



FOCUS VERSE

Isaiah 28:12

To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

LESSON TEXT

Hebrews 4:1-11

1 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.

2 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.

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.

4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

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

7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Labor needs to be balanced with rest. God desired that His people enter into His rest. The church finds fulfillment through the Holy Ghost.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Some Rest for the Weary

Results from The Harris Poll in 2008 revealed leisure time was shrinking for most people. Americans experienced an all-time low of sixteen hours of leisure time per week. When the poll started in 1973, leisure time was twenty-six hours per week. In 2008 the number of hours spent working, including time spent on household chores and studies, was forty-six hours, compared to forty-one hours in 1973. For people ages thirty-two to forty-three it was even worse—an average of fifty-five working hours per week (“Americans today have less free time, study says” *prsa.org*). In addition, people often multitask.

The obvious results of these statistics indicate there is increased stress and less time for faith, family, and rest. People search for substitutes to bring rest that frequently

convey only more stress. The world is longing to find relief. This is good news for churches that believe and offer an experience of rest and refreshing in the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

As Isaiah wrote, “For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing” (Isaiah 28:11–12). In Peter’s message following the lame man’s healing, he said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

In the leisure time we do have, let us take advantage of the rest and refreshing the Lord makes available to us.

OUTLINE

I. BIBLICAL SABBATHS

- A. Sabbath Days
- B. Sabbatical Years
- C. Millennial Rest

II. LABOR AND REST

- A. Benefits of Rest
- B. Work Ethic

III. ENTERING INTO THE LORD’S REST

- A. Holy Ghost Rest
- B. Heavenly Rest

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Just as work is built into the fabric of life, so is rest. The Bible introduces a God unlike all others. Many religious myths depicting the world’s origin present gods at war with one another. They posture, connive, and engage in schemes to outsmart or conquer one another.

The God of the Bible is alone in His deity. He is not fighting with anyone, but He

created an amazing universe teeming with life. The first actions God took were the work of a creative Originator. From the infinitesimal atom to the galactic spinning galaxies, He expressed them into existence. He formed this vast universe with just His spoken Word. Each day of Creation He set about forming an additional feature to His gargantuan cosmic masterpiece.

According to Scripture, He worked six days and rested on the seventh. He did not rest because He was tired but because He wanted to reflect upon His creation and ponder its amazing goodness and perfection. Also God’s resting provided a model for humanity—work six days and rest one day. This ratio of time forms an underpinning principle of work and rest.

God designed the human body for work; but without a time for reflection, life can become monotonous and repetitious toil. A periodic break in our routine by engaging in a diversion from the norm can be refreshing. In addition, we get tired and our bodies

require rest. Most people require around seven to eight hours of sleep a night in order for the mind to rest and the muscles and other organs to rebuild themselves. Without proper rest we would die from exhaustion.

God has built cycles and seasons into the natural world. The earth spins on its axis, giving us hours of light and darkness. The earth orbits the sun with a perfect tilt to give us seasons of spring, summer, fall, and winter. The moon orbits the earth, causing tides to rise and fall with predictability. Many plants shed their foliage, retract their sap, and hunker down for the long winter months. In the spring they begin to bud, showing signs of life again as if waking from a long nap. Many animals hibernate through the cold winter months as they wait for spring to arrive. Life on earth is forced to accept these natural rhythms and cycles. They are the laws of nature set in force by God to teach us the principle of work and rest.

Just as God rested on the seventh day, He established a Sabbath for the Hebrews. It was codified as one of the Ten Commandments.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8–11).

The Sabbath provides a prevailing principle of the need for rest.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. BIBLICAL SABBATHS

The law of Moses allowed time to work six days each week and to rest on the seventh, the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10). The Law allowed plenty of time for work but also allowed for a day of relaxation. Work was important but was to be held in balance with leisure.

The Hebrews had an intimate understanding of the evil and weariness of toil. The Egyptian Pharaoh held them as slaves, setting abusive taskmasters over them. The Hebrews worked in brick factories with unreasonable production schedules and little personal freedom.

God gave a covenant promise to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 27–28. If they obeyed His commandments, He would bless them with abundant crops and healthy livestock, and He would protect them from their enemies. If they were disobedient, however, they would experience fruitless work—building houses, planting vineyards, and raising livestock—but would not reap the rewards of their toil. Instead, their enemies would enjoy the fruit of their labor. The Israelites also were warned that locusts and worms would spoil their harvests. Hard work does not always result in wealth and prosperity. (See Genesis 3:19; Psalm 127:1–3.)

A. Sabbath Days

The Sabbath was not just a day of rest, but it was a holy day. The word *holy* means to be set apart. It was not to be a day of slothful inactivity, but a day of spiritual religious observances. A grave penalty was imposed for violation of the Sabbath—the death penalty (Exodus 31:15; Numbers 15:32–36).

Weekly Sabbaths. The weekly Sabbath was celebrated on the seventh day of the week. Burnt offerings were offered on each Sabbath (Numbers 28:9–10). The Jews celebrated the Sabbath from the going down of the sun on Friday until sunset on Saturday evening.

Orthodox Jews still commemorate the Sabbath on this same schedule. The command to do no work on the Sabbath has fostered many rules and regulations. Many conservative Jews will not activate an electrical device on the Sabbath because it is considered starting a fire. They will not cook food, drive a car, walk over three miles, or do a list of other things on the Sabbath. The day is spent reading the Torah, praying, visiting with family, and resting.

Feast Day Sabbaths. In addition to the weekly Sabbath, the Hebrews celebrated special Sabbath days annually. A concentrated time for feasts and offerings was a fifty-day period in which there were a number of solemn

feasts: Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. These feasts required offerings to be made at the Temple as a way of expressing thanksgiving for God's provision. From the first day of the Passover to the completion of the Feast of Weeks was fifty days, culminating with the Day of Pentecost. The children of Israel were expected to keep track and commemorate many feast days, sacrifices, and offerings. Their calendar was complex and rigid with many ceremonial trappings.

We do not celebrate the Sabbath day as they did in the Old Testament. It is one of the Ten Commandments, but it is the only one of the ten that is not literally enforced in the New Testament. Keeping the Sabbath as did those under the Law violates the spirit of the New Testament. The Law is now written on our hearts and not on tables of stone (II Corinthians 3:3). Being a disciple of Jesus is not being dedicated to many ceremonial and civil rules and regulations. Paul said, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16–17). Paul made it clear the Old Testament law was a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1). The Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

If we continue Sabbath keeping today, do we also practice the seventh year Sabbath and Jubilee? Do we incorporate tomes of regulations of dos and do nots concerning the observance of the Sabbath? Can you drive a car, cook a meal, switch on a light, or walk up stairs?

Although we no longer practice the rigid rules and regulations of the Old Testament Sabbath, the principle of rest does continue. It is no longer the day of the week, but now it is the spirit of obedience that is important. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost transcends the Sabbath Day. The Holy Spirit is our perpetual Sabbath of rest (Hebrews 4).

Jesus freed the Sabbath from the restrictions that brought bondage and encumbrances. The Bible says, "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). God gave the Sabbath as a help to the Israelites, but they made it a burden.

Even though Saturday is the traditional Sabbath (the seventh day of the week), the Christian church worships on Sunday (the first day of the week). There are indications in the New Testament that the original church moved the day of worship to Sunday, perhaps to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Acts 2:1; 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2). They did not move the Sabbath to Sunday, but the first day of the week became a day of worship for the church.

B. Sabbatical Years

In addition to the weekly Sabbath, God implemented a sabbath of years as well.

Rest for the land. "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land" (Leviticus 25:3–5). Every seventh year was a year of rest for the land. The people were not to till their fields or plant crops in the seventh year.

Year of Jubilee. After seven sets of seven years was the year of Jubilee. "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. . . . And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field" (Leviticus 25:8; 10–12).

This was a wonderful provision. In the year of Jubilee all debts were canceled, slaves were set free, and all the land went back to the original owners.

There is no historical record that the children of Israel observed Jubilee. Leviticus 26 describes God's judgment upon them if they

did not obey His instructions: “And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths” (Leviticus 26:33–34). The seventy-year Babylonian captivity is considered punishment for the Israelites’ lack of obedience.

C. Millennial Rest

There are many different opinions about the future of the church and the people of the earth. One thing many Christians do agree on is that there will be one thousand years of peace on earth in the future. Wars will end and the animal kingdom will become tame. Righteousness will rule and peace will be on earth for the first time in history. Jesus Christ will rule the earth with perfect judgment (Revelation 20:1–6). This millennium will be a golden age of righteousness.

The human race has attempted to rule itself for thousands of years. The results have been wars, suffering, plundering, and turmoil. Great leaders have risen to power to be admired by the world. They all eventually died and their empires died with them. Great kingdoms have risen and then fallen into the dust. After so many years of failure to bring lasting peace, the imperfections of humankind are glaring and predictable. One day Jesus Christ will return and overthrow all earthly kingdoms and establish His own. He will bind Satan and cast him into the bottomless pit, and the church will rule and reign with Christ for a thousand years. It will be an age of peace on earth and good will toward men.

II. LABOR AND REST

A. Benefits of Rest

The workaholic may think sleep is wasted time, but rest is as essential as food, water, and oxygen. Without sleep our bodies become depleted of energy and the brain shuts down. A lack of rest can cause physical and mental health problems, stress and nerve disorders, bad attitudes, and a loss of productivity.

Many people like to brag about how busy they are. Sometimes this can be an effort to

feel important or significant. To be called “lazy” is a serious insult. North Americans are some of the hardest-working people in the world. The reason may be that the free enterprise system promotes hard work and productivity.

Jesus was a busy person yet He took time to rest: “But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” (Luke 5:15–16). Jesus saw the need to be away from the crowds for a time of prayer and meditation.

In Mark 4:35–39 Jesus was asleep on a boat with His disciples during a storm. On another occasion, “The apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately” (Mark 6:30–32).

B. Work Ethic

Work is what makes rest so enjoyable. There is nothing like being totally exhausted and falling into a warm, soft bed, pulling up the covers, hugging a fluffy pillow, and drifting into the dream world of sleep. Work is the counterpoint to rest. God is a worker and He created humanity to be workers as well. Humankind was at work before the Fall. The curse resulting from the Fall brought a negative dimension to work—toil and the sweat of the brow. The curse was severe: “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:17–19). The joy of work was dulled by the Fall.

Work is a bittersweet undertaking. It sometimes brings boredom, toil, and challenge, yet it is a satisfying endeavor. Work gives a person dignity, provides sustenance for life, gives opportunity to be creative, and allows opportunity to exercise our God-given talents and abilities. People who do not work become

listless and unhappy. They feel they lack significance and a place in the world.

III. ENTERING INTO THE LORD'S REST

Just as we need rest physically, we need rest spiritually. One of the great benefits of being a child of God is that we can partake of His promise of rest for the weary. We may experience spiritual fatigue when we become weary with temptation, our faith gets weak, and our spiritual fervor becomes dull. We can lose our joy and optimism. We can become weary in well doing and fainthearted (Galatians 6:9).

Accepting the demands of Scripture to live holy lives can be overwhelming. Even being empowered by the Holy Spirit, we continue to deal with our fallen nature. That is why we need grace. We strive to achieve the high expectations of holiness, but ultimately we must rely on the grace of God. We not only need His grace at conversion, but we continue to depend upon His grace for sanctification.

A. Holy Ghost Rest

We are promised rest through the power of the Holy Spirit: "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear" (Isaiah 28:11–12). (See also Jeremiah 6:16.) Some commentaries say Isaiah was talking about Israel's enemies being used by God to speak in a language they did not understand as punishment. This is an incorrect interpretation. How could a message in a tongue they did not know be a means of communication to them? How could a rebuke through an enemy be a "rest" and "refreshing"? It is obvious Isaiah was speaking of the future Holy Spirit baptism. Paul referred to this prophecy and connected it to the activity of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 14:21–22).

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour 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 ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30). We are invited to fall into the arms of Jesus, who cares for us as our heavenly Father.

Spiritual rest comes in many forms to God's children:

- We can rest from the ravaging of sin through repentance, water baptism, Holy Spirit baptism, and sanctification (II Thessalonians 2:16–17; 3:3).
- We can rest in His power to accomplish impossible things through miracles (Luke 1:37).
- We can rest in His grace to save us and not in our own works (Romans 3:23–27).
- We can rest from fear of death because we have been given eternal life (I Corinthians 15:51–58).

B. Heavenly Rest

In Hebrews 4, the writer presented a new concept of rest, which is connected to, but not the same as, the Old Testament rest. "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" (Hebrews 4:1). God's promise to give the Israelites the Promised Land did not result in all of them experiencing it. Due to unbelief many died in the wilderness and never entered into the rest.

The writer of Hebrews warns Christians that lack of faith can prevent them from entering into the promised rest. Some think this has reference only to Heaven, but it can apply to all of the Christian's inheritance. The believer enters into a rest from his labor of works and rests in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures make this clear: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). Paul said, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

"There remaineth 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 labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Hebrews 4:9–11).

The word *remaineth* comes from the Greek word *apoleipo* which means "it remains, is

reserved” (Joseph Henry Thayer, *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). Some say this is evidence that Christians should keep the Sabbath. However, it is not the keeping of the Sabbath that remains but the rest. We are warned not to allow the promised rest to escape us as the doubting Hebrews who never reach the Promised Land.

The Christian is promised a perpetual rest after being born again. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17). Every day is a Sabbath to the born-again believer.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Living a life of sin takes its toll. People deal with many hardships physically, emotionally, and spiritually as a result of a life that is self-directed instead of God-directed. Paul said, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). When Jesus is not the Lord of one’s life, that individual is exposed to Satan’s devices. The body can be ravaged by addictions and destructive lifestyles. Emotions can be damaged by abuse and failures in family life, careers, and relationships. Inevitable regrets and guilt can bring depression and anxiety. Spiritual darkness dominates an individual who is not living in the light of the gospel. A sinner’s life is filled with foreboding and a lack of satisfaction. The Bible says, “There is a way that seemeth right

unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 16:25).

God’s great plan of redemption is primarily the restoration of what has been lost. Humanity fell from grace, but the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus brought about redemption of all things. It is a holistic redemption that heals the wounds of life and promises eternal life as well.

The principle of rest runs the gamut of Scripture. Rest was present in Creation when God rested on the seventh day. Rest was provided in the law of Moses through keeping the Sabbath Day. Rest is displayed in the rhythms and cycles of the natural world. Rest is evident in the needs of the human body. A thousand years of rest has been promised as a capstone to the history of the world.

God has made rest a metaphor in the Scriptures. It symbolizes the many benefits promised to a child of God. When God becomes our heavenly Father and we become His children through the new birth experience, we become heirs to the kingdom of God (Romans 8:17–19; Titus 3:7; James 2:5). We no longer have our nose to the grindstone, surviving by our own efforts, but we find rest for the weariness of the soul. God breaks the bonds of addictions. He liberates us from depression and replaces it with peace. He transcends the cheap thrills of the world with deep and lasting joy. He takes away the aimless searching of the heart and gives clarity of purpose and destiny. Paul said, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Corinthians 5:17). ■

REFLECTIONS

- What is the significance of God’s resting on the seventh day?
- Why do Christians today not observe the Sabbath as the children of Israel did in the Old Testament?
- What examples in nature remind us of the need for rest?
- Name some ways a born-again believer experiences rest.
- Israel’s Babylonian captivity was God’s punishment for what?