

Jesus, the Giver of Rest



SABBATH—JANUARY 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 15:13–21; Hebrews 3:12–19; Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15; Hebrews 4:6–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “And so God’s people have a complete [full; total] rest waiting for them” (Hebrews 4:9, NLV).

HEBREWS 1 AND 2, as we saw, show us that Jesus is the King of the people of God. We also saw that Jesus frees His people from sin. Hebrews 3 and 4 introduce Jesus as a better leader than Moses or Joshua. Why? Because Jesus is the One who will give God’s people rest. But Israel did not get this rest because they had “evil thoughts that cause so much doubt” in their hearts. The doubt caused them to “stop following the living God” (Hebrews 3:12, ERV). We can better understand this idea about Jesus as the Giver of rest when we remember the promise that God made to King David. God promised to give the king and his people “peace” from the enemies who bothered them (2 Samuel 7:10, ERV; read also 2 Samuel 7:11). We can have this same rest right now because Jesus sits at the right side of God.

Hebrews explains that the rest that Jesus gives us belongs to God and is the same in some ways as a Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:1–11). God gave this rest to Adam and Eve.

When we keep the Sabbath, we **remember** that God made us. The Sabbath also helps us remember that God is our Savior. At the same time, the Sabbath gives us a “taste” of the future life that God promises us.



Jesus frees His people from sin.

**THE LAND OF PROMISE IS A PLACE OF REST
(Genesis 15:13–21)**

Read Genesis 15:13–21. As we see from these verses, what does God promise Abraham?

God promises Abraham that He will free Israel from slavery in Egypt. Then God will bring Israel to the land of Canaan. There, the Israelites will be free to serve and obey God (Exodus 8:1; Psalm 105:43–45). The Israelites also will enjoy the Sabbath rest that the King of Egypt refused to allow them to enjoy (Exodus 5:5). Canaan is the land that God promised to their father Abraham. God made this promise because Abraham obeyed God. How did Abraham obey? Abraham left his country to go to the Promised Land (Genesis 11:31–Genesis 12:4).

So, God gives His people Canaan as a home. But God also has a bigger reason for giving them the land. God wants His people to be close to Him (Exodus 19:4). He wants nothing to prevent their love for Him. God brings Israel to Canaan. There, they can learn about God. Then Israel can tell other people about God's love. So, Israel's going to Canaan is important. It makes a friendship possible between God and His people.

In Deuteronomy 12:1–14, the Lord tells Israel what they must do before they may start to enjoy His rest. They must destroy the false gods in the land first. Then God will show Israel, His chosen people, the place where He will live among them.

Read about the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. What two things does the Sabbath rest help us remember? How are these two things connected?

The Bible connects the Sabbath day both with the week God made the earth and the end of Israel's slavery in Egypt. That is why God commands Israel to remember to keep the Sabbath holy. In the same way, the Sabbath shows us that God made us and is our Savior. We did not make ourselves, so we can't save ourselves. Only God can save us. When we rest on the Sabbath, we show everyone that we depend on God to give us life and free us from the slavery of sin. Sabbath keeping is powerful proof that our own good behavior can't save us. Our Sabbath keeping shows everyone that we are saved only by God's mercy.

How does keeping the Sabbath show people that we must completely depend on God to save us?



Canaan is the land that God promised to their father Abraham.

BECAUSE THEY DO NOT BELIEVE (Hebrews 3:12–19)

As we saw, God plans that Canaan shall be a place of rest for His people. But Israel does not “enjoy the rest he planned for them” (Hebrews 3:18, NlrV). Why not? For the answer, read Hebrews 3:12–19.

Hebrews 3:12–19 tells us the sad story about the time when Israel comes to the Promised Land. But they can't enter into the rest that God promises them. Numbers 13 and 14 explain why. Ten of the twelve Israelite spies “brought the people of Israel bad news about the land” (Numbers 13:32, NLV).

Caleb and Joshua believe that God can bring Israel into the Promised Land (Numbers 14:7–9). But the people have no faith. Their doubt is a surprise. They had seen that God is powerful. God brought them out of Egypt after sending ten awful curses on Egypt (Exodus 7–12). The Israelites watched God destroy the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exodus 14). God sent them bread from heaven (Exodus 16). Israel heard God's voice at Sinai (Exodus 20:1–21). God gave Israel water from the Rock (Exodus 17). God also led Israel by His cloud (Exodus 40:36–38). But after all these miracles, Israel fails to trust God. No wonder many Bible writers say that Israel in the desert is a word picture for a heart with no faith (Nehemiah 9:15–17; Psalm 106:24–26; 1 Corinthians 10:5–10).

God promises us gifts that no human can offer us. We can get these gifts only by our faith in the mercy of God. The Israelites do not have this faith. So, the message of hope that God gives Israel “did not help them. They heard it but did not accept it with faith” (Hebrews 4:2, ERV).

Israel came to the border of the Promised Land. There, the spies give two different reports about the land. The Israelites choose to believe the bad report. Our faith can cause people to trust God. Or our doubt can cause them not to trust Him. We must be careful. We must “encourage each other every day” (Hebrews 3:13, ERV). We also should “help each other to love others [people] and to do good” (Hebrews 10:24, NLV). Paul asks us to make sure “that no one loses God's blessing” (Hebrews 12:15, WE). Today, we also are on the border of the Promised Land. We are responsible for the people on this journey.



God also led Israel by His cloud (Exodus 40:36–38).

How can you encourage the faith of other Christians around you? How can you make sure you never say or do anything that can weaken or hurt the faith of someone else?

**“IF YOU HEAR GOD’S VOICE TODAY . . .”
(Hebrews 4:4–8, ERV)**

How is our entering “rest” today connected with our keeping the Sabbath? Read Hebrews 4:4–8 for the answer.

God frees His people from Egypt. But they do not have faith to accept the rest that God promised. God continues to invite His people to accept this rest and to keep their hearts soft for Him. But what about the promise of rest that God made to Israel? In Hebrews 4:1, 6, 9, Paul uses the Greek verbs “*kataleipō*” and “*apoleipō*” to show us that the promise continues “waiting” for the people of God. In Hebrews 4:6, 7, Paul writes about God’s offer of rest to King David (read Psalm 95). This offer is proof that Israel did not accept the promise of rest from God. So, the promise continues to be there for the people of God to accept when they are ready. Paul says that this promise of Sabbath rest has been ready for us since God made the earth and sky (Hebrews 4:3, 4).

God invites us “today” to accept His rest. “Today” is a powerful time word, as we see in Deuteronomy. When Moses makes new the agreement between the Israelites and God, Moses uses the word “today” (Deuteronomy 5:3; compare Deuteronomy 4:8; Deuteronomy 6:6; Deuteronomy 11:2). Moses invites the people “today” to see that God always keeps His promises (Deuteronomy 11:2–7). The people must decide to obey the Lord “today,” too (Deuteronomy 5:1–3). They must not put off their decision. In the same way, “today” is a time for us to make a decision (read 2 Corinthians 6:2).

In Hebrews 3 and 4, we see the word written as “today” five times. This word shows us that we must pay attention to what God says to us (Hebrews 3:7, 15; Hebrews 4:7). When we fail to believe what God tells us, our hearts will become “hard.” Then we will not obey Him. Our hard hearts also may cause us to delay our going to heaven, just as the Israelites’ hard hearts delayed their entering Canaan.

So, we now can “go with complete trust to the throne of God” (Hebrews 4:16, NLV; read also Hebrews 4:14, 15 and Hebrews 10:19–23). We may bring Jesus our spiritual offerings of praise and thanksgiving (Hebrews 12:28; Hebrews 13:10–16). God invites us “today” to trust His promises. He gives us every reason to accept His invitation right away and not delay.

What spiritual decision must you make “today”? Why must you do it now? What could happen if you delay?



“Today” is a powerful time word, as we see in Deuteronomy.

ENTERING INTO HIS REST (Hebrews 3:11)

Read Hebrews 3:11 and Hebrews 4:1, 3, 5, 10 about the rest that God offers us. What does God say about this rest?

God invites us to enjoy **His** rest. God's rest is different than our daily rest. In Hebrews 4:4, Paul takes us back to Eden when God finished making the earth and sky: "So on the seventh day God rested from all his work" (Hebrews 4:4, ERV, which is a quote from Genesis 2:2). Adam and Eve's first day of life was on the Sabbath. At the very start, they learned to rest in God's work for them. The fourth commandment helps us to remember that rest is the reason for the Sabbath. God rested on the Sabbath. He blessed the seventh day and made it holy. Jesus helps us to remember this Bible truth when He said, "The Sabbath day was made for man. Man was not made for [to be controlled by] the Sabbath day" (Mark 2:27, NIV).

What are we invited to do in Hebrews 4:9–11, 16? What did Jesus and His followers do on the Sabbath? For the answer read Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 42, 44; Acts 16:13; Acts 17:2; and Acts 18:4.



**God invites us to enjoy
His rest.**

Both Jesus and His followers kept the Seventh-day Sabbath and worshiped on that day every week. We may not think we need to rest. God did not need rest after making the earth and skies in six days. But He rested anyway. And God knows what we need!

Do you know what is interesting? When Jesus showed Himself to John on Patmos Island, Jesus chose the Sabbath (Revelation 1:9–12). The sabbath is named the "Lord's Day" because Jesus rested from work on the Sabbath. And that separated the Sabbath from other days of the week and made it special (read Isaiah 58:13, 14; Mark 2:28). Yes, Jesus blessed the Sabbath after He finished making the skies and earth. Jesus also blessed the Sabbath again when He finished His work of saving us. How did He do that? He rested in the grave from Friday evening to Sunday morning (Luke 23:54–Luke 24:7).

How can we, right now, enjoy the rest that God has for us? How does the promise of future rest on the new earth show us that God saves us only by His mercy?

**A SABBATH REST WAITING FOR GOD’S PEOPLE
(Exodus 4:9–11)**

Compare the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 with the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12–15. What do these verses teach us about Sabbath rest?

The Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 and in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 invites us to remember the wonderful things God does for us. As we saw, the Sabbath commandment helps us remember that God made skies and the earth (Exodus 31:17; Exodus 34:28). In Deuteronomy, Moses commands Israel to keep the Sabbath because God freed them from Egyptian slavery. The time when God freed His people is named the Exodus. The Exodus helps us see Jesus’ work on the cross to free us from sin. When Jesus says, “It is finished” (John 19:30, ERV), we see that Jesus’ work on the cross is a success. So, the Sabbath is a double blessing because: (1) God rested on the Sabbath after He made the earth, we should, too. (2) The Sabbath helps us remember to “rest” or trust in what Jesus did for us at the cross to free us from sin.

How do we enter God’s rest? Read Hebrews 4:9–11 and Galatians 4:21–Galatians 5:1 for the answer.

Since Adam and Eve first sinned, humans taught two different ways of being saved: the false way (by our good behavior) and the right way (by faith). Think about Cain and Abel. Cain offers God food from his own crops. But Abel offers God an animal. The animal’s blood and death show us Jesus’ future death on the cross. Or, what about Abraham? Abraham tries to make God’s promise about a son happen on his own. That is how Ishmael is born. Later, Abraham depends fully on God’s promise. Then Isaac is born (read Romans 4:19–22; Hebrews 11:11).

When we keep the Sabbath, we show everyone that we accept God’s promises, mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin (see Exodus 31:13). When we keep the Sabbath, we celebrate our joy in being saved by Jesus. The Sabbath shows that our faith is alive and strong. We can do many things to show our faith. But more than anything else we can do, our Sabbath keeping shows that we believe that God saves us by His mercy.

Our good behavior does not save us. How does our resting on the Sabbath show this Bible truth?



When we keep the Sabbath, we celebrate our joy in being saved by Jesus.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: In the book of Hebrews, Paul uses the Sabbath rest to show us an important Bible truth: God saves us by His mercy when we believe in Him. Paul does not use Sunday to show us this Bible truth. What does this information show us about the Sabbath in Paul's time? We can see that Christian believers everywhere kept the Sabbath holy. The Sabbath was very precious to them. From about A.D. 150, we start to discover that a change happened in the church of Rome. The church of Rome stopped teaching that the Sabbath was a word picture of how God saves us. The church of Rome started to teach that the Sabbath was only something that the Jews kept. They also taught that the Sabbath was part of the Old Agreement or Promise. So, they taught that Christians did not need to keep the Sabbath holy. What if someone wanted to keep the Sabbath anyway? Then the church of Rome accused this person of trying to save himself by his own good behavior. That's what happened in the time of Justin Martyr around A.D. 155. In his *Dialog with Trypho* (chapter 47), Justin Martyr writes, "Many non-Jewish Christians did not 'wish to talk with Jewish Christians or be kind to them.' That's because these Jewish Christians believed in Jesus and obeyed Him, but they also kept the Jewish Sabbath."—Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: An Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), page 159, n. 67. In the same way, Marcion, a few years earlier, ordered his followers to fast on Sabbath to show that they rejected the Jews and their God (read Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 42.3.3–4).

"The Sabbath is a special sign that shows us that Jesus can make us holy. . . . At the same time, the Sabbath is a promise of the peace that God will give us because of Jesus. All the beautiful things in nature are God's invitation to us. They ask us to accept Jesus' invitation: 'All you who work hard! All you who carry heavy loads! Come to me! I will give you rest.' Matthew 11:28, [WE]."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 288, 289, adapted.



"The Sabbath is a promise of the peace that God will give us because of Jesus."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How does our keeping the Sabbath show that we believe that we are saved by the loving-favor of God? How does our keeping the Sabbath show that Jesus gives us new life?
- ② How do we keep the Sabbath holy? How is this experience different from trying to save ourselves by our own good behavior?