

A LOOK AT THE NEW TESTAMENT

// Read Hebrews 4:1-13

The book of Hebrews draws heavily on the imagery and understanding of the Old Testament which would have been very familiar to the first century Jews to whom the book is addressed. In this passage the author is contrasting unbelief with what he describes as “God’s rest”. It will be helpful to look at Hebrews 3:7-19 where the author deals with two pictures of unbelief firstly quoting from Ps 95: 7-11 and then in v16-19 (a summary of Numbers 13 &14), telling the story of the people of God in rebellion.

In this passage three types of rest are mentioned: in v4 God’s rest after creation; v8 the expected rest in the promised land (3:16-19 may help with this verse) and; v9 “a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.” What do these pictures say to us about relationship with God?

What implications does v 4 have when we consider the fourth commandment “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (see Ex 20 8-10). Does this commandment help us in our use of Sunday and our understanding of God’s rest?

The response of the people in the time of Moses and Joshua is equated in this passage to unbelief and disobedience (see 3:19, 4:1 and 4:11) What does this tell us about why we may not sense “God’s rest” in our lives at times or on an ongoing basis?

In v1 we read that despite God’s people rebelling “his rest still stands”. What does this tell us about the character of God?

In v6 and v11-13 we are told what God’s antidote to disobedience is. In what ways do these verses help us make practical efforts to enter God’s rest for us?

Discuss how the fourth commandment (Ex 20: 8-10) can also help us “enter God’s rest “.

study notes
week five

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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WAY IN

Reflection: Some people talk about a 'work-rest balance'. Whether or not you like this phrase, take a few moments to consider whether you are putting the right amount of time and energy into working and resting at the moment.

In some communities today there is still a strong commitment to the Sabbath day of rest: there should be no work, no sport, no laundry... and no fun! How would you feel if you moved into one of these communities? What would you find difficult? What might be beneficial?

A LOOK AT EXODUS

// Read Exodus 20:8-11

Look carefully at the wording of this commandment and see whether you can work out why each detail is included. (Why would they need to remember? What is the Sabbath for? Who is the Sabbath for? What happens to us when we observe the Sabbath? Is the Sabbath good news?)

// Read Luke 6:6-11

When we turn to the New Testament it is important to note that there is no mention of us needing to keep the Sabbath in the way it was understood in the Old Testament. The religious leaders at that time had added many detailed restrictions to the 4th Commandment. Jesus often healed on the Sabbath which raised the question: 'what does it mean to keep the Sabbath today?'

What do you think would mark out a good and God-centred day of rest today? How might the example of the early church shape our thinking: Acts 20:6; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Hebrews 10:24-25.

It is sad that sometimes Christians can be defined more easily by what they stand against rather than what they stand for. How could our attitude to the Sabbath show what things we are 'for'?

// Read Matthew 12:1-13

Jesus' disciples were picking and eating corn as they followed Jesus through a field. Do you think that this is 'breaking the Sabbath?'

In what way does Jesus defend his disciples?

Jesus gives two Old Testament examples of people breaking the sabbath, and yet being innocent. David and his men ate food from the temple, and the priests worked in the temple on the sabbath (cf. Numbers 28:9-10). In other words, even the Old Testament permits some acts on the sabbath as being lawful. Notice that both actions are related to the temple. What significance do verses 6-7 then have?

In what ways could you, and your family, take time each week to both receive from and serve Jesus? What changes will you need to make to rest more as part of your weekly pattern?

QUOTE TO REFLECT ON

"That Christians are stewards of the gifts and money that God gives them is a familiar truth nowadays; that we are stewards of the time we are given is less stressed, but just as true...it is for us to make every minute count for God. How? Not by a frenzied rushing to pack a quart of activity into a pint pot of time (a common present-day error), but by an ordered lifestyle in which, within the set rhythm of toil and rest, work and worship, due time is allotted to sleep, family, wage-earning, homemaking, prayer, recreation, and so on, so that we master time instead of being mastered by it." (J.I. Packer)

How are you getting on with 'mastering the time' that God has given to you?