

The Rest That Remains for the People of God

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"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." Heb. 4:9. This text and its context require frequent explanation. We accordingly give the following, which, although brief, will, we think, be found a sufficient key to the entire chapter. That God made to Abraham a promise of an inheritance, is well known. We will quote only two texts. The first is Gen. 13:14-17: "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk

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through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee."

Again the Lord said to Abraham, after he had offered Isaac:—

"I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." Gen. 22:17.

Putting these two texts together, we learn that the inheritance promised to Abraham contemplated peaceable and quiet possession of the land; not simply of a few square miles, but of the whole world. Rom. 4:13. Now it was in pursuance of this promise, that the Lord delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. See Ex. 6:1-8.

Passing by the wanderings in the wilderness, we come to the address which Moses made to the children of Israel just before his death. Speaking to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, who were allowed to settle on the east side of Jordan, he said: "The Lord your God hath *given you this land to possess it*; ye shall pass over armed before your brethren the children of Israel, . . . *until the Lord have given rest unto your brethren, as well as unto you*, and until they also possess the land which the Lord your God hath given them beyond Jordan; and then shall ye return every man unto his possession, which I have given you." Deut. 3:18-20.

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From this we learn that the giving of them rest was nothing more nor less than the establishing of them in their possession. The same thing is also shown by the following words:—

"For 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, so that ye dwell in safety; then there shall be a place," etc. Deut. 12:8-11.

In further confirmation of the idea that the promised rest comprehended quiet possession of the land, we read 2 Sam. 7:1, which says that "when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies," then he thought to build a house for the Lord. In refusing to allow him to do this work, the Lord made great promises to David, and said:—

"Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime." 2 Sam. 7:10.

It is evident, then, that the "rest" promised to the Israelites was the inheritance. Into this rest Joshua led them, as it is written: "And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto

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their fathers; and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand." Josh. 21:44. Yet in the face of this declaration, the apostle declares (Heb. 4:8, margin) that Joshua did not give them rest, and that the Lord afterward spoke of "another day," in which they might secure rest. We have just read from 2 Sam. 7:10 the promise of that rest. If Joshua had given them that rest, then another day could not have been spoken of.

Although God did give to the Israelites the land of Canaan, Abraham had no part in it (see Acts 7:5), neither did Isaac and Jacob, to whom the promise was made as well as to Abraham; and the apostle, after mentioning these patriarchs, and many other worthies, says, "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Heb. 11:39, 40. This shows that the possession of the land of Canaan by the Israelites did not fill all the specifications of the promise. This is still more evident from the fact that they were at peace when the Lord renewed the promise in 2 Sam. 7:10.

But how shall we explain the statement in Josh. 21:43-45, that God gave to the Israelites that which he promised?—Simply on the ground that the partial

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inheritance which they had, might have been made complete, if they had obeyed and trusted God. That they did not have the complete rest and inheritance that was promised to Abraham, is evident from the fact that the promise to him included nothing less than the possession of the whole world. Rom. 4:13. Now from Jer. 17:19-27, we know that God designed that the Israelites should be forever established in the land of Canaan, whose capital, Jerusalem, was to be the capital of the whole world, even as the New Jerusalem will be the capital of the earth made new. But although they were given possession of the capital of their inheritance, they entered not into the full possession thereof, because of unbelief; so that it was the same as though they had never had any of it.

But the "Lord is not slack concerning his promise," and so "there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." This rest is the same as that promised to Abraham, namely, the whole earth; for, after evil-doers have all been cut off, "the

meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." Ps. 37:11. The fact that some could not enter into rest because of unbelief, does not invalidate the promise that those who will now believe shall enter into it, for the rest was prepared and completed from the foundation of the world; and God will not allow his original plan to be

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frustrated. With the knowledge that the earth is the rest that was promised to Abraham and to his seed, and which remains for us who believe, it is very easy to understand Heb. 4:3, 4, and the relation which the facts there stated bear to that rest. Thus:—

The apostle says, "And God did rest on the seventh day from all his works." This is positive proof of the statement made just before, namely, that "the works were finished from the foundation of the world." Gen. 2:3 says that God "rested on the seventh day from all his works which he had made," and that his blessing pronounced upon the seventh day was "because that in it he had rested from all his works which God created and made." He made the earth "to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18), and gave it to men for a peaceful abode; and the fact that he rested on the seventh day was a proof that the works were finished and the rest prepared. The Sabbath, therefore—the memorial of God's rest—a day in which to be glad through the work of God, and to triumph in the works of his hands, as we meditate upon their greatness (Ps. 92:4, 5), is an assurance that God has prepared a rest for his people, and that they will share it just as surely as he is the great Creator who changes not. The *rest* that remains is, therefore, the coming inheritance and kingdom of the saints. The "another day" of Joshua is the day of final reward.

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When Christ shall descend in glory, sitting upon the throne of his glory, having received the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, that he may rid it of all that corrupt it, he will say to the righteous who have kept the faith, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34); and when they with him shall have executed upon the wicked the judgment that is written (See Jude 14, 15; Ps. 149:5-9), then will be fulfilled the promise given through the holy prophet: "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." Isa. 32:17, 18. Then shall the people of God enjoy the rest which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

