

One can safely say that the greatest known evangelist in the history of the church since the apostle Paul was an Anglican clergyman from England named George Whitefield. He was the one who launched the Wesleyan revivals and who first preached in the fields of England to thousands of coal miners and working folk.

God led him to America where he sparked what came to be known as the Great Awakening, the first great revival in the New World. For many years he preached tirelessly, traveling thousands of miles on horseback, spreading the gospel throughout the colonies.

According to John Pollock, on September 29, 1770, George Whitefield gave his last sermon. Upon arrival, the organizers of the event, urged him not to preach. Why? He was weak and frail from years of faithful service throughout the Colonies. As a result of his ministry, a mighty revival swept through the early American frontier.⁴⁵¹

“Sir,” they said, “you are fit to go to bed than to preach.”

Whitefield had a heart ailment, and he knew the end was near.

“True, sir,” George replied. Then he clasped his hand and looked up to heaven and said. “Lord Jesus, I am weary in thy work but not of it. If I have not finished my course, let me go and speak for thee once more in the fields, and seal thy truth, and come home and die!”

Mounting the pulpit, the words of his last sermon came slowly at first. But after a while, it seemed his foggy brain cleared and looking upward to heaven he said, “Works? Works? A man get to heaven by works? I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand.”

For the next two hours, no one would have known that he was suffering from debilitating weakness and exhaustion. He proclaimed a magnificent sermon about the glories of the Christ. At the end of the second hour he cried out, “I go! I go to rest prepared. My sun has arisen, and by the aid of heaven has given light to many. It is now about to set—No! It is about to rise to the zenith of immortal glory. I have outlived many on earth, but they cannot outlive me in heaven. O thought divine! I should soon be in a world where time, age, pain and sorrow are unknown. My body fails, my spirit expands. How willingly would I live forever to preach Christ! But I die to be with Him.”

He looked forward to entering into “rest.”

Then, tottering from the platform, they took him immediately to bed. He awoke at two in the morning and wanted something to drink, a little cider.

⁴⁵¹ Most of the following wording and all of the illustration is adapted from John Pollock, *George Whitefield and the Great Awakening* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 267-72.

“My asthma is coming on again,” he wheezed, “I must have two or three days’ rest. Two or three days riding, without preaching, will set me up again.”

They opened the window and the thought of going without preaching caused him to say, “I hope I shall be better by and by. A good pulpit sweat today may give me relief. I shall be better after preaching.”

The local churches had expected him to preach in a few hours.

Pollock then concludes his description of the last words of this remarkable evangelist and servant of Christ.

“ ‘His servant Richard said, ‘I wish you would not preach so often, sir.’ ”

‘I had rather wear out than rust out,’ panted George.

He had apparently caught a cold preaching the previous day.

Then he sat up in bed, eyes closed and began to pray. He commended his friends to God. He prayed for England and his preaching colleagues laboring there, one by one bringing them before the throne of grace. Then he crossed the Atlantic to Georgia, then to Pennsylvania, and New England. Those present said he seemed completely oblivious to his surroundings and his pain. He knew only that he talked with his faithful unchangeable Friend.

Heaven was only a hair’s breath away. For Richard Smith, it was awe inspiring.

‘My asthma, my asthma’ he croaked. Actually his heart was giving way.

‘I am almost suffocated. I can scarcely breathe. My asthma quite chokes me.’

He got out of bed and stumbled to the open window. Outside, Newbury Port lay asleep. For five minutes he stood there, gasping. He fought for breath as the first glimmer of a new dawn caught the waters of the estuary and would soon break over New England.

He turned to Richard and Parsons: ‘I am dying,’ he said.

Then he mounted the waiting chariot.’⁴⁵²

George Whitefield had finished his course. When the chariot entered, as he put it, “he entered into rest.”

Perhaps no other writer of the New Testament reflected as deeply and profoundly upon the theme of the inheritance and final entrance into “rest” as did the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. In this chapter we discover one of his favorite expressions for the inheritance—he called it “rest.” But, as we will see, “rest” for him was much more than going to heaven when one dies. It was what one entered into when he has finished his work; it was that sense of satisfaction that one like Whitefield feels when he knows that he has come to the end of a life well lived. It is the reward that comes to the faithful, persevering Christian who has lived with the end in view.

God’s Rest

Addressing believers undergoing persecution and considering a return to Judaism, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews presses on them the failure of the Exodus generation and warns them of a similar fate. With unusual insight he notes that their failure to enter into rest was a failure to finish their work, precisely the

⁴⁵² Ibid., 272.

danger facing the Hebrews who were considering an abandonment of their confession.

The readers of this epistle were in danger of “falling away” (Hebrews 6:6) and “ignoring a great salvation” (Hebrews 2:3). All five of the warning passages in the book are directed against this peril. To encourage their perseverance in the midst of persecutions, he sets before them the example of Israelites in the wilderness who fell away and did not enter into Canaan. Because they failed to finish their work, God said,

*So I declared on oath in my anger,
They shall never enter my rest (Hebrews 3:11).*

The Rest Is the Land of Canaan

In the Old Testament this “rest” was equated with the land God swore they would not enter into (Psalm 95:11; Numbers 14:21-23).⁴⁵³ On this basis, A. B. Davidson concludes, “What appears to be spoken of is simply possession of the land of Canaan.”⁴⁵⁴

Also, the terms “rest” and “Canaan” seem to be used interchangeably in many places:

*You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit, since you have not yet reached the **resting place** and the **inheritance** the LORD your God is giving you (Deuteronomy 12:8-9).*

Sun sees in this passage a “theological equation of ‘rest’ with the secured settlement of the Promised Land.”⁴⁵⁵

*But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the **land** the LORD your God is giving you as an **inheritance**, and he will give you **rest** from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety (Deuteronomy 12:10).*

In the future, Zion, the capital of Palestine, will be God’s resting place:

For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: This is my resting place for ever and ever (Psalm 132:13-14).

F. F. Bruce comments that “Canaan [is] the ‘rest’ or home which God had prepared for them.” He argues that in the above passage “Canaan is called ‘the rest and the inheritance, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee.’”⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, Walter Kaiser insists that the land of Canaan is the rest of Deuteronomy 12:9 and that the word is used of a “place,” “geographical, material, and spatial” as well as of a “condition.”⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³ See also Deuteronomy 1:34-36; Numbers 32:10-12; cf. Deuteronomy 12:9.

⁴⁵⁴ Davidson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 99. Davidson, however, while acknowledging that this is the meaning of the Old Testament texts, wants to spiritualize them to mean heaven.

⁴⁵⁵ H. T. C. Sun, “Rest, Resting Place,” in *NISBE* (1979), 4:143.

⁴⁵⁶ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 99.

⁴⁵⁷ Walter Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 157. The interchangeability between the terms “rest” and “land” is suggested by the following passages as well (Deuteronomy 3:18-20; Joshua 1:13).

The Rest Is Our Finished Work

The book of Joshua enriches the concept of “rest” beyond mere possession of the land; it also refers to successful conquest, the completion of their work.

*The LORD gave them **rest** on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one of them was fulfilled (Joshua 21:44-45).*

Coppes concludes from this and similar passages⁴⁵⁸ that rest included the notion of “to defeat Israel’s enemies and give them rest (victory and security) in the land.”⁴⁵⁹ A definite relationship between land and rest exists because “possession of the land brings ‘rest’ (Deuteronomy 12:9; 25:19; Josh 1:13; 21:44), that is, both freedom from foreign domination and the end of wandering.”⁴⁶⁰ Rest is the inheritance, but it is also a condition or state of finished work and victory over enemies which the Israelites entered into when they obtained the inheritance.

But when did the Israelites enter into rest? It was not when they entered into Canaan, for that is when their battle to obtain the inheritance began. Nor did their rest occur when they crossed the river Jordan to attack Jericho (Joshua 3-4). The rest came after the victory had been won and the inheritance was distributed (Joshua 12-22). Between initial entry into the land and the final conquest there were victories to be wrought and battles to win, a task to complete. They entered into rest in Joshua 12 when they received the inheritance.⁴⁶¹ At that point they enjoyed freedom from enemies and had completed their work, just as God had completed His work in creation.

Nothing is particularly new about this approach. Indeed, it has been articulated in numerous books on the spiritual life. In these books the journey of Israel from Egypt to Canaan is compared with the Christian life. As it is commonly taught,⁴⁶² Israel’s time in Egypt pictures the unregenerate man, the wandering in the wilderness is the carnal Christian, and the crossing of the Jordan into Canaan is the spiritual Christian. The victories over the Canaanites are illustrative of the victorious Christian. No longer wandering in the wilderness of unbelief but clothed in the full armor of God, the believer is fighting the “principalities and powers.” And as a reward, he obtains the inheritance in Joshua 12-22 when the land is distributed. Books on the spiritual life often connect this with the distribution of crowns at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

However, many writers persist in the view that the land of Canaan is somehow typical of the future millennial kingdom.⁴⁶³ We will argue that it is typical of our

⁴⁵⁸ E.g., Deuteronomy 12:10; 2 Samuel 7:1; 1 Kings 5:4; 1 Chronicles 22:9.

⁴⁵⁹ Leonard J. Coppes, “*nuah*,” in TWOT, 2:562.

⁴⁶⁰ B. L. Bandstra, “Land,” in NISBE, 3:71.

⁴⁶¹ The writer to the Hebrews states that this was not a complete fulfillment of the promised rest (Hebrews 3-4).

⁴⁶² See Ian Thomas, *The Saving Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1955); Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell Co., 1955).

⁴⁶³ Indeed, the Old Testament promises that one day Israel will return to the land (Ezekiel 37:21-22), be established as an independent state (Ezekiel 37:22), be in possession of the old city of Jerusalem, and become a focal point of global concern (Zechariah 12:1-4). Thus such a parallel can be drawn. These land promises are all fulfilled in the future kingdom.

inheritance in the kingdom, participation with Christ as one of His *Metochoi* in the messianic partnership.

Is entering the land a type of entering the kingdom? And, if it is, are not all who enter heirs of that kingdom? To state the question is to answer it. Obviously not! The book of Joshua supplies at least one illustration of an Israelite who in fact entered the land but who never finished his task. As a result, he never obtained the inheritance and never entered into rest. His name was Achan. After the successful conquest of Jericho, this regenerate “son” of God (Joshua 7:19) stole some of the plunder for himself and then lied about it (vv. 10-11). Such impurity among the people of God made them impotent against their enemies (v. 12).

The same situation existed in the early church when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. They claimed some material things had been given to the church, but they had in fact been held back some for themselves (Acts 5:3). The result for Achan was capital punishment (Joshua 7:24-26). The same happened to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5).

It is therefore evident that a man can enter into the land but not obtain the inheritance there and never enter into rest. The former was available to all Israelites on the basis of a promise, but the latter came only to those who obeyed and won the victory.

In Hebrews 4, the writer to the Hebrews explains that Christians enter into rest when they complete the lifelong work of committed discipleship. But like the exodus generation (and later Achan), not all Christians finish their work. A proper illustration of the relationship between the journeys of the children of Israel and the Christian life is suggested by the diagram below.

From Egypt to Canaan

Natural Man	Carnal Christian	Spiritual Christian	Rewarded Christian
In Egypt	In the Wilderness	Crossing the Jordan	Entering Rest
Ex. 1—Ex. 11	Ex. 12—Deut. 34	Josh. 1—Josh. 11	Josh. 12—Josh. 22
Slave Generation	Exodus Generation	Second Generation	
Lost	Redeemed	Discipleship	Rewarded
1 Cor. 2:14	1 Cor. 3:1-3	Rom. 12:1-2	2 Cor. 5:10

Those Israelites who crossed the Jordan and entered the land were saved people. They are now aligning themselves with God’s purpose. He brought their fathers out of Egypt to bring them into the promised land (Deuteronomy 4:37-38). The Exodus generation never finished the work God gave them to do. However, the second generation committed themselves to accomplish God’s purpose; they crossed the Jordan, entered into battle, and conquered the land. As a result, they finished the work God gave them to do. They “entered into rest.” Typologically, this is portrayed in

Joshua 12 where, after the battles have been won and their work accomplished, they are rewarded by the distribution of the land. It is then that they entered into rest.⁴⁶⁴

The readers of this epistle who similarly finish their work are called *Metochoi*, members of the messianic partnership (Hebrews 3:14).

Christ's Metochoi: The Partners

This magnificent concept of entering into rest was uniquely appropriate to apply to the readers of the epistle to the Hebrews who were in danger, like the Exodus generation, of failing to complete their life work by doing the will of God to the end (Hebrews 10:36). So He warns them saying,

For we have become partakers [Gr metochoi, plural] of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end (Hebrews 3:14, NASB).

What does it mean to be one of Christ's "partners?" Paul uses the synonym in 1 Corinthians 9:23, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker [Gr *synkoinōnos*] of it." Piper misunderstands and thinks that to become a *metochos* means "to obtain what the Gospel promises," that is, heaven when we die. He argues that Paul "becomes all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22) so that Paul can save not only himself from damnation, but also others.⁴⁶⁵ We disagree. To become a "fellow partaker of the gospel" does not mean "to be saved" at the end, but rather to become a partner in the spreading of the gospel ministry as the preceding context of 1 Corinthians 9:23 makes clear.

The phrase "for we have come to share in Christ" (ESV, NIV) is best translated "for we are partners [*Metochoi*] of Christ (NASB)" (Gr *Metochoi gar tou Christou gegonamen*). The perfect tense "have come" (*gegonamen*) takes the most basic sense of the perfect, the intensive perfect. "It is a strong way of saying that a thing is. Usually its closest approximation is the English present."⁴⁶⁶ The genitive "of Christ" is the simple genitive of possession. We may therefore translate, "We are partners of Christ" or "we are Christ's partners."

The Gr *metochos* means "partner or companion."⁴⁶⁷ The word is found in classical Gr for a wife, a member of a board of officials, a partner in business, or the joint owner of a house.⁴⁶⁸ Men may or may not be joined together as thieves, destroyers, or robbers, but they are all still men; only their partnership in a particular enterprise is in question. Similarly, Christians may or may not be joined together with Christ in the coming "messianic partnership," but they are still Christians.

How is one a partner "in" another person (ESV, NIV)? The NASB translation above is preferable. Someone could certainly "share with" a person but not "in." Perhaps some of the difficulty is that the translators are attempting to read the Pauline concept of "in Christ" into this Gr word. If the word *metochos* means to be "in Christ" or be "part of Christ," then the verse is suggesting that we are Christians if and only

⁴⁶⁴ Paul writes that "these things occurred as examples" (1 Corinthians 10:6), so there is some justification for such interpretations. The journey of the Exodus generation and their sons to possess Canaan in a striking way portrays the theology of entering into rest.

⁴⁶⁵ John Piper, *Beyond the Gold* (Desiring God Radio, May 14, 2006).

⁴⁶⁶ DM, 202.

⁴⁶⁷ BAGD, 516. In the LXX it often means "companions," see Hermann Hanse, "echō," in TDNTA, p. 289.

⁴⁶⁸ LSJ, 1122.

if we persevere to the end. This, of course, is a translation favored by many Experimental Predestinarians. If, on the other hand, the word *metochos* suggests something like “companion” with Christ, then an entirely different kind of relationship is in view. In fact it is highly unlikely that *metochos* implies the Pauline idea of being “in Christ.” Montefiore comments:

*Most commentators take the phrase to mean that we are **Partners of Christ** or that **we share in Christ**. This Pauline concept, however, is entirely alien to our author who regards Christ not as the new humanity into whom believers are incorporated by faith union, but as head of the Christian family, the son among brothers.*⁴⁶⁹

Similarly Hughes writes:

*There is, indeed, a certain ambiguity associated with the Greek noun used here since it may mean either “Partners with” someone in a particular activity or relationship, in which case it denotes “companions” or “partners,” as in 1:9 and Luke 5:7 (the only occurrence of the noun outside the Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament), or “Partners of.”*⁴⁷⁰

Hughes argues that the former interpretation should be favored here. He notes that the Israelites were *partners with* Moses in the wilderness parallel (and not *partners of*) and that the same sense is found in Hebrews 1:9, where it is implied that the Christians are the companions of the royal Son. Farrar has adopted the same view:

*But the meaning may rather be “Partners **with** Christ;” for the thought of mystical union with Christ extending into the spiritual unity and identity, which makes the words “in Christ” the monogram of St. Paul, is scarcely alluded to by the writer. His thoughts are rather of “Christ for us” than of “Christ in us.”*⁴⁷¹

Finally, Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains it this way, “It means ‘participant’ or ‘sharer.’⁴⁷² It is sometimes used for ‘associate’, ‘partner’. A partner is a man who goes along with another man in a business or whatever it may chance to be.”⁴⁷³

But being Christ’s partner is not the same as being God’s son. Only sons are partners, but not all sons are partners—only those who “*hold firmly to the end the confidence*” they had at first. The word *metochos* was used in the papyri for a partner or associate in a business enterprise. One manuscript contains a portion of a sentence which reads, “We Dionysius, son of Socrates and the associate [*Metochoi*] collectors of public clothing.”⁴⁷⁴ Apparently, Dionysius and his associates were partners in a tax-collecting business. A man named Sotas was also writing receipts for tax bills paid and collected through his company: “... paid to Sotas and associates [*Metochoi*],

⁴⁶⁹ Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 78.

⁴⁷⁰ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 149.

⁴⁷¹ Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 63.

⁴⁷² To use Wallace’s categories, it is an attributive genitive which “specifies an attribute or innate quality.” It also adds a bit of emphasis – partners of *Christ*. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, s.v. “The Genitive Case”.

⁴⁷³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans Chapter 8:17-39: The Final Perseverance of the Saints* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 322.

⁴⁷⁴ MM, 406.

collectors of money-taxes.”⁴⁷⁵ A similar usage is found in the New Testament in reference to Simon Peter’s fishing business. He was a partner with James and John (Luke 5:10):

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners [Metochoi] in the other boat to come and help them (Luke 5:6-7).

It was perfectly normal for a king to surround himself with certain associates with whom he maintained a more intimate relationship than he did with all other citizens of his kingdom. In the Old Testament one might think of David’s mighty men (2 Samuel 23:8-39) or perhaps of David’s invitation to the crippled Mephibosheth to eat at his table like one of the king’s sons (2 Samuel 9:7, 11, 13). Certainly, the disastrous counsel which Rehoboam received from “the young men who had grown up with him and [who] were serving him” (1 Kings 12:8) could be said to have come from his partners, his *Metochoi*.

In the Roman world it was a great privilege to be known as a “friend of Caesar.” At Jesus’ trial when the Jews questioned whether Pilate was a “friend of Caesar” (John 19:12). Pilate reversed himself in trying to release Jesus. Suetonius, in his *The Deified Julius*, says of these “friends of Caesar”:

Moreover when he came to power he advanced some of his friends to the highest position, even though they were of the humblest origin and when taken to task for it flatly declared that if he had been helped in defending his honor by brigands and cutthroats he would have requited such men in the same way.⁴⁷⁶

Perhaps, in a similar vein, we might think of the honor of being a member of Caesar’s household (Philippians 4:22). The term “Caesar’s household” was commonly applied to the imperial civil service throughout the empire. Philo says, “If Agrippa had not been a king, but instead one of Caesar’s household, would he not have had some privilege or honor?”⁴⁷⁷

God’s King-Son in the epistle to the Hebrews has likewise surrounded Himself with companions (Hebrews 1:9, Gr *Metochoi*). In the case of David there were many citizens living in his kingdom other than those who ate at his table and his mighty men. Many lived under Rehoboam’s sovereignty who were not among those with whom he grew up. There were many in Caesar’s kingdom who did not have the official title “friend of Caesar” or “member of Caesar’s household,” and probably there were many in the businesses of Sotas, Dionysius, and Peter who were not “associates.”

Jesus made it clear that only those Christians who “do the will of My Father in heaven” are His “friends” (Matthew 12:48-50). He told them that friendship with Him was conditional: “You are My friends if you do what I command” (John 15:14). He even spoke of Christians who could in no way be considered His friends because He “would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men” (John 2:24). Yet these

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Suetonius, “The Deified Augustus,” in *The Lives of the Caesars* (Available at www.books.google.com), LXXII, p. 35.

⁴⁷⁷ A. Rupprecht, “Caesar’s Household,” in ZPED, 1:683.

from whom He drew back had “believed in His name” and were, therefore, born again.⁴⁷⁸

The *Metochoi* of King Jesus, then, are His co-heirs in the rule of the messianic kingdom. They are those friends, partners, and companions who have endured the trials of life and were faithful to the end, and who will therefore obtain the inheritance-rest. As early as the fourth century, Origen held this view of the Partners. In his letter to Gregory he concludes with a blessing that he may not only be a saved man, but in addition, “May you also be a Partner [Gr *metochoi*], and be *ever increasing your inheritance*, that you may say not only, ‘We are become Partners [*metochoi*] of Christ,’ but also Partners [*metochoi*] of God.”⁴⁷⁹ A Partner, says Origen, is one who is “ever increasing his inheritance,” so that he may become the Father’s partner as well as Christ’s.

The danger in Hebrews 3:14 is not that his readers would lose their justification but that they might lose their inheritance by forfeiting their position as one of Christ’s *Metochoi* in the coming kingdom. To help them avoid this danger, the writer applies to them the lesson of the failure of the Exodus generation to enter rest. His readers are also in danger of not entering into rest.

Entering into Rest (Hebrews 4:1-11)

Having set before their eyes the failure of the Exodus generation, he now warns them against the possibility of failure in their Christian lives as well.

The Warning (4:1-2)

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it (Hebrews 4:1).

There is no reason for assuming that the rest (Gr *katapausis*) in Hebrews 4 is any different from the inheritance of Canaan obtained by obedience as described in Hebrews 3. The transition between the chapters is smooth, the application is precise and without any qualification, and the same word, *katapausis*, is used. It involved a spiritual victory over all opposing enemies which was achieved by spiritual faith-obedience to the King. As pointed out earlier, Moses clearly links the “rest” with the inheritance of Canaan.

... for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you (Deuteronomy 12:9; cf. 3:18-20).

Later the writer refers to this again, saying, “*He who is coming will not delay,*” and in light of that he urges his readers to persevere, and not turn back to Judaism, so that they might “*receive what he has promised*” (Hebrews 10:36-37). Because Christ

⁴⁷⁸ Many people saw the miraculous signs and *episteusan eis to onoma autou* (“believed on His name”). Yet Jesus would not *episteuen auton autois* (“entrust Himself to them”) because He “knew all men.” The phrase “believe on His name” is used throughout John for saving faith. Note especially John 3:18 where the same phrase is used. The phrase *pisteuō eis* is John’s standard expression for saving faith. One believes “on Him” or “in His name,” 6:40; 7:39; 8:30; 10:42; 11:25; 11:26; 12:11. Therefore, Calvin’s claim in *Institutes* (3.2.12), that they did not have true faith but were only borne along “by some impulse of zeal which prevented them from carefully examining their hearts” is fallacious.

⁴⁷⁹ “Letter from Origen to Gregory” in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, J. A. Cleveland, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers 4, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325.* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 3, p. 393.

could return at any moment (the pretribulation rapture), there is a special urgency, exhorting them to complete what they have begun. He continues,

For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them because those who heard did not combine it with faith (Hebrews 4:2).

What “gospel“ was preached to them? It probably was not the good news of forgiveness of sins. There is no reference to such a gospel in the context of this warning passage. The word “gospel” simply means “good news.” Our Reformation heritage has perhaps caused us to limit this expression to only one kind of good news, deliverance from eternal damnation. But the good news they received was the promise of entering into God’s rest. The writer will define this more clearly in the verses to follow.

The Present Existence of the Rest (4:3-7)

Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world (Hebrews 4:3).

Here the writer to the Hebrews makes it explicit that only those who believe enter into rest. The phrase “we who have believed” should be translated “we who believe.”⁴⁸⁰ His interest is not in those who have believed at a point in time but in those who continue to believe to the end of life (3:6, 14). Perseverance in faith, not a one-time exercise of it, guarantees that believers enter into rest.

He quotes Psalms 95:11 again, which is a Davidic commentary on the failure of the Exodus generation. This rest, this experience of finished work that comes through meritorious acquisition of the land of Canaan, is God’s rest. The significance of the statement, “*And yet His work has been finished since the creation of the world*” is difficult to interpret precisely. Why is it included? Our author probably means that God completed His work of creation and has offered the experience of completed work to every believer since then.

In the discussion above it was argued that the meaning of entering into rest included not only the obtaining of the inheritance of Canaan but also signified the completion of one’s labor. This possible meaning of the term in the Old Testament is now made explicit by the writer to the Hebrews in the words to follow:

For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.” And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest” (Hebrews 4:4-5).

The precise connection between God having finished His work and their not finishing theirs by entering the land seems to be as follows. Since God has completed His work, the experience of completed work, rest, has been available to all since the creation of the world. The fact that God “rested” does not mean that He was tired, but that His task was finished. Believers enter into that experience the same way God did, by finishing the task. Possession of Canaan was the task the wilderness generation was to complete. The concept of rest is thus enriched to mean finished

⁴⁸⁰ The aorist participle indicates that no one will enter unless they have believed. While it says nothing about the absolute time or specific time or length of time, it does say the believing has preceded the entering.

work. For the readers of this Epistle, to enter into rest meant to finish well, to persevere to the end.

No Final Rest under Joshua (4:6-9)

It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:6-7).

The Exodus generation failed to enter the land. They never finished their task, and that task still remains to be completed! But someone might argue that the entire promise of the land of Canaan was fulfilled under Joshua. Did not the Old Testament say that the conquest of the land was the fulfillment of the promised rest (Joshua 22:4; 23:1)? This view is answered by the following words:

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God (Hebrews 4:8-9).

If the experience of Sabbath rest had been fulfilled in Joshua's conquest of the land, then David, four hundred years later, would not still be offering the same promise in Psalms 95:11 and saying it is available "today." The writer is evidently setting before his Christian readers the hope of an inheritance, the land of Canaan, which metaphorically also speaks of finished work. This future inheritance is still to be obtained; the experience of finished work is still to be achieved!

How the Rest Is Obtained (4:10-11)

He now explains how the rest is to be obtained:

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 example of disobedience (4:10-11).

As Christian believers they will have an inheritance in the land of Canaan in the future millennial kingdom, if they make every effort to finish their course. They are to enter rest the same way the Exodus generation should have, by finishing their work. This was how God entered into the experience of rest.

To apply "every effort" (Gr *spoudazō*) is a strong term and hardly appropriate for the means for obtaining heaven by faith alone, without cost, and apart from works. Peter exhorted his readers, "*Be more diligent [Gr *spoudazō*] to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble*" (2 Peter 1:10). As demonstrated elsewhere, this means that the believer is to apply virtues to his Christian life in order to establish a strong foundation so that he will not fall into sin.⁴⁸¹ The psalmist echoes this idea when he says that failing to apply the virtue of humility almost caused his feet to stumble (Psalm 73:2-3).⁴⁸² Peter also says that in regard to their eternal future they should "*be diligent to [Gr *spoudazō*] be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless*" (2 Peter 3:14, NKJV). Timothy was commanded to "*be diligent [Gr *spoudazō*] to present yourself approved*

⁴⁸¹ See discussion in vol. 2, chapter 30, p. 447.

⁴⁸² Cf. 1 Kings 11:2-4, 9. Solomon "turned away" from God.

to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV). None of these exhortations has anything to do with proving that one is saved by persevering in good works, as Experimentalists maintain.

Entering rest is, therefore, more than obtaining the land of Canaan, although it is also that. It is the fulfillment of man’s destiny to “rule and have dominion” (Genesis 1:26-28). It is the finishing of our work: “*for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests* (Gr *katapauō*, “to bring to an end”⁴⁸³) *from his own work, just as God did from His*” (Hebrews 4:10). The concept of “rest” is clearly associated with successful completion. Or as the writer expressed it in Hebrews 10:36:

*You need to persevere so that when you **have done the will of God**, you will receive what he has promised.*

In a similar way Jesus said, “*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work*” (John 4:34).

The conclusion is that the content of the inheritance in Hebrews 3 and 4 is the messianic partnership of Hebrews 3:14. By being faithful to Christ to the final hour, we finish our course and obtain this inheritance. While this involves ownership of the land of Canaan, the capital of the millennial earth (Isaiah 2:1-4), it includes more than that. It signifies completion of our life work by faithful perseverance to the final hour. It means living there in the heavenly country, ruling from the heavenly city with the King. Only Christ’s *Metochoi* will reign with Him in the kingdom. To be invited to rule with Christ on earth in the coming kingdom is synonymous with hearing Him say:

Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness! (Matthew 25:21).

There are many in the kingdom today, but only some will inherit the land in the consummation. That is why the rest must be worked for:

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:11).

Consistent with its usage throughout the New Testament, the inheritance (rest) must be earned. Unlike heaven, it is not a free gift, nor is there anything in this passage about perseverance in holiness as proof of the presence of saving faith. Not all Christians will make that effort or will make equal effort, and those distinctions will be acknowledged by Christ in the coming reign of the *Metochoi* during the millennial kingdom.

Summary

A major theme of the book of Hebrews is the inheritance-rest which is still available to believers. The writer of this epistle draws on the Old Testament background to warn the Hebrews that they are in danger of a failure similar to the of the Exodus generation. Because they are considering a return to Judaism, they may never finish their work. He reminds them that God swore to the Israelites of old that they would never enter the land of Canaan and never obtain the inheritance they sought.

⁴⁸³ BDAG, 524.

Believers enter into that rest only when they persevere in faith to the end of life. ~~When they do this, they will obtain~~ a share in the inheritance, the millennial ~~land of~~ Canaan, and will rule with Christ as one of His *Metochoi* there. Rest is not just the land itself; it also includes the state or condition of “finished work,” of final perseverance, into which the faithful Christian will enter. God has not set aside His promises to Israel. The promise of the inheritance, the land, is eternally valid, and those Christians who remain faithful to their Lord to the end of life will share in that inheritance along with the Old Testament saints and the great company of the *Metochoi* in the future reign of the servant kings. Page 48