

The Rest of Faith

THE REST OF faith is of particular interest to the Christian of this Gospel Age. The subject, as we wish to approach it, is developed by the Apostle Paul in the third and fourth chapter of Hebrews. He asks us to consider the “Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.” (vs. 1) Then he contrasts Jesus and his house, with Moses and his house.—vss. 2-6

HOUSE OF SERVANTS

Moses’ faithfulness as a servant is vouched for in verse five. We think of the great care that he took to see that every feature in the building of the Tabernacle was carried out to the letter. We remember, too, that Moses testified that a greater prophet than he would arise to teach the people. (Deut. 18:15) This testimony, augmented by pictures and types, was for our benefit.—Rom. 15:4

Moses was a servant in the house of his God. How much more honor to be a son and share in the possession of the house as an heir! Christ is a Son over his own house, and Paul hastens to assure us that we are of his house—“if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”—vs. 6

Most of verse seven, and on through verse eleven, is a parenthesis dealing with Israel's rebellion against the LORD that barred them from Canaan. Without this parenthesis our text reads like this: "Wherefore, . . . take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."

STEADFASTNESS

Paul here reiterates the very pointed admonition that being partakers of Christ is conditional upon our steadfastness 'unto the end.' He tells us plainly that it is possible to lose our confidence and hope of being included in the house of Christ. This can come about through lack of faith. Lack of faith leads to a coldness and a hardening of the heart that resists the providence and disciplines of God that are shaping us into the character likeness of Christ.

Paul bases his admonition on the example of unbelief on the part of the children of Israel in the wilderness. In verses fifteen through nineteen, he rehearses briefly their provocation of the LORD during those forty years, and its disastrous effect on those who sinned and thus failed to enter into the promised land. Did not Israel provoke the LORD? Let us consider briefly some of the many incidents during those momentous forty years in the wilderness when the children of Israel provoked the LORD, and that continuously.

MURMURING AGAINST GOD

With the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea still vividly imprinted upon their minds, we find a murmuring arising from this great throng of people. After journeying three days into the wilderness they came to water, but it was unfit to drink. It was only natural that they should be very thirsty and desirous of water to quench their thirst. It was natural also that their disappointment should be keen when finding the water to be bitter. However, it was not the natural thing to commence complaining to Moses against the LORD. Had not the LORD just delivered them from the armed might and vengeance of the despotic army of Egypt? Could he not easily supply their temporal needs, having brought them thus far? They had no faith!

God supplied their needs by instructing Moses to cast the branches of a certain tree into the bitter waters to make them sweet. Later they came to Elim where they were refreshed from twelve wells of water, and rested under the shade of seventy palms.—Exod. 15:23-27

Following this we find Israel longing for the fleshpots of Egypt, and manifesting a lack of faith in the ability of God to supply them with food. In Exodus 16:4,5, the LORD instructs Moses in the use of the manna which he planned to send to feed the Israelites. But they complained about the manna and wanted something more substantial to eat. The LORD provided them with an abundance of meat, even to Moses' surprise, by sending droves of quail that fell in the camp. (Exod. 16:13) God's displeasure is manifested by the plague which came upon Israel when they were eating the flesh, and many of them died.—Num. 11:31-33

FAITH IN GOD

Undoubtedly it was a difficult situation, one that required the exercise of faith in God to look beyond their immediate difficulties and be assured that God would bring them safely through this wilderness to the land he had promised. But their lack of faith again caused them to doubt, and to complain bitterly to Moses that they had no water.—Exod. 17:3-7

Three months after their deliverance from Egypt, we find the Israelites encamped round about Mount Sinai. Moses was absent, being in the mount receiving instructions from God. After many days they began to wonder what had become of their leader. They desired something tangible to worship. So they induced Aaron to make them a golden calf, which they acclaimed as the god that had brought them out of Egypt.

The narrative, in Exodus chapter thirty-two, tells us that God would have blotted out the entire nation, but Moses interceded. Nevertheless, they were punished by God and many of those idolaters were slain.

REBELLION

In the twelfth chapter of Numbers, we read of the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron against the leadership of Moses. God's displeasure at their presumption was evidenced in Miriam's turning leprous. Moses' greatness is evidenced in his petition for mercy that was granted, although Miriam was forced to remain outside the camp for seven days before she was clean.

Then, in the thirteenth chapter of Numbers, are recounted the details of the LORD's plan to send

out spies, one from each tribe, preparatory to entering the land. The LORD was letting them do all they could by themselves, but he was also seeking to prove their faith.

This proved too great a test for the faith of ten of the spies. They all reported that it was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey and a wonderful inheritance. However, the ten reported that it would be impossible for them to conquer the people of this land. In fact, they went so far as to report that the people were “giants.” (vs. 33) The meaning of this word, *Nephiyl*, translated ‘giants’ (*Revised Standard Version*, *Nephilim*) suggests great warriors, tyrants, bullies. It comes from a root meaning ‘to fall.’ *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible* gives the meaning as ‘fallen ones, fellers from Nephilim.’ This undoubtedly caused great fear in the camp, for they would have been quite familiar with the account of the fallen angels and the tyranny of their monstrous offspring who were drowned in the flood.

PROVOKING

In Numbers 14:11, God asks the question: “How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?” This episode not only showed a lack of faith in God’s ability to give them back the land, but an utter lack of appreciation of God’s motives and purposes in bringing them out of Egypt. For this breach they were to be punished by remaining in the wilderness for forty years—a year for each day that they spied out the land. And the males of twenty years and over were to die in

the wilderness and not be allowed to enter Canaan. (vs. 23) “Surely,” the LORD said, “they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it.”

Strangely enough, the very next day this rebellious people had overcome their objections sufficiently to decide that they would go into the land, but it was too late. Their effort to conquer the people proved how foolish it was to attempt such a thing in their own strength. The LORD was not with them, and they were routed with heavy loss of life.

CANAAN OF REST

Canaan was to have been their place of rest, but they were not then permitted to enter into that rest. “Ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about.”—Deut. 12:9,10

Some five hundred years after Israel had actually entered their promised land we hear David saying in Psalm 95:7-11, “To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, . . . When your fathers tempted me. . . . Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.”

We might well wonder why David should write this so long a time after Canaan had been entered. But we are not left in doubt, for the Apostle Paul’s reasoning brings the subject into focus. “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, for if Joshua (*Marginal Translation*) had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” (Heb. 4:7,8) Thus Paul explains that David had been speaking prophetically. God has promised a ‘rest’ of which the land of Canaan was a symbol, or type.

GOD RESTED

Adam was created just at the close of the sixth creative day, and God declared that the work thus concluded was “very good.” (Gen. 1:31) With the dawning of the great seventh creative day, “God rested from all his works.” (Gen. 2:2) God promised Israel a rest. Let us see how they failed to enter that rest. In Hebrews 4:2, we read that the Gospel was preached “unto them”—that is, the good news. This, briefly stated, was the good news that under the leadership of Moses they would inherit the land and, as chosen people, they would bless all the families of the earth.

When told to go in and possess the land, through lack of faith they refused. Canaan was designed to be their rest. Was this God’s rest? No, it was only a picture. If Israel had exercised faith, they could have entered Canaan and probably would have been able eventually to enter into the true rest.

The Gospel, or good news, in substance is the same as that preached unto Abraham—“In thee [and in thy seed] shall all nations be blessed.” (Gal. 3:8) Abraham’s natural seed, Isaac, came through faith. He pictured the greater seed that was to bless all nations, which seed was to be developed by faith. Abraham thought to make his servant Eliezer his

seed and heir. (Gen. 15:2) Next he sought to help God with Ishmael.

Israel fully expected to become that promised seed by keeping God's Law. That this was impossible for imperfect beings was manifest in Israel's failure to keep the Law. The Apostle Paul confirms this, saying that "no man is justified by the law," and that "the law is not of faith." (Gal. 3:11-14) He continues, saying that Christ redeemed the Jews from the curse of the Law, that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, and that the promise of the Spirit might be received through faith. He also states that the "just shall live by faith." (vs. 11) We might put it another way by saying that it is only through faith in Christ's sacrificial death that we may be justified, or made right.

Therefore, we conclude that it is impossible to enter God's rest through one's own works. So it was that Israel could not enter by works. But a rest was promised. And we see that a remnant from Israel did enter into God's rest. Paul wrote, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded."—Rom. 11:5-7

We ask ourselves how was it that God rested from his works? It was not because of weariness, for we find, in Isaiah 40:28, that the "LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary." And it was surely not the lack of something to do. He rested in the sense that he anticipated the finished work of Christ, and left the outworking of the seventh creative day to him. Therefore, we conclude that the only way to enter into God's rest is to cease from one's own works

and accept the finished work of Christ. The Apostle Paul expresses it thus, “He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.”—Heb. 4:10

THE WORKS OF CHRIST

We ask, then, on what are the works of Christ based? They are based on his perfection, the keeping of God’s law, and the fact that he willingly gave up his own life, which was a perfect human life, as a ransom for all. This constitutes a corresponding price for Adam. Because all in Adam die, therefore Christ has tasted death for every man. (Heb. 2:9) Further than this, the works of Christ are based upon his resurrection from the dead in order that the benefits of his ransom could be made available to mankind.

We have seen that, through unbelief, Israel could not enter God’s rest. Failure to keep the Law also hindered them, although a remnant at the end of the age did ‘enter into rest.’ Then the opportunity was presented to the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. So this Gospel has been preached since the First Advent unto the present day.

All down through this Gospel Age there has been a mixture of ‘wheat’ and ‘tares.’ Many for a time sought rest in the ‘creed’ beds. These were uncomfortable and chilly. Concerning these resting places Isaiah wrote, “The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.” (Isa. 28:20) The true wheat class has found that their only genuine rest is in Christ. This has been true of all during the age and in this harvest time.

ABRAHAM'S FAITH

In Romans 4:19-25, Abraham's faith is brought to our attention. Undoubtedly Abraham's faith was great. It is not just the fact that he believed that commends him, but additionally, the fact that he acted upon his faith in God's promises. Thus he attested his assurance that God's promises would come true.

When Abraham sought to make his servant Eliezer his heir, God told him that his own offspring would be his heir and that his seed should be as the stars of heaven. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. (Gen. 15:6) Paul quotes this in Romans 4:22-25, and explains that these words were not merely for Abraham's benefit, but were spoken for ours also.

Verses twenty-four and twenty-five enlarge on the subject and show how it is that this righteousness is imputed to us. "If we believe on him [God] that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." We read, in Hebrews 9:24, that he appeared "in the presence of God for us," to apply the merit of his sacrifice on our behalf.

So, if we believe in Jesus' sacrifice, and if we make a full consecration, and if we are accepted by God, we then have been justified and begotten of the Holy Spirit. The apostle continues his reasoning in Romans 5:1,2: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

A ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Standing now in this grace, covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness, we are no longer at enmity with God, and no longer depending on our own works. Then have we entered into God's rest. "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." (Heb. 4:10) This constitutes, for the Christian, a present and continuous rest in Christ. However, we realize that this is only a hand payment, a foretaste of the final rest beyond the veil.

We read, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest." (Heb. 4:11) This brings to mind those who contend in the games. They must strive lawfully. (I Cor. 9:24-27; II Tim. 2:5) Having gained access to the racecourse we must press along the line, earnestly and zealously running for the prize of the High Calling. (Phil. 3:14) We must be determined that nothing will hinder or divert us as we steadily progress toward the goal.

This labor will cost us something in time and talent. Our weak flesh may cry "enough," but the sacrifice must be consumed if it is to be accepted.

"Ne'er think the victory won,
Nor once at ease sit down,
Thine arduous work will not be done
Till thou has gained the crown."

Paul gives his reason for urging us to labor—"Lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." (Heb. 4:11) These words are full of meaning to us. Think of Israel, the example of unbelief. Nor does he let the matter rest here. In Hebrews 3:12, he says: "Take heed, brethren," and in 4:1, "Let us therefore fear." These are warnings, danger signals,

that we who have entered into God's rest now, may fall short of entering the ultimate and complete rest in glory.

How Paul magnifies the importance of faith! Faith is the basis upon which we must build a character adorned with the fruits and graces of the Spirit. Some of these are fortitude, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. And again, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. (II Pet. 1:5-11; Gal. 5:22) We realize that of our own selves we would be unable to accomplish this transformation of character, but we are thankful to realize that having begun a good work in us, God is able also to finish it. We have been promised all the help we need.

Coming now to verse twelve and on to the end of Hebrews, the fourth chapter, Paul concludes his thoughts with the encouraging assurance that those who have entered into God's rest, have every provision made for them to receive help through their "great high priest"(vs. 14), and, by availing themselves of these privileges, will be able to be "more than conquerors."—Rom. 8:37

"The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword." (Heb. 4:12) The truth of God's Word is the source from which we gain eternal life. It reveals God's purposes both for the church and for all mankind. It reveals our faults and failings, and shows us how to overcome them. It is given "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."—II Tim. 3:16,17

“All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Heb. 4:13) We may hide things from others and even from ourselves, but we cannot hide them from God, for he knows the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. It should be our constant prayer to be cleansed from secret faults and thus be kept back from presumptuous sins. David expresses this thought beautifully: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.”—Ps. 24:3,4

PURITY OF HEART

But how can we maintain this purity of heart? How can we overcome the wiles of the Adversary, the lust of the world, and the many weaknesses of our own flesh? Are we sometimes overwhelmed and discouraged at our failures? Do we sometimes allow our eyes to leave our Savior momentarily and look upon the roaring waves; or, perhaps, think that the fiery trials are more than we can endure?

What consolation is brought to us in the following verses: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”—Heb. 4:14,15

What comfort it brings to consider Jesus! We have been beheaded and have accepted Christ instead as our Head. He knows each member of his body and is looking after the needs of each one, no

matter how small or insignificant those needs may be. He is our heavenly Bridegroom and is very solicitous for the welfare of his bride. He is anxiously awaiting as, one by one, they complete the adornment of their wedding gowns. Finally the marriage will take place. This will be “a marriage such as earth hath never known, when bride and Bridegroom are made one before the great white throne.”

ANOINTED IN CHRIST

We think of the anointing that we have received in coming into the body of Christ, and of all the privileges that we enjoy as we endeavor to follow faithfully in the steps of our Beloved. And how blessed the invitation, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”—vs. 16

Having received all the admonition and encouragement of the preceding verses it is only logical that we should avail ourselves of the opportunity of coming to God in prayer. Indeed, we should feel the warmth of his relationship as a Father to his children, and should joyfully and eagerly come to him in prayer.

The word ‘boldly’ contains the thought of ‘frankly’ and ‘with assurance.’ We can bring our failures and shortcomings to our Father, for we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, who pleads our cause, who intercedes on our behalf that our robes may be cleansed from every spot, stain, and wrinkle.—I John 2:1; Eph. 5:27

“Let no earthborn cloud arise to hide thee from thy servant’s eyes.”