

Has Christ Given Christians “Rest” from the Seventh-Day Sabbath?

A critical examination of the meaning of Hebrews 4:9.

“There remaineth therefore a **rest** to the people of God” (Heb. 4:9, *King James Version*). As we will see, this is an incorrect translation, rooted in Orthodox bias against the holy Sabbath day of God.

Because of this erroneous translation—due largely to Protestant hostility against the seventh-day Sabbath and their preference for Sunday—this verse is almost universally misinterpreted and misunderstood. In fact, the true meaning of Hebrews 4:9 is the *very opposite* of the false interpretation assumed and taught by many churches, ministers and theologians.

Today, mainstream “Christianity” teaches that Christians are no longer required to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. They misconstrue Hebrews 4:9 to mean that Christ has given them “rest” (or, as some say, a “release”) from commandment-keeping. This false claim feeds the premise that Jesus has “fulfilled the law” *for* them. As a result, people are told, the Christian has entered into a “spiritual rest” from sin, and that Jesus Himself is their “spiritual Sabbath,” because Jesus kept the Sabbath in their stead.

Such absurd reasoning is completely contrary to the Word of God. Jesus Himself said that He did not come to abolish or “do away with” the laws and commandments of God (Matt. 5:17-18). Nor did He fulfill any commandment in order to release Christians from their obligation to keep God’s laws. Indeed, He set the perfect example for us to *free us* from committing sin, which is the transgression of the law (I Pet. 2:21-22; I John 3:4). Jesus did not come to keep the commandments *in our stead*. Years into his ministry, the apostle Paul said that he was still *zealous* for the laws of God (Acts 22:3)—which would certainly include the Sabbath commandment.

When we understand and absorb the full meaning of the Greek text of Hebrews 4:9, there is no question that the New Testament upholds the authority of the Fourth Commandment. The Greek word used here for “rest” is *sabbatismos*, which means “Sabbath rest, Sabbath observance” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

This definition is confirmed by other historical works: “The words ‘sabbath rest’ are from the [Greek] noun *sabbatismos*, [which is] a unique word in the NT. This term appears also in Plutarch (*Superset. 3 [Moralia 166a]*) for sabbath observance, and in four post-canonical Christian writings which are not dependent on Heb. 4:9” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, p. 856). This is historical evidence that *true* Christians continued observing the seventh-day Sabbath long after Emperor Constantine declared in 325 AD that Sunday was the “Christian” day of worship.

While *sabbatismos* is a noun, the verb form of the word is *sabbatizo*, which means, “to keep the Sabbath” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

This definition of *sabbatizo* is confirmed by its use in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from the third century BC. Jews used the Septuagint in synagogues throughout the Roman Empire; Greek-speaking Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity used this translation throughout the early New Testament period. This is why the apostle Paul quotes extensively from the Septuagint in his epistle to the Hebrews, which went to all the true churches of God—Jew and Gentile.

When Paul used *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9, he did so knowing that its meaning was **well known** to the Greek-speaking believers of that day. After all, its verb form (*sabbatizo*) is widely employed in the Septuagint—which, as a translation, was as familiar to the Greek-

speaking Jews and Gentiles of the early Church as the King James Bible is to Christians today.

For example, the use of the verb *sabbatizo* in Leviticus 23:32 in the Septuagint substantiates its meaning. *The Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint* defines *sabbatizo* as “to keep [a] sabbath, to rest” (Lust, Eynikel, Hauspie). The English translation of this verse in the Septuagint reads: “It [the Day of Atonement] shall be a holy sabbath [literally, a Sabbath of Sabbaths] to you; and ye shall humble your souls, from the ninth day of the month: from evening to evening **shall ye keep your sabbaths**” (*The Septuagint With the Apocrypha*, Brenton).

The phrase “shall ye keep your sabbaths” is translated from the Greek, *sabbatieite ta sabbata*—which literally means, “you shall **sabbathize** the Sabbaths.” The form of the Greek verb *sabbatizo* is the second person plural *sabbatieite*, which means, “you **all** shall keep”—meaning *everyone* is to keep the Sabbath. Throughout the entire Septuagint, the verb *sabbatizo* is never used except in relation to Sabbath-keeping. Understanding this definition, the *KJV* translators translated *sabbatieite* as “shall ye celebrate your sabbath.” However, they deliberately did not likewise translate *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9—because of their Sunday-keeping bias in following the lead of the Roman Catholic Church, as *Rome’s Challenge to the Protestants* so forcefully argues.

There is no question that the Greek verb *sabbatizo* in Leviticus 23:32 is specifically referring to Sabbath observance. This meaning equally applies to the noun form *sabbatismos* as used by Paul. Thus, the continuity of the Septuagint’s use of *sabbatizo* and the use of *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 confirms that Paul was upholding the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath for all true Christians.

The use of *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 directly contradicts any false teaching that the Fourth Commandment has been abolished. As the context of Hebrews four demonstrates, the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest and worship is as literally binding for the people of God today as it was since creation, or in the days of King David, or for Israel of old.

It becomes clear that Hebrews 4:9 does not mean that Christians have entered into some sort of “spiritual rest” which exempts them from their obligation to keep the Sabbath, or any other commandment of God. Rather, this verse must be taken as *instructive*—that Christians are indeed commanded to keep the Sabbath day. Consequently—in accordance with the original Greek—this verse should be translated: “**There remains, therefore, Sabbath-keeping for the people of God**”—Jew and Gentile alike.

The *true* meaning of Hebrews 4:9 is diametrically *opposite* the false misinterpretation of Orthodox Christendom. Paul is emphatically declaring that Sabbath-keeping—and this means the annual holy day Sabbaths as well—is *required* for true Christians. He is not “spiritualizing away” or eliminating the weekly Sabbath or the annual Sabbaths of God.