

Sabbath-Rest

What a wonderful day it must have been when, after decades of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites finally crossed into the Promised Land and had a place to call "home"! Joshua 21:43-45 summarizes this exciting chapter of history by saying, "So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around...And not a man of all their enemies stood against them...Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken..."

While the Israelites experienced an earthly place of rest, Hebrews chapter 4 makes it clear that we who are believers have entered into a place of spiritual rest and peace. "There remains, therefore, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their [Israel's] example of disobedience." Earlier in verse three the author says, "For *we who have believed do enter that rest.*" (NKJV)

When I believed by faith on the Son of God for salvation, the Sabbath-rest of God became my new "home", my permanent dwelling place. However, I'm sure I'm not the only one who at times subconsciously falls back into the "works" mode of life--doing, doing, doing in order to try to please God. But when you and I believed, we entered His place of rest, where works cease and faith is the currency. God in His mercy gives this place of rest. It is all about His grace and not my works. The Israelites did not earn the land they entered or build the houses they lived in, but received them as a gift from the hand of God. According to Hebrews 4:3, I have already entered the land of rest; I just need to take possession of it and live fully in it, appropriating His promises and "eating the fruit of the land" as that generation of Israelites did.

Why then does Hebrews 4:11 say, "Let us, therefore, *make every effort* to enter that rest..."? The end of the verse makes it plain. While abiding in God's Sabbath-rest, the only effort I must make is to live in obedience, listening for His voice and doing what He says. It's not about me at all! When I am living in the center of His rest, it is a place of peace, and I need not have any fear of enemies. Not even one can stand against the power of God unleashed on my behalf. He stands like a protective shield around me, fending off attackers and softening the blows of the enemy's firepower. In His wisdom, He allows through that barrier only those things which will help me to bear fruit and keep me in battle form.

A Sabbath-rest lifestyle becomes a life of joy-filled adventure and opportunity, watching to see where God leads next and following in His footsteps of grace. A lifestyle consisting of a guilt-based "works" mentality, where we're trying our best to accomplish something of value for God's kingdom, becomes a life filled with stress and lack of peace.

If you are a believer, you are already living in a Sabbath-rest reality. Begin cultivating a Sabbath-rest mentality!