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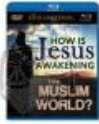
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Is the Sabbath for Today/Part 6

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By: Dr. Robert A. Morey; ©2003

Dr. Morey answers the arguments of sabbatarians from Hebrews 4:9 (Sabbath rest), and the “remember” argument from Exodus 20:8. Do either of these verses demand Sabbath keeping?

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Part II—An Examination Of The Sabbatarian Arguments (con’t)

The Hebrews 4:9 Argument

The Sabbatarian Position—

In this chapter the author clearly states that there remains for the Christian a Sabbath-day of rest.

Examination Of This Argument

1. This argument’s greatest proponent was the Puritan, John Owen. But the exegetical evidence against his Sabbatarian position is so great that no classic commentator can be cited who agreed with his interpretation. Even some of the Puritans, such as John Brown, rejected Owen’s interpretation. With almost all the classic commentaries and exegetes against the Sabbatarian position on Hebrews 4, this at once makes us suspicious of its validity.

2. A careful exegesis reveals that Hebrews 4 is teaching the exact opposite of the Sabbatarian position. The context is clear on the following points:

- God’s “rest” in Hebrews 3:18 stands symbolically for the promised land. Because of unbelief, most of the generation died in the wilderness instead of entering His “rest” (3:16-19).
- From this Old Testament example, the author now informs his audience that the promise of a greater “rest” stands before them (4: 1a).
- This “rest” is of such a nature that:

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1. We can fall short of it (v. 1b).
2. We fall short if we do not believe the Gospel (v. 2).
3. It is entered into by faith (v. 3).
4. This "rest" is now drawn from another Old Testament example: God's Sabbath rest (v. 4).
5. The author combines God's Sabbath rest with the "rest" of the promised land (v.5) and states that disobedience to the Gospel hinders anyone from entering "rest" (v. 6).
6. Even now in the age of salvation, the age of "Today" (v. 7; cf. II Cor. 6:2), God calls us to enter a "rest"; a rest like God's Sabbath rest; a rest like that in Canaan (v. 9). The only reason for putting the word "Sabbath rest" (Greek, *sabbatismos*, v. 9) instead of just "rest" as in the rest of the context is that the author had just used God's "Sabbath" as an illustration or example.
7. The nature of the "rest" or "Sabbath rest" of verse 9 is explained in verses 10-11.
 1. Just as God ceased forever from His works, even so we are to cease from depending upon or trying to produce works to merit salvation. The works we produce are elsewhere called "dead works" (6:1).
 2. Let us enter the "rest of faith" in the Gospel and persevere to the end. We must not fall away into or rest upon dead works.
 3. The danger to which the author was addressing himself was apostasy, not which day was to be observed by Christians. The audience was tempted to return to Judaism. Thus the author exhorts them to persevere in the faith and he warns them of condemnation if they become disobedient to the Gospel. That this is the theme of the entire book and the thrust of Chapter 4 is accepted by nearly all commentators. Why do the Sabbatarians ignore this broader and immediate context? The emphasis in Hebrews 4 is on a future rest that yet awaits all who persevere to the end in faith (cf. 10:38-39), and the author's fear that by moving back under the Old Covenant they would fall short of that *sabbatismos*.
 4. The conclusion of the author's argument is given in vs. 14-16. In order to enter God's rest, we must "hold firmly to the faith" (v. 14) in Christ's meritorious priestly atonement. Therefore, let us "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (v. 16) in view of Christ's work for us.

CONCLUSION

Hebrews 4 is a passage which shows that God's Sabbath and the Promised Land were an eschatological foreshadowing of the believer's rest of faith in the Gospel of salvation, accomplished by the sealing of the New Covenant by the blood of Christ. Hebrews 4:9 does not say "Sabbath day" but rather "Sabbath-like rest" (*sabbatismos*). The context rules out the Sabbatarian interpretation, because the emphasis falls not on a day to be observed in this age, but on an eternal rest awaiting all who live by faith until the end (cf. 3:14).

The "Remember" Argument

The Sabbatarian Position


The word "remember" in the Fourth Commandment points us to the past observance of the Sabbath since the creation.

Examination Of This Argument

1. The Hebrew word *zachar* in Exodus 20:8 is in the Kal infinitive form and not in the imperative. The *Brown, Driver and Briggs Lexicon* does not place the word as found in Exodus 20:8 in the section under "recalling something or someone you already knew about" (sections 1-2). Rather, it means to recall to mind from now on, i.e., "to observe or commemorate" a certain day.
2. An examination of the *Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance* reveals that in many cases "remember" has the meaning of a future calling to mind. Thus, Moses was saying, "From now on, recall to mind and sanctify...."
3. When *zachar* is used for observing a ceremonial day, it is usually combined with and is synonymous with *shamar*, which means to observe or preserve (cf. Deut. 16:1,3).

[To be continued.](#)

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