

• *Persisting in faith – or not have serious consequences*

If the Christian neglects to persist in faith, he loses a lot! He fails to enter rest. He faces God's chastening in an intensified manner. He loses much at the final judgement seat of Christ. He stays in a wilderness. He is still 'sanctified for ever' but the joys and blessings of being God's house are missed. God gives us various promises and threats, and waits to see what we shall do with them. If we do hear God's voice, and if we persist in faith, we shall get to the point where he takes an oath of blessing. God will say to us, 'Now I know that you fear me. I will indeed bless you' ^{¶1}. And we enter into the highest possible blessing that there is in this world, the joy of being used by God in a way that cannot be reversed or undone.

^{¶1} see Genesis 22:12, 16, 17

Hebrews 3:11 quotes Psalm 95.

*As I swore in my wrath,
they shall certainly never enter my rest.*

Three ways of getting to see what it means to 'enter into God's rest'

There are three ways of getting to see what it means to 'enter into God's rest'. (1) One is to consider the illustration that the writer himself gave us in the story of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. (2) Another approach is to consider the equivalent terms that are used. The letter to the Hebrews has different ways of putting this matter. It is the theme of the whole letter. He uses the phrase 'entering into rest' in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 but he has other phrases, such as 'inheriting the promises', which seem to refer to the same thing. (3) A third way of coming at it is to consider the significance of God's sabbath in Genesis 2:1–3. The writer says we enter into God's rest. We enter into the same blessing that God entered into, after creation. This too will help us.

• *The reward that comes to the Christian in this life as a result of his diligent faith*

Entering into rest – I believe – is the reward that comes to the Christian in this life as a result of his diligent faith. It is the joy of inheriting promises. It is experiencing the oath of God, not the oath of wrath but the oath of mercy. It is when after years, maybe, of persistent faith, we come to have an assurance that we have obtained that which we have been looking for and which God has promised us. It is what happened to Abraham when, after years of diligent faith and testing, God said to him, 'Now I see...'. At that point on God's side an oath was taken. At that point on Abraham's side, he entered into rest. At that point the promise was 'obtained'. Before that point it could have been aborted. 'Entering into rest' is what happened to David when after years of trials and tribulations he finally came to the point where God took an oath, and without the possibility of any reversal said to David, 'Your seed will continue forever. I swear it!' (if I may summarize 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89 in this way). On God's side an oath was taken. On David's side after many struggles against many enemies, 'The Lord had given him rest on every side' ^{¶1} but also gave him rest within by giving an unshakable oath that his seed would last for ever.

^{¶1} 2 Samuel 7:1

• *The oath of mercy*

The Israelites were saved by the blood of the lamb. What saved them was the substitutionary death of the passover lamb. On God's

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• *They had to persevere in faith*

• *When the Israelites had persisted in faith, and overcome all obstacles, they would reap the blessing of what they had been believingly looking for, for many years.*

• *If we hear God's voice, there is immense blessing laid up for us*

side they were saved by blood-atonement. On their side they were saved through faith. But their being redeemed by the blood of the lamb did not bring them immediately to what they were saved for. They were saved in order to get to a land flowing with milk and honey. They had to persevere in faith. They had to trust God to get them across the Red Sea and to deliver them from the pursuing armies of Pharaoh. They had to trust God to get them through the wilderness where there was little water and no food. They had to trust God to give them victory over tribes they would meet along the way who would resist their entering into the land of promise. Then before they got to the land, there was the river Jordan. They would have to trust God to enable them to cross Jordan. Then after they had crossed that river there were giants in the land of Israel. They would have to conquer fortified cities like Jericho. They had to continue to believe that God who was promising to give them victory at every step of the way, would actually keep his promises. They had to trust that God would bring them into all that he was saying he would give them. 'My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest', was the promise of God ¹. When they had achieved this great purpose of God for their lives they would be given rest, they would inherit the land ². 'Inheriting the land' and 'entering rest' are the same thing. When the Israelites had persisted in faith, and overcome all obstacles, they would 'enter into rest'. They would enjoy the land flowing with milk and honey. They would reap the blessing of what they had been believingly looking for, for many years.

Such a blessing could be lost, and the first generation of Israelites did in fact lose it. They did not lose their redemption but they lost what they were redeemed for. The writer has quoted Scripture (3:7–11, citing Psalm 95). Now he presses upon them some of its implications. He invites them to watchfulness, and sensitivity in hearing God's voice. If we hear God's voice, there is immense blessing laid up for us.

¹ Exodus 33:14

² Deuteronomy 3:20



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