

ΚΑΤΑΠΑΥΣΙΣ AND ΣΑΒΒΑΤΙΣΜΟΣ IN HEBREWS 4

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Problem

Enthusiasm for the subject has not resulted in a general consensus regarding the meaning of “rest” in Hebrews 4. The dissertation studies the meaning of *katapausis* and *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4, together with its relation to the neglected gatherings in Hebrews 10.

Method

The study consists of an analysis of those passages in which the rest motif is found explicitly (Hebrews 3–4), as well as the unit (Hebrews 10) which exhibits cohesion to the rest motif in Hebrews 4, giving special attention to the use of the term *katapausis* in the Septuagint, *sabbatismos* in Christian and non-Christian literature, and *episynagōgē* in the patristic literature. The dissertation is both exegetical and theological in nature.

Results

Chapter 1 deals with the introduction of the topic, stating the problem of no consensus with regard to the meaning of “rest” in Hebrews 3-4, and then describing the purpose and justification of the research.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the examination of the audience of Hebrews. Pursuing the profile of the audience within the book itself, the evidence seems to support a mixed ethnic background. The author calls the ancestors “fathers” rather than “our fathers” (1:1). The epistle never mentions Jews or Christians, the Temple, or circumcision, never makes negative references to Jews or Gentiles, and refrains from divisive references to Jews or Gentiles. The group to which the audience is supposed to belong is the “people of God” (4:9).

Chapter 3 analyzes the structural relationship between Hebrews 4 and 10. Hebrews 4:11-16 and 10:19-25 display the most striking use of *inclusion* in Hebrews. Semantic threads in one discourse are woven with the same or related lexical items in the other, indicating a relationship between these passages. Besides formal and semantic correspondence, these two passages also present syntactical cohesion. Both furnish three hortatory subjunctives in close proximity. Finally, both units share the same genre. That means the units exhibit cohesion of form and function, and also a continuity of topic and content. The exhortation of a Sabbath observance in Hebrews 4 is shown to be complementary to the neglecting of the gathering in Hebrews 10.

Chapter 4 presents findings with regard to the term *katapausis* in the Septuagint, which it refers to as (1) the Promised Land (Deut 12:9), (2) the temple as the habitation desired by God (Ps 132:14), and (3) the Sabbath rest

(Exod 35:2; 2 Macc 15:1). In Hebrews 3, a midrash on Psalm 94, the rest the Exodus generation failed to enter was the Promised Land. The formal parallelism between the *katapausis* of Heb 4:6 and the *sabbatismos* of 4:9 suggests that *sabbatismos* is meant to define more precisely the character of the rest. Etymologically *sabbatismos* derives from *sabbatizein* in much the same way that *baptismos* derives from *baptizein*. *Sabbatismos* in non-Christian as well as Christian literature is always used literally, meaning Sabbath observance, although sometimes pejoratively, with the exception of Origen, who uses the term twice figuratively. Hebrews 4:10 describes how the *sabbatismos* will become possible. The one entering it rested (aorist) from his works just as God rested from his on the first Sabbath in the primeval history of the world. The comparative conjunction defines clearly who is to be imitated when one enters the rest.

Chapter 5 analyzes Heb 10:19-25. The verb “forsake” (v. 25) implies negative connotations with dire results. Therefore, the gathering must be more than just a social gathering. Verse 26 speaks about willful sinning if one neglects the gathering. The willful sin is defined in Num 15:30-36 and exemplified by the person who willfully desecrated the Sabbath (no sacrifice available, two or three witnesses, nullifying the Law of Moses, and death without compassion). In view of these reasons, the gathering in Heb 10:25 seems most likely to be a Sabbath gathering. Assuming Numbers 15 as an intertext helps to foreground the coherent flow of Heb 10:19-25.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings.

Conclusion

The audience of Hebrews does not relapse back into Judaism, but faces a waning commitment to the community’s confessed faith. Since Heb 4:11-16 and Heb 10:19-25 share similar vocabulary, syntax, and genre, one can assume that they share also a similar theme. The Sabbath observance remains for the people of God (4:9) and an invitation is extended to “rest” the way God rested from all his works on the seventh-day Sabbath after the six-day creation. Hebrews 10:25-26 seems to talk about an intentional neglect of the church gathering that is best explained by a Sabbath gathering, since the background to the willful sin is a rebellious neglect of the Sabbath. Such continuing, willful, intentional neglect equates with trampling underfoot the Son of God (10:29). This is the reason why the author strikes such a serious tone in his elaboration of the matter.