

Finding Rest for Your Soul

Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30, NIV).

Are you weary and burdened? The Father wants to lead you into His rest, just as He led Israel out of Egypt and into the land of rest (Jer. 31:32).

He wants to teach you that sabbath is not a day of the week but a state of the soul. To understand the secret of living in a soul sabbath, we need to examine three Hebrew concepts, which are ingredients of an uninterrupted inner tranquillity: sabbath, rest and peace.

The first mention of sabbath is in Genesis 2:13. In his book, *The Five Books of Moses*, author and Hebrew scholar Everett Fox offered this translation:

"Thus were finished the heavens and the earth, with all of their array. God had finished, on the seventh day, his work that he had made, and then he ceased, on the seventh day, from all his work that he had made. God gave the seventh day his blessing, and he hallowed it, for on it he ceased from all his work, that by creating, God had made."

The Hebrew word that Fox translated *ceased* is the word *shabath*. The word in English is *sabbath*.

In most of our translations, the word has been rendered *rest*. In Genesis 2:2, then, we find that God "sabbathed."

Several words here describe how God sabbathed: *finished*, *ceased* and *hallowed*. Notice that Fox translated *shabath* as *ceased* rather than *rested*. This is truer to its meaning.

According to Spiros Zodhiates in his book *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, the Hebrew word most often used for *rest* is the word *menuha*, which means “a settled, deep stillness.” *Menuha* is the sabbath-rest we seek.

At the first mention of *shabath*, we find that God completed His work of creating and that He hallowed or sanctified the day because of its significance to Him. God’s rest, not humankind’s rest, identifies the Sabbath.

We can plausibly speculate with the ancient rabbis, who teach that on this first Sabbath God deliberately created for His people the gift of *menuha*—rest. We can be at rest because God did the work.

When He set Adam and Eve in the garden, the place was a finished work. It was complete—a land of rest.

God had another gift for His creation, the gift of *shalom*, a Hebrew word usually translated in English as *peace*. Zodhiates says *shalom* also means “total well-being.”

The term conveys wholeness and health in body and soul; to be complete. *Shalom* and *shabath* are related, and both suggest the meaning of “finished.”

Scripture records in Exodus 20:10¹¹, for example, that God rested on the seventh day because He was finished with all of His work. He sabbathed; He ceased. The word *sabbath* means “to be finished, to have completed the work.”

God created for six days, and on the seventh day He began a sabbath that was to last forever. God’s work has been in a finished state, completed since day seven.

When was the Lamb slain? Before the world began (Rev. 13:8).

When was the kingdom prepared for believers? Before the world began (Matt. 25:34). All of God’s work was finished, and so He sabbathed (Gen. 2:3).

Yet Jesus stated, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17). At one level—the spiritual realm—God's work is finished. The work that remains is to release the reality of His finished work in the material realm in the fullness of time (2 Tim. 1:9-10).

For example, grace was given to us before the beginning of time. But God revealed His grace in Christ's coming to earth.

Sabbath Shadows

God's finished work will be revealed on the earth at its appointed moment. But He has provided natural laws and principles in His Word that help us to interpret spiritual realities. Note these examples:

The Sabbath day. God established the Sabbath, the seventh day of each week, to be set aside for rest from work and for delighting in the Lord. The Sabbath observance is a day on which His people are to mimic His rest.

We are to enter into peaceful tranquillity, the perpetual state of the Father. The observance of the Sabbath-rest is beneficial to the physical world and provides for its optimum functioning.

But the physical and mental rest of the Sabbath observance is only a shadow of the real rest and soul-sabbath that God has made available to His people. Again, sabbath is not ultimately a day of the week, but a state of the soul.

The land of rest. The next shadow-figure of sabbath-rest is the promised land. Earth began as a land of rest but became a place of labor, turmoil and death because of the entrance of sin.

When God promised His people a land of their own, He called it a land of rest (*menuha*). Part of the gift of land was the gift of rest. "Come into Canaan. Here, I will give you rest," is

essentially the invitation of Yahweh to His people (Deut. 12:8-10).

The promised land, the land of Canaan, the homeland, was to be a land of physical and soul rest. But when the nation of Israel refused to enter the land because of fear, God said of them: "For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known My ways.' So I declared on oath in My anger, 'They shall never enter my rest'" (Ps. 95:10-11).

Thus, we have sabbath (God's rest), celebrated and remembered by a weekly observance and represented by a land. Sabbath is God's rest into which His people may enter.

Canaan in the material realm is a geographical location; in the spiritual realm, it is Jesus Himself. The promised land is the shadow of the Promised One.

The writer of Hebrews connected these pictures of rest, making them one thought: sabbath, Canaan, God's rest, and Jesus (Heb. 3:16-4:10). He reminded his readers of "the rebellion" or "the testing" when the Israelites complained against God and Moses because there was no water. Having seen God provide miraculously for their every single need, they still did not trust God to meet their new needs as they arose.

God swore that this generation would never enter His rest (Canaan). The Israelites did not experience the rest of Canaan because they trusted their own perceptions more than they trusted God's Word.

In Hebrews 3:7-19 and 4:11, the author moves the analogy to the present, in essence warning readers: Don't let the same thing happen to you. You can experience Christ (the real Canaan) if you operate in faith as need enters your life.

The same good news of a promised rest has been given to us. The Israelites' promise was Canaan; our promise is Jesus.

Just as the Israelites could enter Canaan, we can enter God's rest. In fact, those who have believed have entered the promised land, the place of rest: Jesus (Heb. 4:1-11).

God's own eternal sabbath, based on His finished work, was pictured by Canaan. Jesus is Canaan. Jesus is sabbath. Jesus is rest.

What Sabbath Means for Us

The purpose of the weekly Sabbath observance was to stop everything else and take delight in the Lord. The people of God were to have no other purpose or thought except to enjoy His presence and to give Him pleasure.

I want to challenge you to let your daily time with the Lord be a Sabbath pause, a time to celebrate the relationship you have with Him. The soul-sabbath that He has provided for you in Christ is His sign to you of how deep His love is for you. Let the daily Sabbath pause be your sign to Him of how much you love Him.

You should design your Sabbath pauses according to what is conducive to worship for you. Essentials are your Bible, a prayer journal and a writing utensil.

One of the benefits of a private Sabbath pause is that you can be completely uninhibited in your worship style. Perhaps you will find it refreshing to physically assume some of the following scriptural postures of worship:

- Kneel in His presence (Ps. 95:6).
- Lift up your hands (Ps. 134:2).
- Fall on your face before Him (Rev. 1:17).

Spend this time opening your life fully to the Father. Let these be moments of delighting in the Lord and celebrating His finished work.

Daily Enter His Rest

As you begin your daily sabbath observance, think through how your time will be structured. Each day may flow differently, but I would propose the following structure as a springboard:

Delight. Begin by focusing on the joyful, exuberant and passionate relationship you have with God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Sabbath is a sign between you of mutual delight (Is. 61:10; Zeph. 3:17). His delight in you will cause you to delight in Him.

Discover. "Learn from Me," Jesus said. As you refresh yourself in His presence, seeking Him and calling to Him, He will announce and explain to you things that were previously hidden from you (Jer. 33:3).

Distill. As you end your Sabbath pause, take the time to distill the essence of what God has spoken to you. You can count on the fact that God sends His living, active Word into your life and that He has given it an assignment that will be fulfilled in you (Is. 55:10-11).

Your goal is to live in a soul-sabbath. More than an absence of activity, entering into His rest (*menuha*) means to be a stable, established, composed, quiet, still, tranquil soul.

Sabbath means living our lives in absolute surrender and total trust in what Christ has already done. Not only is the salvation work finished in Him, but every need that comes into our lives has already been provided for; every dilemma has already been resolved; every question has already been answered.

We simply have to place our lives in the flow of His provision. Simply abide in Christ. Simply live where the power is operating.

Faith-born obedience puts us in the land where the soul has continual sabbath-rest. Hear Him say: "Come to Me. You will

find rest for your souls.”

Sabbath rest is the promised land where a continual, uninterrupted sabbath awaits you. This is your destiny; it belongs to you. The more you learn of Jesus, the easier it will be to rest in Him.

Read a companion devotional.

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