

God's rest has still not ended. It was demonstrated that they have ignored the context of the passage, which issues a solemn warning and promises a future blessing. It was further demonstrated that those who believe in the seventh day as a long time period do not adequately understand the reference to Genesis 2:2 or the ("sabbath rest." The rest referred to in Hebrews 4:1-11 speaks about a time that will be similar to the first "sabbath rest," in that there will be no sin or death in the creation. If one desires to make the days of creation more than a solar day, then one must do so from the context of Genesis 1, not Hebrews 4:1-11. The days of creation were six literal days, with God resting on the seventh. Although the seventh day does not have the concluding formula, it is related to the other days from the context. The seventh day was a solar day, just like the other six days.

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...If you call out for **Insight...**

You will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
Based on Proverbs 2:3-5

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How Long was the Seventh Day?

by James Stambaugh, M.DIV.*

An important topic of debate for many years has been the length of the days in Genesis 1. Some who hold to the standard uniformitarian chronology insist that the days lasted perhaps billions of years, and point to Hebrews 4:1-11 in an attempt to demonstrate that the seventh day is still in progress. Their point is apparent; if the seventh day is a long period of time, then so are the other days, and the supposed multi-billion-year history of the earth and universe is intact.

The issue regarding the length of the seventh day will be examined in two ways: First, the context must be studied. There is an old adage that "A text without a context is a pretext." Second, one must understand what is meant by "rest" in this section, and the purpose of the reference to the sabbath. Once these have been examined, the length of the seventh day will be clear.

The Context Of Hebrews 4:1-11

Our text, Hebrews 4:1-11, is in the middle of a warning passage (3:7-4:13). There are five such passages in the entire book.¹ The warning passages generally are "concerned with the danger of apostasy. There were some in the readership who had made a profession of faith in Christ but were seriously considering returning to Judaism."² Each warning is concerned with a particular issue.

The issue in this passage is the superiority of Christ to Moses. "The writer pauses to warn against a similar lapse of faith from Christ, as was demonstrated in the days of Moses. The implication is that since Christ is superior, such a lapse would be all the more reprehensible."³ Disobedience and unbelief caused the failure of Moses' generation to enter God's promised rest. Verses 1 and 11 build perseverance in the readers, and warn them not to return to Judaism.

The point of this warning is to stay faithful to Christ. What we do with Christ now determines whether or not we will enter a future rest. "The picture that begins to emerge is one where this future rest is entered into by faith in the historic present."⁴ The Sabbath rest of this passage is not present, but future.

"Rest" In Hebrews 4:1-11

The concept of "rest" in Scripture is multifaceted, yet it is important to the

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understanding of this passage. This can be seen in the definitions and kinds of "rest." There are three words used for "rest"; two are from the same Greek root, a noun and a verb translated "rest," and the word is "sabbath rest," used only here (v.9) in the New Testament. The verb form of the former gives the idea of stopping from work; while the noun form may be used figuratively as a place or situation of rest.⁵ The concept of "sabbath-rest" will be considered in more depth below. The kinds of rest are theological interpretations based on the various definitions of "rest." There appears to be at least four kinds used in the whole warning (3:7-4:13): Creation rest (4:4); Canaan rest (3:7-19); Salvation rest (4:1, 3a, 8), and Eternal rest (4:10,11) including the "Sabbath rest" (v. 9).⁶ The "rest" can also be viewed typically (the land of Canaan), present (our salvation), and future (the eternal state), with creation rest used as a past analogy. This illustrates the multifaceted use of "rest" in this warning passage.

The Old Testament concept of "rest" appears to serve as a basis for "rest" in this passage. The Old Testament view is itself multifaceted, where "rest" is used in five ways: "1) literal, physical rest (Genesis 8:4); 2) rest in death (Job 3:13); 3) psychological-spiritual rest (Proverbs 29:17); 4) physical rest in the land based on God's promise to defeat Israel's enemies (Deuteronomy 12:10; Joshua 21:44), and 5) the theology of the sabbath (Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:11)." "God intended that man share in the creation (sabbath) rest, but that Adam's fall occurred and the sabbath rest was forfeited. The way back to this rest is provided in the coming kingdom."⁷ God's rest is related to the sinless perfection of the first sabbath, which was lost when Adam rebelled. This problem is corrected in the future "rest" that is promised.

Psalms 95:7-11 is quoted in this warning passage and draws our attention to a specific time of "rest." This psalm occurs in a group of Enthronement Psalms (93-100), and it has been suggested that Psalms 95 and 96 should be viewed together.⁸ The distinctive nature of these psalms is that they celebrate the reign of God. Kaiser observes: "But our Psalm (95:7-11) warns [against unbelief], before it breaks into the triumphant strains of Psalm 96 with its announcement in song of the final, universal reign of the Lord."⁹ Yet the basic tone of these psalms is that they look to the future.¹⁰ So when Psalm 95 is used in Hebrews 4, it is pointing to the future reign of God. Now that we have briefly examined the background and general use of "rest" in Hebrews 4:1-11, let us examine why "rest" is used in connection with the sabbath. The problem as it relates to the length of the Genesis days and the age of the earth is well stated by Newman: "The fourth chapter of Hebrews tells us that the believers can still enter into the rest of God mentioned in Genesis 2:2. This may be understood figuratively to mean that we, too, can someday rest just as God did long ago. But a more literal interpretation could suggest either that God is still resting (day-age view) and that we are living now in the seventh day, or that God has not yet begun to rest, as the seventh day is still in the future."¹¹ Archer believes that the seventh day is still continuing: "Scripture does not at all teach that Yahweh rested only one twenty-four-hour day at the conclusion of His creative work. No closing formula occurs at the close of the seventh day, referred to in Genesis 2:2. And, in fact, the New Testament teaches (Hebrews 4:1-11) that that seventh day, that 'Sabbath rest,' in a very definite sense has continued on right into the church age."¹² Dr. Kent holds the view that the seventh day is future (he also believes in a six-literal-day creation), but also observes: "This does

not imply that the seventh day was not a literal day with an evening and a morning, just as the previous six days of creation. However, the author has used the silence of Scripture on this point to illustrate his argument that God's sabbath rest has never ended."¹³ The author of Hebrews refers back to the creation in Hebrews 4:9, telling us that there is still this type of rest available. The author is exhorting his readers to diligent obedience, with the hope of future rest. Hughes says: "The expression 'sabbath rest' links the concept of the promised rest still more closely with the account of creation, in which the seventh or sabbath day was the day on which God rested from his labors."¹⁴ The author wants us to notice that the future "rest" will be like the past "rest" when God finished His creation.

The Nature Of Our Rest

It has been demonstrated that the "rest" in this passage is future, and is similar to the first sabbath "rest." What remains to be discussed is the future nature of that "rest." There are two views on the timing of this "rest": The first is that the "rest" is the millennial rest. This view is held by some premillennialists. The second view believes that the "rest" is the eternal state. Most amillennialists and some premillennialists hold this view.

Of the first view, which presents the "rest" as a millennial "rest," Oberholtzer says: "The sabbath rest interrupted by the fall of Adam will be restored in the coming age. The millennium will be an extension of the original sabbath."¹⁵ This view does handle most of the evidence well. It observes that the context of the passage is a warning, and promises future reward. It accepts the fact that the Psalm 95 quote is ultimately pointing to the future, and that the one who is to reign is Jesus Christ Himself. It also believes that the fall of Adam will be undone in this time of "rest." It states that men and animals will dwell in complete harmony, and that the earth will be able to produce abundant food supply for mankind. This "rest," according to this view, will truly be a paradise on earth. However, there is a major problem as it handles the remedy to the fall of Adam. While much of the results of the fall are overcome during the millennium, the two exceptions to this are sin and death. These will remain, because God wants all to see the incorrigible nature of man. Sin and death are not abolished until after the millennium (Revelation 21:4, 8). In assigning the future "rest" to the millennium, this view fails to take into account the absence of sin and death in the original sabbath "rest" to which this passage refers.

The second view of the nature of "rest" is that it refers to the eternal state. This view accepts the context as future "rest," and likewise accepts the idea that Psalm 95 is picturing a future reign of God and His Son. This view also believes that the fall of Adam will be totally undone, and that there will be no sin and death in the ultimate "sabbath rest." This view handles more consistently the data of the passage, for the "rest" from creation and the future "rest" are analogous. Our ultimate "rest" is still future.

Summary And Conclusion

This article asked: "How long was the seventh day?" There are some who believe that the seventh day of Genesis 2:2 has lasted at least several thousand years. They base this on the quote in Hebrews 4:4, which seems on the surface to show that