

# REST IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY

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## *Abstract*

*This work discusses Sabbath-rest, which was commanded and observed in the Old Testament (hereafter OT). In the New Testament (hereafter, NT), it appears there is no direct command to keeping the Sabbath holy. The Book of Hebrews, particularly chapters 3 and 4 focus on rest and use two Greek words, katapausis and sabbatismos, translated as rest. The author of the Book of Hebrews only used sabbatismos in Hebrews 4:9 in defining the abiding rest, but in all the other ten (10) occurrences of the word he/she uses the word katapausis or its verb form katapausen. This work adopted exegetical and expository analyses and engaged in the word studies of keywords. The findings reveal that the New Testament teaching on Sabbath-rest has not contradicted the Old Testament teaching of it, even though there is no new direct command to keep the Sabbath holy. And that the rest in the Book of Hebrews actually refers to the OT Sabbath-rest, because it is connected to the creation rest, Canaan rest, rest from the enemies of Israel and rest of the Promised Land. But this rest is not limited to the OT rest; it is a better rest in Christ. The paper argues that though there is no contradiction between the OT and NT teaching on rest, there is a difference; since the OT rest was physical, the NT teaching on rest, particularly as stated in the Book of Hebrews focuses on the spiritual rest that can only be found in Christ by those who believed in Him.*

**Keywords:** Rest, Sabbath, Old Testament, Book of Hebrews, Jesus, Church

## **Introduction**

The Book of Hebrews reveals how Jesus is better than the Angels and Moses, and how He is better than the OT priestly order, having offered himself as both the high priest and the sacrificial lamb, which He offered once and for all. Therefore, the Book of Hebrews can be said to be talking about better things in Christ. The book also has a dimension of rest, which is not portrayed in other books.

What does the Bible generally say about rest? Could this “rest that remains” in the Book of Hebrews point to the physical rest that God promised the Israelites? Or do these texts talk about the rest as was observed by the Jews in the OT? What does the “rest that remains” mean in the Book of Hebrews? Why did the author of the Book of Hebrews make a sudden switch from *katapausis* to *sabbatismos* to refer to the rest that remains? How can a biblical understanding of rest be presented in order to resolve the dichotomy among several churches and ministries today?

Among many issues, this study evaluates these concerns in the churches and ministries today. The paper attempts to do a biblical evaluation of rest in the Book of Hebrews. Having considered rest from the OT and the NT, the research singles out and samples the Book of Hebrews as one of the books that sheds light on the concept of rest, and because the author of the Book of Hebrews has presented new thoughts on the concept of rest, presenting an evaluation of such new insights would add direction to the understanding of rest in the NT.

## **A Brief Historical Background of the Book of Hebrews**

This section focuses on the authorship, date of writing, structure, occasion, purpose, and theme of the Book of Hebrews. This background information will guide the study of the Book.

**Authorship:** The Book of Hebrews is one of the New Testament books whose canonicity was disputed amongst scholars. The

Book of Hebrews is one of the most debated epistles. Though written in about 60-70 AD, the author is not known because he leaves no clue for his identity but he must be a Jew (probably Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, or anyone) who lives during the period that the Book was written (60-70 AD).

**Paul:** Traditionally, Paul the apostle was thought to be the author. This possibly might be from its inclusion in the “collected writings of Paul from a very early Date. Again, Codex B46, which is a volume of Paul’s general Epistles, includes Hebrews immediately after Romans” (Comfort 36-38). On this note, Augustine of Hippo affirmed Paul’s authorship and vigorously defended the Epistle of Hebrews. Other church fathers such as Eusebius also “endorses the view of Clement of Alexandria that the Epistle was written by Paul in Hebrew and translated carefully into Greek by Luke the Evangelist, a thing demonstrated by its stylistic similarity with Luke’s Acts” (Eusebius 101). The assumption of Paul as the author of the Book of Hebrews allowed its acceptance in the Eastern Church but that also led to the persistent doubt in the western Church (Mitchell 2). Paul’s authorship was accepted until the end of the second century, predominantly in the West. People like Origen cast doubts on Pauline’s authorship by advocating that the Book only contains the original thoughts of Paul but denying the diction and phraseology as that of Paul (Eusebius 37).

While some scholars supported Pauline’s authorship of the Epistle of Hebrews, some people doubt it. However, some critical scholars such as Bart D. Ehrman and Clare K. Rothschild completely deny Pauline’s authorship of this Book. Ehrman regards any attempt to attribute the authorship of Hebrews to Paul as “a deliberate forgery attempting to pass itself off as a work of Paul” (23); while Rothschild refers to Paul as a false writer of the Book (4). Not only critical scholars, but even some church fathers such as Gaius of Rome and

Hippolytus also denied Paul's authorship of Hebrews (Photius 121).

**Timothy:** Timothy, a companion of Paul, is said to be the author of the Book of Hebrews. This is supported by the authors of King James Version (KJV) 1611 Edition which ends the Book with the comment "Written to the Hebrews, from Italy by Timothy" (cf. KJV 149) is one of the references that supported this view.

**Barnabas:** Tertullian suggested Barnabas as the possible author of the Book of Hebrews (De pudic 20).

**Luke or Clement:** Origen of Alexandria in about CE 240 suggested that either Luke the Evangelist or Clement of Rome was the author of the Book of Hebrews (Girard 17<sup>th</sup> June). Hippolytus also attributed the Book of Hebrews to Clement of Rome (Barsalibi, in Apoc.1:4). While Brian Chilton, having studied the Book argued that since the author calls Timothy a brother (Heb. 13:23) and since the author explained that he received the gospel from those who heard the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:3), then he concludes that Luke is the possible author of the Book of Hebrews (10).

**Apollos:** Apollos, one of the companions of Paul, is said to be the author of the Book of Hebrews. This is because, He was a "learned man, popular in Corinth, an Alexandrian" (Guthrie 48) and he was a supporter for Christians and was almost always "arguing for Christian" believers (Nelson 1981). Martin Luther is said to be the one who proposed Apollos as the author of the Book of Hebrews (Girard 17<sup>th</sup> June).

**Priscilla:** Ruth Hoppin joined Adolf von Harnack who in 1900 opines that Priscilla was the author of the Book of Hebrews and argued that the masculine description of the author of the Book was a scribal error (978). As discussed above on the authorship of the Book of Hebrews, the Book is the most debated especially

on the issue of authorship. Therefore, this work has not attributed the authorship of the Book of Hebrews to any of the names above. So the author of the Book of Hebrews is unknown.

**Date of Writing:** Many Bible scholars believed that the Book of Hebrews was written before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Therefore, this work assumes that the Book of Hebrews was written during the reign of Emperor Nero (about AD 64-68).

**Purpose of the Book of Hebrews:** Chilton submits that the purpose of the book is to exalt Jesus and to demonstrate how superior Jesus' sacrifice is compared with the OT sacrifice. He concludes that the Book of Hebrews ties the OT with the NT more than any other book of the NT. But one thing is obvious in the book, the idea of *kreitton* translated as more excellent or better. Therefore, the book's main purpose is to exalt Jesus as one who is more excellent compared with all the OT realities and promises (73).

### **Sabbath-Rest in the Old Testament**

God did not just rest himself but instructed that man should rest on the seventh day of the week. This idea was adopted and obeyed by Adam and his immediate descendants. As the people of Israel began to spread and the consciousness of God continued in the people, in the days of Moses, God required a whole day of rest after six days of labour (Exodus 20:8-10; Leviticus 23:3). In the OT, the word "Sabbath" means rest. During the OT, the whole idea of rest got developed and expanded beyond the once-a-week rest, they inculcated sabbatical week and year (Exodus 16:26; Leviticus 23:23, 29; Leviticus 25:2-5). This generally can be understood to be Sabbath day, Sabbath week, and Sabbath year and the Jubilee.

In the OT, the children of Israel while on their journey to the Promised Land, were promised rest by God and were urged to observe the Sabbath while wandering in the wilderness. During

the time of Joshua as the leader of the Israelites, God fulfilled his promise by giving them the Promised Land (Joshua 1:3). As a result, the land of Israel rested from war (Joshua 11:23; 14:15). The people also rested because God delivered all their enemies into their hands, which necessitated rest for the people from physical war (Joshua 21:44). Though this rest (enjoyed during the time of Joshua) was never permanent during the reign of King David and Solomon, the nation of Israel experienced a long period of rest (2 Samuel 7:1, 11; 1 Kings 5:4; 1 Chronicles 22:9). And this was seen as the fulfilment of the rest God had promised his people, the Israelites (1 Kings 8:56). God fulfilled his word and granted them rest which perhaps they have never experienced. But were these (the rests outlined above) the promised rest that Isaiah prophesied that will be glorious (Isaiah 11:10)? If so, which rest did he later say it will be refused (Isaiah 28:12)? It appears there is more to this rest than the OT has projected (Micah 2:10).

### **Sabbath-Rest in the New Testament**

One cannot delve into the NT teaching on the Sabbath-rest without looking into the period between the two testaments. The 400-years period between the OT and the NT, generally referred to as the period of “silence” was the period many teachings crept into the church. During the period between the OT and NT the Pharisees bound the weekly Sabbath with multitudes of trivial regulations that made the day a burden instead of a blessing. There were “burdensome regulations later codified in the Mishnah, constituted as part of the tradition that Jesus vigorously opposed throughout His ministry (Matthew. 23:4; Mark. 7:1-13; *Mishna Shabbath 7:2*)” (SDA 960).

Some of the Sabbath practices and regulations as taught by the Pharisees include; looking into a mirror fixed on the wall, lighting a candle or fire on the Sabbath. Even when a hen lays an egg on the Sabbath that egg must be sold to a Gentile and must not be eaten by a Jew. Other rules, which prohibited the Jews

from working on the Sabbath include; losing a knot, writing two letters of Hebrews and travelling for more than a kilometre. The historical review of the development of the Sabbath's commandment from the age of the Maccabees to the editing of the Mishnah has shown that Judaism was aware of its commitment to the demands of the Law. However, all those demands began to change during the centuries and began to take different forms in the home-land and the Diaspora. So it appears that during the intertestamental period, so many laws were added to the laws that were previously given by God himself but the idea of rest was maintained as gotten from the OT and it served its purpose among the people of Israel (Kittel 10).

In an attempt to explain the Sabbath that remains (Hebrews 4:9), Steve Motyer explains that it is definitely connected to the rest in Genesis 2:2 and that of Exodus 20:8-11 (56). Motyer states that "Christians never have obeyed this commandment, apart from groups such as the Seventh-Day Adventists who define themselves by their literal keeping of it. Traditionally, many Christians have transferred the Sabbath commandment to Sunday, the Christian day of worship, thus making Sunday a compulsory day of rest on which no work may be done" (55). Motyer further says that "the arguments used to support 'keep Sunday special' have been social, not biblical: 'not that it's against God's law, but it undermines family life and leads to people being exploited by demanding employers'(55).

In the NT, Jesus appeared to have taught a different Sabbath from the understanding in the OT, a spiritual Sabbath rather than the physical and hypocritical Sabbath practiced by the religious leader which allowed some kind of works such as healing (Matthew 12:9-21; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6), picking of grains and removing an animal that falls in a ditch (Matthew 12:11-12). Jesus emphasised the spiritual nature of the Sabbath rather than the physical, which was enforced among the people while the enforcers themselves were not practicing. He resisted such a

Jewish Sabbath, which was demanding on the people and broken by the religious leaders (Matthew 23:1-3; Acts 15:11).

### **Sabbath-Rest in the Book of Hebrews**

The Book of Hebrews appears to say much about Jesus. The Book reveals Jesus sitting on the right-hand of God (Hebrews 1:3), and as the medium, God chose to communicate to the Jews or humanity at large (Hebrews 1:2), and as one who is better than Angels (Hebrews 1:4). The Book of Hebrews also depicts Jesus as someone who is worthy to be worshipped by the Angels of God (Hebrews 1:6), and as someone who has a kingdom and is God himself who laid the foundation of the Earth (Hebrews 1:8, 10). Therefore, Jesus has greater honour than Moses (Hebrews 3:3), because Moses was a servant while Jesus was a Son (Hebrews 3:5, 6). Jesus is depicted as the most experienced high priest who ministers in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus was called to priesthood by God himself, as in the order of Melchizedek, who was not from the human priestly lineage (Hebrews 5:10).

Believers should not crucify Christ the second time by going back to their evil ways and doctrines (Hebrews 6:1-6). Since, Jesus' priesthood is forever (Hebrews 7:17, 24), his intercession is also forever, having offered himself once and for all (Hebrews 7:24, 27). Unlike the earthly priest, Jesus is "holy, harmless" and "undefiled" (Hebrews 7:26). In Hebrews 8, Jesus is depicted to be sitting on the right hand of God, signifying a position of honour (8:1). Again, Jesus ministers in the "true" tabernacle, he who has a more excellent ministry, a mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises (Hebrews 8:5-6).

Studying rest from the Book of Hebrews, particularly in chapters 3 and 4 appears to say a lot about Sabbath or rest. In the Book of Hebrews, two Greek words are translated as rest. The common word translated as rest in the Book of Hebrews is *katapausis*, to



mean the 'rest that remains'. The writer also uses the word *Sabbatismos* from the root word *Sabbaton*, a common word mostly used to refer to rest in the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews reveals the New Covenant Sabbath rest for believers. Hebrews 4:9 says that "there remains, then, a Sabbath-rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God." Interestingly, the word *sabbatismos* is found only once in the NT, and it is likely because the author of Hebrews was attaching to the Sabbath a new and expanded meaning beyond that of *sabbaton*, which is otherwise used to denote the Sabbath day (Ratzlaff 284). White also supports the idea that some Christians worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Sabbath, which she thought was not appropriate. In her sermon titled "the present truth," White says:

They then see that instead of observing the seventh day, the day that God sanctified and commanded to be observed as the Sabbath, they are keeping the first day of the week as the Sabbath. But they honestly desire to do God's will, and they begin to search the Scriptures to find the reason for the change. Failing to find this, the question arises; shall we accept a truth that has become unpopular, and obey the commandments of God? Or, shall we continue with the world, and obey the commandments of men? With open Bibles they weep, and pray, and compare scripture with scripture, until they are convinced of the truth, and conscientiously take their stand as commandment-keepers (170).

In discussing rest from the Book of Hebrews, it is submitted that in the Book of Hebrews "Christ's rest is not a rest from work, but in work; not the rest of activity, but of the harmonious working of all the faculties and affections of will, heart, imagination, conscience — because each has found in God the ideal sphere of its satisfaction and development" (Ikpe).

Elaborately, Ikpe also points out that the *Vine's Concise Dictionary's* word for rest includes; quiet, calmness, tranquility, peacefulness, serenity and stability; and that there are hindrances of entering God's rest which include "Lack of faith in God's word", "lack of knowledge of God's word", and "hardening of hearts" in the part of God's people (Ikpe).

Ikpe, therefore, offers suggestions on how to overcome those hindrances when we cease from our arrogance by accepting God's grace by living a "Christian life and principle through faith...it is only when we believe God's word through faith, you enter into God's rest and you cease from your struggles to be perfect and follow your own self will" (Ikpe).

Again, some are saying that the laws of God including the Sabbath law given to Moses were not meant to be permanent. They are basing their argument on the Book of Hebrews that talks about better covenants, which implies doing away with the old. For example, Hebrew 7 appears to support a change of the law of God that was given to Moses, "For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law" (Hebrews 7.12). Again, we understand that "[b]y calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one [the old covenant] obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear" (Hebrews 8.13).

Will Pounds identifies three (3) prominent interpretations on the rest in Hebrews 4:10 as:

1. The rest, as a deeper experience in which the believer rests his soul more fully in the Lord and ceases from his efforts at greater sanctification; rest could be from "trials, persecutions, temptations and labours of this earthly pilgrimage".
2. That a believer receives his final rest at death (Revelation 14:13).

3. That the verse refers to Christ who has finished his earthly work and has entered the rest of heaven so that the true believer may have spiritual rest in this life as he looks forward to the eternal rest in Heaven (Pounds).

The rest in the Book of Hebrews is seen as “an Eschatological rest” and not a “present rest”, and is therefore divided into four;

1. God’s creation rest (Hebrews 4:4)
2. Canaan’s rest (Hebrews 3:7-19)
3. Salvation rest (Hebrews 4:1, 3, 8-9)
4. Heaven rest (Hebrews 4:10-11) (Pounds).

Gary G. Cohen also points out that the Sabbath was fully kept in the OT period and the time of Jesus but that it was later changed to “the Lord’s day” at the time of John the Revelator. His submission is that the Sabbath, also known as “the day of convocation has been changed from the OT Sabbath to the NT Lord’s day” (54). Similarly, Christopher John Donato also stated that “the fathers did not regard the Christian Sunday as a continuation of, but as a substitute for the Jewish Sabbath” (149). Hilton James examines the issue of how the Sabbath or rest should be kept and observed. James opines that the issue is not whether a Sabbath day or a Sunday should be kept or not but considering it from an ethical point of view, he established that “the ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath are no longer in effect in the new covenant, and that the day in which Christians have chosen to worship is Sunday.” He, therefore, submits that “setting aside one day out of the seven days on a voluntary basis out of a heart of gratitude to the Lord for rest and remembrance, the Lord’s day is kept and observed” (13). Ryan M. McGraw also concludes that the Sabbath was designed for worship and that God appointed the Sabbath day to rest from our worldly employment (and recreation) so that we might have a day of worship and communion with God” (24). Anna Wishart states that “as we keep our eyes on Him and believe Him, we will find

ourselves entering this rest promised to us in the Book of Hebrews” (1).

This chapter reveals that on the issue of a weekly rest, scholars are divided into at least four groups: The first group is those who believed that the Sabbath law of the OT was transferred from Saturday to Sunday, since the Sabbath was for the Jews and not for Christians, but that the keeping of it was modified. The second group are those who believed that the Sabbath was kept till the time of Christ, using Colossians 2:14-16 as evidence that the Sabbath is no longer binding on Christians, therefore, this group advocates that the Sabbath command was transferred into the rest of grace, therefore, it no longer binding on Christians.

The third group, basically championed by the Jehovah Witnesses says that the Sabbath was just a covenant sign like the rainbow during Noah’s time, therefore, Christians are no longer obliged to observe a weekly day of rest (in other words neither Sunday nor Sabbath should be observed) at all. While the Fourth group is saying that the Sabbath law was fully kept in the OT and at the time of Jesus, therefore, it should be re-instated among Christian churches. This proponent believed that the Sabbath law, which has to do with ceremonies is no longer binding but the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments is still binding on all Christians and should be kept holy. Therefore, these arguments show that Christians are still in confusion on the issue of the biblical teaching of rest particularly the weekly rest. And this has created a kind of dichotomy among Christians.

The Book of Hebrews has thirteen chapters. The word *rest* appears only eleven times (Hebrews 3:11, 18, 4:1, twice in verse 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10). The term rest appears twice in Hebrews 3 and nine times in Hebrews 4. Out of these occurrences of the word, rest in the Book of Hebrews, only chapter 4:9 has the Greek word *Sabbatismos* translated as rest, all the rests are from the Greek *Katapausis*. In other words, this chapter will focus on

Hebrews chapters three and four. It will attempt to do contextual studies of rest in the Book of Hebrews. This contextual study will lead to the contextual interpretation of rest in the Book of Hebrews.

### **Meaning of *Katapausis* in the Book of Hebrews**

This section attempts to define all the words translated as rest from the Greek word *Katapausis* in the Book of Hebrews. The section will also consider the various contextual usages of the words translated as rest from *katapausis* in the Book of Hebrews. The *New American Standard* (NAS) NT, Greek lexicon, defines *Katapausis* as “putting to rest, a calming of the wind, or a resting place.” And metaphorically as “the heavenly blessedness in which God dwells, and of which he has promised to make persevering believers in Christ partakers after the toils and trials of life on earth ended” (NAS Lexicon). *Katapausis* is mentioned 9 times in the Greek text of the OT (Septuagint or LXX) and in “several of the contexts” it refers to God's rest (Exodus 35:2; Numbers 10:36, Deuteronomy 12:9, 1 Kings 8:56, 1 Chronicles 6:31, 2 Chronicles 6:41, Psalm 95:11, Psalm 132:14, Isaiah 66:1). In the Book of Hebrews alone, *Katapausis* (noun) and *Katapausen* (the verb form of it) were used ten (10) times.

**Katapausis as a Noun:** In the Book of Hebrews, *Katapausis*, as a noun, appears seven (7) times (Hebrews 3:11 and 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10 and 11). In all these occurrences, they appear in the accusative singular feminine noun form, which suggests that all its occurrences, the word *katapausis*, the accusative case, is the direct object of the subject of its sentence and can be translated as “reposing down” or abode or simply rest (Bible tools.org 1). The first mentioning of rest in the Book of Hebrews is in 3:10-11. It is interesting to note this begins with the word “Wherefore” as an indication for an application. The word *wherefore* always introduces an application in the Bible (1 Samuel 19:24; Ecclesiastes 3:22; Acts 22:30; 1 Corinthians 8:13; 2 Corinthians 8:24; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; Hebrews 12:28).

The greatest obstacle that hinders the children of Israel from having the rest God intended for them is unbelief. Again, even with a better leader, Jesus Christ himself, belief is necessary for entering his rest (Hebrews 3:11). The wilderness experience of the Israelites was aimed at teaching them to cooperate with God and to prepare them for the occupation of the Promised Land. God had promised Abraham that his descendants shall come back to Canaan in “the fourth generation” (Genesis 15:16). But God’s promise was subject to their performance in the wilderness. There was a lesson that they needed to learn. God’s presence was to go with them and God was going to give them rest (Exodus 33:14). But, at Kadesh, the promise of entering that rest was breached and God punished them for forty years for their rebellion (Numbers 14:34). Therefore, they shall not enter my rest, *katapausis* (Hebrews 3:11). The word *katapausis* is “a settled rest” or a resting place but the concept is a cessation from labour or other activity, in each of its occurrences in the Book of Hebrews (Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:1; 4:3 twice, 4:4, 5, 8, and 10). *Katapausis* is definite, specifying a particular “rest” or “God’s rest” depending on the context.

In Hebrews 3:11, the author quoted Psalms 95:11 in connection with the wilderness journey of the Israelites into the Promised Land. In this phrase “they shall not enter my rest”, the “they” here refers to the Israelites who left Egypt with Moses as their leader but did not enter God’s rest (Hebrews 3:16). In Hebrews 3:18 a reason for not entering the *katapausin* is given as “unbelief”. So, in this verse, there is a connection between “rest” and “belief”. In other words, this rest is obtainable by faith in God’s word alone. In Hebrews 4:1, the phrase “his rest” suggests that this rest belongs to God. *Katapausis* here refers to the promised land of Canaan in fulfilment to God’s promise to Abraham and not a Sabbath-rest. This same rest (land of Canaan) is again referred to in Hebrews 3:18, 4:1, 5, and 11). In Hebrews 4:3, the *katapausin* here still refers to “that rest” of God in Psalms 95:11. This rest is connected to believers and

disconnected from unbelievers. The same rest is referred to in Hebrews 4:5, but is now connected to the creation rest (Genesis 2:1-3). This rest is not only connected to the past but also the future rest that some will enter (Hebrews 4:6). In Hebrews 4:10, the *katapausin* here refers to the same “rest of God”, which is connected to creation, while the *katapausin* of Hebrews 4:11 requires an earnest or deliberate effort for one to be able to enter.

***Katapausen* (the verb form of *katapausin*):** In the Book of Hebrews, *Katapausen* appears three times as 3<sup>rd</sup> aorist active indicative verbs (Hebrews 4:4, 8, and 10), with the literal meaning as “to settle down” or figuratively as to “cease” or simply to rest (Galos 1). Hebrews 4:4 compares God’s creation rest to the believers’ rest. The believers’ rest is connected or associated with God’s creation rest. This suggests that this rest is also a physical rest while the *katapausen* in Hebrews 4:8 is connected to Joshua’s rest that was not fully entered by the children of God. And finally, the *katapausen* in Hebrews 4:10 refers to a physical rest from labour that is associated with God’s creation rest. Peter Toon explains (in his summary of Hebrews 3 and 4) that the rest of the Promised Land is referred to 8 times in the Book of Hebrews. God gave Joshua the task of leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land and into the rest that God had promised them. However, the everlasting rest that God promised his people and the gift of rest on the seventh day were not achieved by Joshua. This rest is rightly called the Sabbath-rest because it is for the participation in God’s rest that his people after completing their service to him will enter into his rest. One can deduce from the above occurrences of rest in the verb form to refer to a physical rest from labour that can be compared to God’s creation rest.

### **Meaning of *Sabbatismos* in the Book of Hebrews**

In Hebrews 4:9, the writer of the Book of Hebrews switched from *katapausin* to *sabbatismos* to refer to the “rest” that remains. The word *Sabbatismos* is in the nominative case,

therefore, the subject of its sentence. *Sabbatismos* is a singular masculine noun, which is translated Rest or Sabbath or cessation of labour. The noun *sabbatismos* simply denotes a Sabbath rest or rest or cessation of labour in a more general sense. Warren W. Wiersbe in his explanation of the rest in the Book of Hebrews states that “writers mention two different “rests” found in the OT history: (1) God’s Sabbath rest, when He ceased from his creation activities (Hebrews 4:4; Genesis 2:2); and Israel’s rest in Canaan (Hebrews 3:11; Deuteronomy 12:9; Joshua 21:43-45). But, these “rests” are illustrations of the spiritual experiences of believers today. The Sabbath-rest is a picture of our rest in Christ through salvation (Hebrews 4:3, and see Matthew 11:28)” (39). On the *sabbatismos* rest that remains, Wiersbe defines it as “a keeping of the Sabbath” but connects to its keeping when the saints shall inherit the kingdom of Heaven (40). A linguistic study of Hebrews 4:9 leaves it uncertain, which Sabbath is really meant, but the context will usually tell or give a clue. The writer of Hebrews appears to use *katapausis* and *sabbatismos* more or less synonymously. The Book of Hebrews clearly teaches that unbelievers will not enter God’s rest (Hebrews 3:11). However, there is a general call to enter God’s rest (Hebrews 4:1). But at last it will only be for those who truly believed in God and are faithful to his calling (Hebrews 4:3). Just as God rested on the seventh day from his work of creation, He is still calling for His people to enter His rest (Hebrews 4:4; 10). This rest is not to be taken for granted because there is a condition for entering it (Hebrews 4:5). Joshua was unable to give rest to those that believe what God have commanded them to do (Hebrews 4:8). But the rest for God’s people still remains (Hebrews 4:9), and it requires labour or struggle for one to enter into God’s rest (Hebrews 4:10).

The *SDA Bible Commentary*, in an attempt to explain the rest referred to in Hebrews 4:9, says; “the verse 9 states the conclusion already alluded to verse 6, drawn from the line of argument begun in verse 3 to prove the assertions of verses 1, 3”



(-421). It, therefore, concludes that the rest (*sabbatismos*) that remains in verse 9 is obviously the rest (*katapausis*) that the believing Christian enters in verse 10. Barclay calls it a complicated passage, in that the writer uses *katapausis* to refer to “the peace of God”, the “promised land” and to “the rest of God after six days of creation” (132). In supporting the idea that the rest referred to here is complicated, Ray Stedman explains that this rest can be “The New-Creation Rest” since it is “associated with placing one's faith in Christ”, it could also refer to the rest that God promised Israel in Isaiah 11:10, and is also associated to the rest of eternity (Revelation 14:13) (74). *Matthew Henry Commentary* adds that the rest here referred to “a rest of grace ...a rest in glory and the everlasting sabbatism of heaven...and a “spiritual rest”. It Explains that the rest referred to in the Book of Hebrews is both rest with Christ on Earth and with Christ in Heaven (1914-1915).

### **Implications for Contemporary Christianity**

Rest in the Bible, particularly the Book of Hebrews, has proven to be an important part of the Bible; hence. God commanded it. The church must take rest seriously and never allow doctrines to divide its frontiers. The following implications should be noted by the contemporary church:

1. The Bible teaching on Sabbath-rest in both the OT and the NT has no contradiction. The church should reconsider such teachings on the issues of rest, either on Saturday or Sunday, irrespective of denominational doctrines. The Bible goes before the doctrines of an organisation.
2. While the OT teaches practical-physical rest the NT emphasises the spiritual aspect of the Sabbath rest. It means Jesus gave a dimension of rest, which encompasses the entire spiritual aspect of humans and some churches need to align with this teaching and believe that there is a spiritual rest that will abide, which believers will enter.
3. This work establishes that, though the OT weekly Sabbath rest still remains (Hebrews 4:9), no Christian believer

should look down on any person who decides to worship God on a different day of the week. Therefore, as Christians who are one in Christ, you should respect one another's freedom of choice. Jesus emphasised that the true worship God deserves is the worship done in truth and in spirit (John 4:24).

4. This work has also established that the Greek words, *Katapausis* and *Sabbatismos*, may refer to the same kind of rest depending on the context of the text. In the Book of Hebrews, the two words were somehow used interchangeably.
5. The rest in the Book of Hebrews is a complex kind of rest that includes the giving of Canaan land to the Israelites, rest from labour, enemies, war, rest of the Sabbath and the spiritual rest that God has in store for all his believing saints.
6. Though there is a call to put in effort in entering this Sabbath-rest, the scriptures did not set the call to enter Sabbath-rest as a condition for making heaven or for enjoying the eternal rest. This is because Sabbath-rest and eternal rest are not the same.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that the rest in the Book of Hebrews made allusion to the seventh day of creation but pointing at something better than the OT Sabbath(s) as it was kept. The God-intended Sabbath was not fully achieved by the Israelites but the promise of entering that rest is still on and only believers can enter it by faith. The promised rest is still available but will be given in full to the saints at the second coming of Jesus. Therefore, the rest that remains is not just a spiritual rest but also the physical rest of the eternal home of the saints (Heaven) or the New Jerusalem that is being prepared for all believers as promised by God. Having done a survey on rest in both the OT and the NT, this work submits that the rest in the Book of Hebrews is in connection with the rest in the OT, particularly, the rest that

remains in the Book of Hebrews. This rest includes but is not limited to the weekly Sabbath-rest (the physical rest from labour), rest of the Promised Land and rest from enemies. But the emphasis of this rest is on the spiritual aspect of life. This rest guarantees eternal peace with God. It is really an eternal rest that the creator, God, enjoyed after his work of creation (Genesis 2:2), which the saints will enjoy after their labour on earth. The church should respect the Bible's teaching on rest particularly as stated in the Book of Hebrews, irrespective of denominational doctrines, beliefs and perceptions. True worshippers must worship God in truth and in spirit (John 4:24).

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