

Rosh Hashanah

09/12/06

Introduction

Read Lev 23:23-25; Num 29:1-6.

Rosh Hashanah is something of a paradox in the OT.

- On the one hand, it is unquestionably instituted in the law: Lev 23:24-25; Num 29:1-6.
- On the other hand, it is never mentioned unambiguously in the Bible.
 - *Neh 8:2 (which we studied last year) may reflect it, but the people were so ignorant of the law that they did not know that they should keep the feast of booths, so it's not clear that they assembled there in obedience to the law of the feast of trumpets.*
 - *Psa 81 and Psa 47 have been attributed to it on the basis of Jewish synagogue practice, but without strong internal evidence.*

So in studying this feast, we need to focus on the terms in the description itself. The descriptions in Lev and Num include several terms. Three of these are common to all or most of the festivals:

- “holy convocation,” indicating the need for the people to gather together, is common to all the holy days.
- So is “no servile work,” indicating that they are to lay aside their usual activities,
- and so is the mention of “an offering made by fire.”

But two are more specific:

- Asabbath rest *\$abbaton* ; used in Lev of this feast and also Atonement and Tabernacles, not in Numbers.
- The most distinctive term is the one translated in our version by “trumpets.” It is used in both Lev and Num, and does not appear in any other feast.

Let's focus our attention on the term *\$abbaton* this year, and next year, D.V., we'll consider the word translated “Trumpets.”

A Sabbath Rest

All of the feasts were to be marked by abstention from “servile work.” Gill describes “servile work” as “agriculture, or any manufacture or mechanical business, which they and their servants were at other times employed in.” But he goes on to note that “they might bake bread, and boil or roast their meat, and walk abroad, which they might not do on their sabbaths.” But three of the feasts have the further restraint that on them one is to observe a *\$abbaton*, a sabbath rest, subject to full Sabbath restrictions: Rosh Hashanah (v.24), Atonement (v.32; cf. 16:31), and Tabernacles (v.39). The only other places that the word is used describe either the Sabbath day (Ex 16:23; 31:15; 35:2) or the sabbatical year (Lev 25:4,5).

What all of these things have in common—the three feasts, the day, and the year, is that they are the seventh in a series of time periods: the seventh day, the seventh month, and the seventh year.

So important was the Sabbath Day to Israel that it is echoed on a monthly and yearly basis. In fact, though the word is not used, every seven sabbath years comes the Jubilee, a kind of super-sabbath.

The Sabbath has a twofold significance—to OT Israel, and to us today.

To Israel

Each of God's great covenants has associated with it some sign or symbol (Heb *wt*, Gk *shmeion*).

To **Noah**, God gave the sign of the bow in the cloud (Gen 9:12-13), “And God said, ... ¹³ I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.”

To **Abraham**, he gave circumcision (Gen 17:11), “Ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.”

To us in the **New covenant**, he gives the Holy Spirit, Eph 1:13,14, “ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (see Rom 15:19 for the connection of the HS with the signs that accompanied the new covenant).

In the same way, the covenant of **Sinai** had its distinctive sign: the Sabbath day (Ex 31:13), “Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that *ye* may know that I *am* the LORD that doth sanctify you.”

So the first significance of this obsession with the seventh of any series of time periods is to remind Israel that they are a covenant people.

We do not keep the sabbath, because we are not under the covenant of Sinai. Paul makes very clear in Galatians that this covenant was temporary; it could not overrule the principle of grace in the covenant with Abraham. Now, according to the promise to Jeremiah, it has been replaced with a new covenant.

Yet there is still a principle here for us: we are to remember our covenant, the New Covenant. Our seal is the Holy Spirit, and thus we have numerous exhortations in the NT not to despise that special gift:

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Quench not the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Acts 7:51, Stephen rebukes the Sanhedrin for resisting the Holy Ghost

Acts 5:3, Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Spirit, and in v.9, tempted the Spirit.

Heb 10:29 describes willful sin as despising the Spirit

In fact, this lies at the heart of the gospel injunction against blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31,32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10). This is the New Covenant parallel to the OT warning in Exod 31:14,

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it *is* holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth *any* work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

If you want to be a member of the covenant people, the one thing you cannot do is despise and discard the sign of the covenant.

To Us

Though the Sabbath is a sign of Israel's covenant and not ours, yet the NT uses it as an image of an important truth. The key passage is Heb 4:9, "There remaineth therefore a rest unto the people of God." The word "rest" in Greek is *sabbatismos*, a word invented by the writer to Hebrews, but clearly derived from Greek *sabbaton*, the translation for Heb *Sabbat*. This passage teaches us that God has something for us that corresponds to the Jewish Sabbath.

Overview of the Argument

Heb 3:7-11 is a quotation from Psa 95:7-11. The basic argument of this portion of the Psalm is that because of Israel's hardness of heart in the wilderness, they could not enter into God's rest in Canaan. The focus is on those who were discouraged by the spies in Num 14, cf. vv. 23, 28-30, "surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers."

Heb 3:12-19 expounds their hardness of heart, and equates it with lack of belief.

Then Heb 4:1-11 expounds the promise of entering into God's rest.

Detailed Analysis of 4:1-11

As the table shows, the patterns of repetition in the text divide it naturally into three topics, with the pattern of repetition A-BC-CBC-A

A. 1, 11, Exhortation

These verses form an inclusio, setting off the section. Both verses have the form, "Let us do x, lest we should miss out on y." Israel of old lost out on their rest because of unbelief. We must be careful to avoid that error. *He urges two things upon us.*

Fear.--*As long as we are in the flesh, we should not despise the fear of God. There are consequences for sin, and we should not take them lightly.*

Labor.--*The word has the sense of diligent endeavor. Let us set our affection on this objective, make it our goal, and pursue it. The AV's "labor to enter into rest" sounds paradoxical, but recalls our Lord's oft-repeated exhortation to lose our life if we would save it. True rest can be attained only by diligent exertion.*

B1. 2-3, Opportunity

vv. 2-3a states that the good news that was presented to Israel of old is available to us now.

unto us ... as well as unto them.--We and they both are in receipt of a "gospel," good news.

Did not profit them.--The rest of v.2 reminds us of their response, already discussed in the end of ch. 3: they did not believe, and so they did not realize the promise.

C1. 3, *Explanation*

We which have believed.--The beginning of v. 3 sets us in contrast to them. If unbelief shuts people out from the promise of rest, belief opens the door to that rest.

If they shall.--This phrase is a literal translation of the Greek, which copies the LXX's literal translation of the Hebrew. The Hebrew idiom is more naturally translated, "They shall not." (this is in fact how the AV translators translated the Hebrew itself in Psa 95:11.) the idiom is based on the oath form: "If I do xyz, may something bad happen to me," meaning, "I absolutely will not do xyz."

(They shall not) enter into my rest.--The Psalmist has in mind the judgment of God on the generation in Num 14 who refused to enter the land when they heard the report of the spies.

Compare the wording in Num 14 with the Psalm:

<i>Num 14:22-23</i>	<i>Psa 95:9-11</i>
<i>22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness,</i>	<i>9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work.</i>
<i>and have tempted me now these ten times,</i>	<i>10 Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart,</i>
<i>and have not hearkened to my voice;</i>	<i>and they have not known my ways:</i>
<i>23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:</i>	<i>11 Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.</i>

"Rest" has a special meaning in connection with the exodus and conquest stories. God repeatedly offered Israel "rest": Ex 33:14; Deut 3:20; 25:19; esp. 12:9,10. Three elements are in view:

1. Israel (not some other nation or people)
2. would inhabit the land of Israel (not some other land)
3. in a state of peace with her neighbors.

So excluding people from the land is a withdrawal of the offer of rest promised in Deut 12:9,10.

although the works were finished.--Now the writer prepares to connect Psa 95:11 with another OT passage. God did not promise in the Psalm, "they shall not enter into rest," but "they shall not enter into *my* rest." But God's rest implies God's work, and his work was finished in Genesis 1.

C2. 4-5, *Explanation*

Now the author develops this parallel in more detail.

4-5, God did rest ... my rest.--There is more than a thematic link between Psa 95:11 and the Genesis creation story. In the LXX, "my rest" in the Psalm is the noun *katapausis*, while "rest" in Gen 2:2 is the cognate verb *katapauw*. Based on this similarity, the writer concludes that the "rest" that the people of Israel rejected in the Psalm is the rest that God enjoys after finishing his work.

(Interestingly, the words are not at all related in the Hebrew; the writer's argument rests entirely on a correspondence in the LXX. This is an example of the legitimacy of expounding from a translation.)

B2. 6-9, Opportunity

vv. 6-9 make the same point as 2, that the offer of the rest is still open. The basic argument has three points:

6 It remaineth that some must enter in.--The first point is that if God intended people to enter into his rest, that offer stands until someone takes advantage of it. God does not provide blessings only to have them unrealized.

They to whom it was first preached entered not in.--The second point is that no one took advantage of it in the days of the Exodus.

At this point, some may object, "But even though the first generation didn't enter the land, the next generation did." But this isn't really accurate.

- From time to time, Israel was said to have rest, under Joshua (21:44; 22:4; 23:1), Solomon (1 Kings 5:4; 8:56), David (2 Sam 7:1), Asa (2 Chr 14:6,7; 15:15), and Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:30). *These four kings account for only 143 years out of Israel's 457 year monarchy, about 1/3. Joshua died at 110 (24:29) and was over 40 when he entered the land, so he gave them no more than 70 years of rest, less for the conquest. Israel's total history from Conquest (1400) to Babylon (600) is 800 years, of which only about 200 could be described as "rest." Clearly, the "rest" that some enjoyed was intermittent and temporary. (Josh 14:15 and the references in Judges use a different word that refers to "quiet," not rest. The land that is quiet, but the people are not resting.)*
- Isa 11:10 shows that the ultimate "rest" will come during the earthly reign of Messiah.

7 David ... after so long a time.--The third point is that David considers this offer to be open still in his day, a "today" 400 years after the exodus.

8 If Jesus had given them rest.--The original promise of the rest was to the Israelites under Joshua ("Jesus" in the LXX). If they had exhausted it, David would never have been able to offer it to his generation. The fact that it was still available then means that it is an ongoing opportunity for God's people. This leads to his great conclusion:

9 There remaineth therefore a (sabbath) rest to the people of God.--For the first time he describes this rest as a Sabbath. But of course, that's just what it is in view in Gen 2.

C3. Explanation

A third time the author draws on the parallel between Psa 95:11 and Gen 2:2. In C2, he focused on God's ceasing from his work. Now he points out that the time will come when we will be able to cease from our labor, and enjoy the rest that God has enjoyed since finishing his work.

Summary

So what is this sabbath rest that we enjoy? It is our reward for a life well lived in serving the Lord Jesus.

- It is his “well done, thou good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt 25:21, 23).
- It is the fulfillment of his promise, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne,” Rev 3:21.
- It is Paul's promise in 2 Tim 2:12, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*.”
- It is the promise of Rev 21:4, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Like Israel of old, we are to labor “six days ... and do all thy work,” looking forward to “the seventh day ... the Sabbath of the Lord thy God,” the “Sabbath rest” that “remaineth ... unto the people of God.” In this confidence, let us “labor to enter into that rest.”

Hymn: Go, Labor On