; but He also knew that the supreme step had been taken that would eventuate in the complete vindication of God and the final cleansing of the universe from sin. He looked forward to the time when one pulse should beat throughout creation, one song of harmony rise from every tongue, when the family in heaven and earth should unitedly raise their voices in praise to Him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.

## **THE FIRST SABBATH**

That first Sabbath on earth was the climax of the creation experience. When God's family of heaven and earth met that day in Eden, all gained a deeper conception of the beauty of life and what it may hold. God, during the six days, had given a demonstration of work and activity; now He gives a demonstration of communion, love, social life, worship. Here was the day for which all the other days had been made, the

crown, the glory, the pearl of all days. On this day God set His seal of approval. He blessed and sanctified it.

When the first Sabbath came to earth, only God had worked the six previous days. The angels had looked on in wonder and admiration, but they had not created. Man had been brought into existence on the sixth day. So neither angels nor man had worked six days. Adam had indeed worked on the day of his creation in naming all the animals. But he had worked at most only part of one day. In a special sense, therefore, the first Sabbath in Eden was God's Sabbath, for He was the only one who had worked six days. It was His holy day, His day of rest. Hence, the strength and appropriateness of the Bible statements: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord." Exodus 20: 10. "My holy day." Isaiah 58:13. "My rest," Hebrews 3:11; 4:3, 5. "His rest," Hebrews 3:18, 4:1, 10.

"On the seventh day God ended his work." Genesis 2:2. The word "ended" does not convey the exact meaning of the original, which would more nearly be "finished." Indeed the preceding verse says that "the heavens and the earth were finished," and "finished" is the same word that in the second verse is translated "ended."

God did more than merely end His work on the seventh day. A person may stop his work without finishing it. God not only stopped His work; He finished it. And He finished it on the seventh day. Had God finished His work on the sixth day, there would have been no Sabbath for mankind. But God included the Sabbath in the creation week, and thus made His finished work include both work and rest. Having worked six days and rested the seventh, God says to man, "I have worked six days and rested the seventh; now you work six days and rest the seventh, for the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord.--It is noteworthy that two thousand years after creation, God in speaking of the Sabbath does not say that the seventh day was the Sabbath of the Lord, but that it is. In this Christ concurs when He affirms that the Son of man is, not was, Lord of the Sabbath.

God's ideal of perfect life, perfect communion, perfect love, joy and peace, found expression in that first Sabbath in Eden. As we have noted, in a peculiar and distinct sense it was His Sabbath, His rest. That the first Sabbath left a deep impression upon God Himself, we know from the way in which He refers to it later. When, for example, in Hebrews He invites and pleads with Israel to enter His rest, He definitely points back to the Edenic Sabbath to define what He means by His rest, stating that "my rest" was the one He entered into when "the works were finished from the foundation of the world," and that then "God did rest the seventh day from all his works." Hebrews 4:3, 4. Had God only meant rest in general He would have so stated it. The fact that He picks out the seventh day and specifically mentions that this is the day on which He rested in the beginning, and that it is "his rest" to which He invites all to enter, is significant. And that this is recorded in the New Testament in Hebrews, more than thirty years after the death of Christ, is equally significant. Christians would do well to ponder this.

Let the mind dwell upon the first Sabbath. God has finished His work and as He contemplates it, finds it "very good." God states this very modestly, for the earth and what He had made must have been surpassingly beautiful. As God beheld His creatures; as He saw Adam in his perfection of strength and manhood, and Eve in her loveliness; as He saw angels and men, sons of God, cherubim and seraphim; as He saw "the whole family in heaven and earth" in sweet communion and fellowship, He saw life as He meant it to be-ideal, pure, complete, satisfying. And so, as He drank in the whole scene, He rested and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:17) The ideal and the climax had been reached. Of this the prophet says, "He will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing." Ephesians 3:17.

Adam never forgot that first Sabbath. As long as he lived he recounted to his children and his children's children to the seventh generation the glory of that first Sabbath. And as Adam forgot not, so God did not forget. Ever fresh in His mind is the memory of earth's first glorious Sabbath. Men may forget the Sabbath, but God never. The Sabbath stands as a memorial of that which once was and again shall be.

The Sabbath thus became to Adam symbolic of rest with God, of perfect communion, of oneness with God. It was the one commandment that God chose to honor by joining man in its observance; or perhaps better, inviting man to join Him in its observance. It is the one command that was communicated to man not only by way of law but also by God's example. Among the ten it stands unique, symbolic of God's idea of perfection, of holiness, of rest, of ideal existence with God.

It is this idea of the seventh-day Sabbath that is introduced in Hebrews to symbolize God's rest. From the "foundation of the world" God spoke of the seventh day as His rest. (Hebrews 4:3, 4) It is evident from this reading that God connects the seventh day-the original seventh day -from the foundation of the world," when He had finished His work-with entering into His rest.

There are three distinct ways in which "rest" is used in this chapter: first, entering the land of Canaan, which was Israel's understanding of rest; second, rest from sin, resting in God, having His peace in the heart, rest for the soul, true conversion; and third, the perfect symbol and sign of that rest, the Sabbath, instituted by God Himself-not a spurious or new Sabbath, but the original seventh day of creation, which "remains" and which God blessed and sanctified and gave to man as a sign of sanctification. (Ezekiel 20:12, 20)

## ISRAEL'S EXPERIENCE

It is interesting in this connection to call to mind Israel's experience with the Sabbath, which forms the ground for God's statements in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. This history clearly reveals that the seventh-day Sabbath was closely bound up with Israel's entrance into Canaan, gives point to the introduction of the Sabbath into the argument in Hebrews, and is highly significant in view of the warning that we are not to "fall after the same example of unbelief." Hebrews 4:11.

This history is recorded in the twentieth chapter of Ezekiel, and should be studied in this connection.

Ezekiel lived and prophesied at the time of the invasion of Judea by Nebuchadnezzar about the year 600 BC. The king of Babylon had already been to Jerusalem once, and had carried some of the Jews into captivity, but the city and the temple had so far been spared. It was a time not unlike that in which the Jews found themselves when the book of Hebrews was written, and the Romans were about to come and finally destroy the temple.

At this critical time certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before Ezekiel, the prophet. (Ezekiel 20:1.) The Lord promptly informed them that He would not be inquired of by them. Instead, He had something He wanted to tell the people. "Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers," He commands the prophet. Verse 4. He then proceeds to recount His experience with the fathers, and how they had rebelled against Him and rejected His counsel. He does this for the purpose of showing that the calamities that had overtaken them were a result of their rejection of Him, and that their only hope was in a return to God.

God begins by saying that He first made Himself known to Israel in Egypt when He decided to bring them into the Promised Land, a land that flowed "with milk and honey." (Verse 6) He had asked them to cast away their idols and other abominations, "but they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me. They did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt." Verse 8.

God therefore considered leaving them in Egypt and not delivering them; but instead of doing this, He was merciful to them for His name's sake, and brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness. (Verse 10) There He spoke to them from heaven and gave them statutes and judgments, "which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them." Verses 11, 12.

But as they had rebelled against God in Egypt, so they now rebelled in the wilderness. "They walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my Sabbaths they greatly polluted." Verse 13.

God again considers the advisability of terminating His relations with Israel "because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my Sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols." Verse 16. But again He spared them and did not "make an end of them in the wilderness." Verse 17.

Many years Israel wandered in the desert, until most of the generation that had left Egypt were dead. God then spoke to the children and gave them the same promises He had given their fathers, with the warning: "Walk you not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and hallow my Sabbaths. And they shall be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God." Verses 18-20.

But the children did no better than their fathers. They also rebelled against God; "they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my Sabbaths." Verse 21.

God could do no more for them. He had tested both the fathers and the children, and all had failed. So God decided to "scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries; because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols." Verses 23, 24.

In view of these experiences, God told Ezekiel to tell the elders that He would not be inquired of by them, for they had not turned from the sins of the fathers. However, God would not cast them off entirely. If they would heed His voice, He said, "I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: and I will intolerance, bigotry, Pharisaism, and spiritual pride. It had completely lost its meaning as a symbol of the rest of God, and had become a symbol of their own righteousness.

Under these circumstances what did God do? He sent His Son to restore to them the true meaning of the Sabbath and its observance. But they rejected the Son and at last killed Him. Well might God ask, almost in despair, as He appeals to their own judgment: "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" Isaiah 5:3, 4. God could do no more.

But there was still a remnant left in Jerusalem. Before the final destruction of the city and the temple He sent a message to them. He called to their attention the history of the failure of their fathers and why God rejected them, emphasizing their disregard of the Sabbath. Then He warned them not to "fall after the same example of unbelief." Hebrews 4:11. He called specific attention to the seventh-day Sabbath, the Sabbath of creation, when "God did rest the seventh day from all His works." Hebrews 4:4. This statement He connects closely with the call to repentance, thus associating the rest to which He calls His people -rest in God, true conversion-with the seventh-day Sabbath rest.

This matter of the Sabbath as presented in the book of Hebrews is significant in view of the fact that God was about to take away the vineyard from Israel and give it "to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Matthew 21:43. God knew that the time would come when this new "nation" would go even further than the Jews had done, completely reject the Sabbath and bring in a spurious Sabbath, and attempt to substitute it for God's own day. For this reason, forty years after the crucifixion, when the temple was about to be destroyed and the new "nation" about to take over, God called attention to His Sabbath, the seventh-day Sabbath, linked it with true conversion, and thus established Sabbath keeping on New Testament ground, a sign of the new birth, of true sanctification.

God now is gathering a company of men and women who will enter into a new covenant relation with their Creator; He is calling-and has called ever since men left their first Eden home-for them to return, that Eden may be restored; He is calling them to enter into the rest prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

This call to enter into God's rest is nothing less than a call to holiness, to consecration, to sanctification. Without holiness no man can see God, much less dwell-with Him. It was evident that Israel could not attain to the rest of God by merely changing residence. They needed a change of heart. For this reason God could not accept the disobedient and rebellious people that come out of Egypt. We are warned not to fall after the same example of disobedience.