

“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9)

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A friend asked for an explanation of: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). **We accordingly give the following, which will be found a sufficient key to the entire chapter.** That God made to Abraham a promise of an inheritance, is well known. We will quote only two texts. The first is Gen. 13:14-17: —

“And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.””

Again the Lord said to Abraham, after he had offered Isaac: —

“I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies” (Gen. 22:17).

Putting these two texts together, we learn that **the inheritance promised** to Abraham contemplated peaceable and quiet possession of the land; not simply of a few square miles, but of **the whole world**. (Rom. 4:13). Now it was in pursuance of this promise that the Lord delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. (See Ex. 6:1-8).

Passing by the wanderings in the wilderness, we come to the address, which Moses made to the children of Israel just before his death. Speaking to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, who were allowed to settle on the east side of Jordan, he said: —

“The Lord your God has given you this land to possess. All you men of valor shall cross over armed before your brethren, the children of Israel. ... until the Lord has given rest to your brethren as to you, and they also possess the land which the Lord your God is giving them beyond the Jordan. Then each of you may return to his possession which I have given you” (Deut. 3:18-20).

From this we learn that the giving of them rest was nothing more nor less than the establishing of them in their possession. The same thing is also shown by the following words: —

“For as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. But *when* you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord

your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place" etc. (Deut. 12:8-11).

In further confirmation of the idea that the promised rest comprehended quiet possession of the land, we read 2 Sam. 7:1, which says that "when the king was dwelling in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies all around," then he thought to build a house for the Lord. In refusing to allow him to do this work, the Lord made great promises to David, and said: —

"Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously" (2 Sam. 7:10).

It is evident, then, that the "rest" promised to the Israelites was the inheritance. Into this rest Joshua led them, as it is written: "The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand" (Josh. 21:44). Yet in the face of this declaration, the apostle declares (Heb. 4:8, margin) that **Joshua did not give them rest, and that the Lord afterward spoke of "another day," in which they might secure rest.** We have just read from 2 Sam. 7:10 the promise of that rest. If Joshua had given them *that rest*, then *another day* could not have been spoken of.

Although God did give to the Israelites the land of Canaan, Abraham had no part in it (see Acts 7:5), neither did Isaac and Jacob, to whom the promise was made as well as to Abraham; and the apostle, after mentioning these patriarchs, and many other worthies, says, "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Heb. 11:39, 40). This shows that **the possession of the land of Canaan by the Israelites did not fill all the specifications of the promise.** This is still more evident from the fact that they were at peace when the Lord renewed the promise in 2 Sam. 7:10.

But how shall we explain the statement in Josh. 21:43-45, that God gave to the Israelites that which He promised? It can be explained on the grounds that the partial inheritance, which they had, might have been made complete, if they had obeyed and trusted God. That they did not have the complete rest and inheritance that was promised to Abraham is evident from the fact that the promise to him included nothing less than the possession of the whole world. (Rom. 4:13). Now from Jer. 17:19-27, we know that God designed that the Israelites should be forever established in the land of Canaan, whose capital, Jerusalem, was to be the capital of the whole world, even as the New Jerusalem will be the capital of the earth made new. But **although they were given possession of the capital of their inheritance, they entered not into the full possession thereof, because of unbelief; so that it was the same as though they had never had any of it.**

But the "Lord is not slack concerning his promise," and so "there remains therefore a rest to the people of God." This rest is the same as that promised to Abraham, namely,

the whole earth; for, after evildoers have all been cut off, "the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:11).

The fact that some could not enter into rest because of unbelief, does not invalidate the promise that those who will now believe shall enter into it, for the rest was prepared and completed from the foundation of the world; and God will not allow His original plan to be frustrated. With the knowledge that the earth is the rest that was promised to Abraham and to his seed, and which remains for us who believe, it is very easy to understand Heb. 4:3, 4, and the relation which the facts there stated bear to that rest. Thus: —

The apostle says, "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works." This is positive proof of the statement made just before, namely, that "the works were finished from the foundation of the world." Gen. 2:3 says, "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." He made the earth "to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18), and gave it to men for a peaceful abode; and the fact that He rested on the seventh day was a proof that the works were finished and the rest prepared. The Sabbath, therefore—the memorial of God's rest—a day in which to be glad through the work of God, and to triumph in the works of His hands, as we meditate upon their greatness (Ps. 92:4, 5), is an assurance that God has prepared a rest for His people, and that they will share it just as surely as He is the great Creator who changes not.

When Christ shall descend in glory, sitting upon the throne of his glory, having received the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, that He may rid it of all that corrupt it, He will say to the righteous who have kept the faith, "**Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world**" (Matt. 25:34); and when the judgment that is written shall have been executed upon the wicked (See Jude 14, 15; Ps. 149:5-9), then will be fulfilled the promise given through Isaiah: "The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isa. 32:17, 18). Then the people of God enjoy the rest, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

The Signs of the Times 15, 7 (February 18, 1889), pp. 102, 103.