

ASPECTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT SABBATH: PSALM 95 AS EXEGETED IN HEBREWS 3 AND 4

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Hebrews 3 and 4 present us with a somewhat rare phenomenon in the New Testament. A passage from the Old Testament is not only quoted and applied to a particular situation, it is exegeted. I mean to say that it is discussed, set in its historical context, related to other portions of Scripture, and applied to the hearers. We may justifiably speak here of internal exegesis. It is the purpose of this paper to briefly analyse the argumentation of the writer to the Hebrews with respect to Psalm 95 and also to pay attention to the implications of his argumentation for our understanding of the nature of the situation in paradise and the impact of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin.

A Summary of the Argumentation

In Ps. 95:7c-11 a warning is given to the hearers not to harden their hearts as did the generation which died in the wilderness. The warning is made particularly potent by reminding the hearers that God swore in his anger not to allow them to enter his rest. The writer to the Hebrews quotes this section of the psalm to warn his own hearers against hardening their hearts in unbelief. He has just reminded them that the position of Jesus Christ is so much more full of glory than that of Moses ever was. The implication is that if God was so angry against unbelief in the time of Moses, unbelief and rejection of Jesus can only be the more serious.

In brief, the letter to the Hebrews in one sense places its hearers on the same level as the people of Israel in the time of Moses. Faith in the good news revealed by God is required by those who hear it, both in the time of Moses and in the time of the letter to the Hebrews (Hebr. 4:1-2). The warning can therefore be directly applied. The author of the letter was quite unaware of the “nuances” of American dispensational theology. On the other hand, the letter to the Hebrews also appreciates the unique place in redemptive history of both the generation in the wilderness, and the original hearers of David’s psalm.¹ It appreciates that the rest which the wilderness generation forfeited was connected with the promised land which Joshua was to give the succeeding generation. And yet it argues that Psalm 95, which uses the fact that God forbade entrance into his rest to the unbelieving generation in Moses’ time as a warning to its hearers, proves that Joshua could not have fully provided that rest (Hebr. 4:6-8). The land of Canaan must be viewed as a type of the genuine rest which God envisages for his people (cf. Hebr. 11:13-16). The conclusion is therefore that for the hearers of the letter there remains both a promise of entering God’s rest and a warning against hardening one’s heart in unbelief.

The fact that Psalm 95 (LXX 94) speaks of entering *God’s* rest leads the author of the letter to connect this rest with the rest which God himself enjoyed after the six days of creation. Appeal is therefore made to Genesis 2:2.² An additional connection between Gen. 2:2 and LXX Ps. 94:11 is the fact that the same word-stem is used in both texts. The words used are *καταπαύω* and *κατάπαυσις* respectively. Whilst it is true that the Hebrew stems differ in the two texts, they are nevertheless effectively synonymous. The letter thus views God’s rest not only as a rest which he *gives* to believers, but a rest which he *enjoys* himself. It is significant that the phrase which introduces the quotation of Gen. 2:2 speaks of the opposite of God’s rest, namely, of God’s works: “Although his works were complete from the foundation of the world.” This strongly suggests that the writer interprets the phrase in Ps. 95 “they saw my works” to be referring to the works of creation (see below).

The nature of the promised rest of God

We must next address the question as to the nature of this “rest” of God as interpreted by the writer to the Hebrews. Is the reference to a “place of rest” or to “rest” as a quality? Ellingworth has argued for the former

¹ The psalm is said in Hebr. 4:7 to be by David in accord with the Septuagint title Αἶνος ᾠδῆς τῷ Δαυιδ. The textual tradition of the MT lacks a title. On the relevance of the psalm titles in the Septuagint see R. Dean Anderson, “The Division and Order of the Psalms,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994) 219-41.

² Peter E. Enns (“Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1—4:13” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 [1993], 255-280) on p.269 suggests the temple as a possible referent for God’s rest in Ps. 95. The suggestion is all the more interesting because of the same Hebrew root used in texts such as 1 Chron. 28:2; 2 Chron. 6:41; Ps. 132:8 and Isa. 66:1. Nevertheless it is not relevant here due to the fact that the writer to the Hebrews makes a different connection.

both on the basis of the reference in the psalm text and more especially from the fact that Hebrews consistently speaks of “entering into” this rest, implying a spatial object to the verb.³ It may be true that $\eta\eta\eta\eta$ in Psalm 95:11 refers to a place of rest, namely, the land of Canaan, although it should be noted that the Hebrew noun can also be used in the sense of the quality of rest, cf. Jud. 20:43. It may also be true that the Septuagint translation $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$, despite the use of the abstract noun, may be intended *per abuis* for the concrete. We may compare the more common use of $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\lambda\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ for $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\lambda\upsilon\mu\alpha$ or $\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ for $\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\sigma\mu\alpha$ (cf. Hebr. 4:13). Nevertheless, there is much to be said for concluding that the writer to the Hebrews understood the term $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in Psalm 95 in terms of the quality of rest and not of a resting place. We have already seen how he connects God’s rest in Psalm 95 with Genesis 2:2, which describes God resting from the works of creation. The “rest” of God on the seventh day is surely not a “resting place,” but the quality of rest. Furthermore, it is not at all unusual to find the verb “enter” used in a figurative sense denoting entrance into a non-spatial category, cf. Matt. 25:21 and 23 where we find the phrase “enter into the joy of your master.”

This rest of God is presented as a promise of a future good for those who believe (Hebr. 4:1, cf. 6, 11).⁴ It is the Sabbath which God enjoyed on the seventh day, and, by implication, which God still enjoys. If there remains a promise of entering into God’s rest even today, the presupposition is that God himself is still resting. In fact both Hebrew verbs used in Gen. 2:2 for resting mean in essence “to stop.” The point is that God ceased his creation work. He did not begin it again on the eighth day! The seventh day is sanctified as the day upon which God stopped working. For this reason we may justly speak of the promise of the eternal Sabbath which awaits all believers. The nature of this eternal Sabbath rest is described in Hebr. 4:10 as resting from one’s works, just as God did from his. We may not spiritualise our resting from works as a resting from evil works, for that would destroy the comparison with God’s rest from his works of creation. The eternal Sabbath, which characterises the new heavens and earth, is therefore to be a time of rest from the toil of daily labours.

If, in the thinking of the writer to the Hebrews, the seventh day marked the beginning of an eternal rest for God we must ask what implications this has for our notion of the activities of mankind before the fall into sin. Given these premises it would surely be natural to consider the situation of paradise to be one of, in some sense, sharing in God’s Sabbath rest after the creation of the world. In fact, when Hebrews 4:10 refers to resting from $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\epsilon\rho\gamma\alpha$ just as God did, there appears to be an allusion to the curse brought upon man as a result of his fall into sin. The curse of Gen. 3:17-19 in the Septuagint reads:

¹⁷ τῷ δὲ Ἀδὰμ εἶπεν Ὅτι ἤκουσας τῆς φωνῆς τῆς γυναικὸς σου καὶ ἔφαγες ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου, οὗ ἐνετειλάμην σοι τούτου μόνου μὴ φαγεῖν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἐπικατάρατος ἡ γῆ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις σου, ἐν λύπαις φάγη αὐτὴν πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς σου, ¹⁸ ἀκάνθας καὶ τριβόλους ἀνατελεῖ σοι, καὶ φάγη τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ. ¹⁹ ἐν ἰδρωτί τοῦ προσώπου σου φάγη τὸν ἄρτον σου ἕως τοῦ ἀποστρέψαι σε εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐξ ἧς ἐλήμφθης, ὅτι γῆ εἶ καὶ εἰς γῆν ἀπελεύση.

But to Adam he said: “Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the only tree of which I commanded you not to eat, cursed is the earth *in your works*; in pains you will eat it all the days of your life; it will sprout thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your face you will eat your bread until you turn back to the earth out of which you were taken for you are earth and to earth you will return.”⁵

Tov has shown how the translators of this passage (and of Gen. 8:21 and Jer. 14:4) have read the underlying Hebrew root of the phrase ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις σου as coming from $\epsilon\gamma$ instead of the MT reading: $\eta\eta\eta\eta$.⁶ There is reason to believe that this translation may have led the writer to the Hebrews to view work *as such* as part of the curse, which is undone when we enter into God’s rest from works. The words “in your works” in this sense are taken as showing the effect of the curse on the land. Adam will need to engage in “works” upon the

³ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 234-35.

⁴ The present tense of εἰσερχόμεθα in Hebr. 4:3 is gnomic. The verse describes *how* one “enters” into this rest, namely, by believing.

⁵ All translations from Greek text are my own.

⁶ Emmanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, Jerusalem Biblical Studies 3 (Jerusalem: Simor, 1981) 158. Tov refutes Georg Bertram, “ἔργον, ἐγάζομαι,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, transl. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 2.643-44, who suggested that the translation had to do with the negative attitude of Hellenistic Judaism to work.

land in order to survive. We may compare Gen. 5:29, referring to Noah,⁷

Οὗτος διαναπαύσει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων ἡμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν λυπῶν τῶν χειρῶν ἡμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἧς κατηράσατο κύριος ὁ θεός.

This man will give us rest from our works and from the pains of our hands and from the earth, which the Lord God has cursed.

It is clear that “works” are here viewed as the hard labour resulting from the curse brought about by the fall into sin. These texts must inevitably colour the way in which LXX Gen. 2:15 (cf. 2:5) was read. For it must be admitted that even in paradise it is said:

Καὶ ἔλαβεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ὃν ἔπλασεν, καὶ ἔθετο αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ ἐργάζεσθαι αὐτὸν καὶ φυλάσσειν.

And the Lord God took the man, whom he had formed, and set him in the park to work and keep it.

There is a sense in which Adam was expected to “work” in the garden. He needed to tend the park in which God had placed him. And yet the difference between this “working” (ἐργάζεσθαι) of the park and the “works” (τὰ ἔργα) which would be required of him after the fall are not only emphasised in the texts quoted above, but also vividly represented in LXX Gen. 3:23 where we read:

καὶ ἐξάπεστειλεν αὐτὸν κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς ἐργάζεσθαι τὴν γῆν, ἐξ ἧς ἐλήμφθη.

And the Lord God sent him out of the park of luxury to work the earth, out of which he was taken.

Here, instead of the transliteration Εδεμ, the park is described as the “park of luxury” in contrast to the “working” (ἐργάζεσθαι) of the earth in which he will now need to engage.

The promised “rest” which is envisaged for God’s people is a rest which would restore the situation of paradise, which the writer to the Hebrews inevitably viewed as a situation of permanent rest from hard labour. We may also compare Rev. 14:13 which speaks of the rest from labours granted to those who die in the Lord. The book of Revelation characterises the life of the new heavens and earth as a return to the situation of paradise and a removal of the curse (Rev. 21-22).

This interpretation of the situation in paradise has several important consequences. In the first place the charge given to Adam and Eve to populate the earth and rule it (Gen. 1:28) cannot have been viewed as “works” in the sense in which that noun is used here. That the writer to the Hebrews viewed things in this way is clear from his understanding that God’s rest on the seventh day continued. The writer would surely not wish to have denied that God nevertheless continues to rule the world as king of creation. As far as food was concerned, in paradise Adam and Eve were simply supplied by creation (cf. Gen. 1:29). There was no need to till the ground. In paradise God planted and watered the garden (Gen. 2:8-10). Adam only had to tend it.

Against this background we may also set the description of the promised land of Canaan, which would, in contrast with Egypt, not be a land where the Israelites would have to sow seed and manually water the plants (Deut. 11:10). They would simply take over cities, houses, cisterns, and vineyards without having to build or dig anything (Deut. 6:10-11). Of course this utopia was not realised, not least because of the failure of Israel to capture the whole land, but also because of their continuing sin. Even so, this “rest” which was promised in the land of Canaan was a type of the true rest of God from works, which is promised to believers.

The interpretation of God’s “works” in Psalm 95

At this point we may return to the suggestion made above that the fact that Hebrews introduces the quotation

⁷ Compare 4 Ezra 8:52 “because it is for you that Paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, **rest is appointed**, goodness is established and wisdom perfected beforehand,” translation by B. M. Metzger in James H. Charlesworth (ed.) *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983) 1.544.

of Gen. 2:2 by referring to God's works (Hebr. 4:3c) indicates that he may have interpreted the works of God mentioned in the quotation of Psalm 95 to refer to God's works of creation. This suggestion may, in view of the text of the quotation, seem *prima facie* impossible. We read, contrary to the text of the Septuagint, "your fathers ... saw my works for forty years; therefore I was angry with this generation." This text clearly presumes that the works of God were his wonders wrought in the wilderness. Nevertheless serious doubts may be raised regarding the validity of the text of Hebr. 3:10 where, without significant known variants, the word διό is added to the quotation of LXX Ps. 94. This is what forces one to take the "forty years" with the preceding phrase and consequently God's "works" in v.9 as his wonders in the wilderness.⁸

In the first place we find in Hebr. 3:17 the same phrase referred to as if διό were absent from the text (which accords with both the Hebrew and the Septuagint text as we know it). We read there: "προσώχθισεν τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη."

In the second place, despite various attempts to attribute to the writer to the Hebrews a theological motivation for the text as it stands in 3:10, the fact remains that he does nothing with this reading. No interpretation is built upon it in his argument. The reverse is true, for in 3:17 he uses the accepted Septuagint reading.

In the third place, if we indeed suppose that the writer felt free enough to add a word such as διό to the text of the psalm, thus directing its interpretation, we may ask why the author did not make more obvious changes to the psalm text in order to bring it into line grammatically with the way in which it is used. The sentence in Hebr. 3:7 begins with διό and requires a main verb. If we bear in mind the need to read ancient texts, which were mostly read aloud, linearly, then we must understand the quotation of Psalm 95 to include the main verb. In other words, the writer puts Psalm 95 into his own mouth to admonish his audience: "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'today, ... do not harden your hearts ...'" Further on in the quotation, however, the first person is used (i.e. τὰ ἔργα μου, προσώχθισα, εἶπον), which provides some grammatical confusion.⁹ It would appear that the author, in putting the quotation in his mouth, did not wish to make the appropriate grammatical changes, which only occur later in the quotation anyway. But if he shows respect for the text of the quotation in this way, it is difficult to account for the addition of διό in v.10.¹⁰

We must therefore conclude that διό in v.10 is a corruption and does not belong to the original text. We are therefore free to suggest that the writer picks up on the ἔργα of God in Psalm 95 in Hebr. 4:3c, referring to

⁸ It is this which causes F. W. Grosheide to suggest that the author to the Hebrews interpreted Psalm 95 in such a way that God was *working* with Israel during the wilderness journey in order that he too might rest when they finally reached Canaan (*De Brief aan de Hebreëën*, Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift [Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1923]. For Grosheide it is in this sense that the rest in Psalm 95 can also be called God's rest. The problem with this is that Hebr. 4:3b ff. interprets God's rest of Psalm 95 to be his Sabbath rest after the six days of creation. Grosheide can only overcome this difficulty by suggesting that in Hebr. 4:3b ff. the author climbs to a higher level of interpretation (49). This is nothing but a simple subterfuge to hide the contradiction between his interpretation of God's rest in Psalm 95 and that of the author of the letter to the Hebrews. Grosheide's attempt to make sense of the text of Hebr. 3:10 as it stands only highlights its problematical nature. It is interesting to note that this interpretation of God's rest in Psalm 95 is not to be found in Grosheide's *De Brief aan de Hebreëen en de Brief van Jakobus*, *Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament 12* (Amsterdam: H. A. van Bottenburg, 1927). There (128) he wishes us to see an ever broadening meaning to the concept of "rest" in the passage, from the rest of Canaan for the wilderness generation, to a rest from enemies and obedience to God's law for Israel in Canaan in Psalm 95, to a rest from the evil works of sin apart from the land of Canaan for the hearers of the letter to the Hebrews. It is, however, certainly questionable as to whether the author of the letter to the Hebrews considered the concept of God's rest, mentioned in Psalm 95, to be ever broadening. He plainly interprets it as the rest into which God entered on the seventh day, which was hardly a rest from sin!

⁹ For this reason some commentators believe that the main verb following the διό of v.7 is βλέπετε of v.12. This verb, however, is too far away from its antecedent to be understood in this way. See Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 30* (6th ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 186.

¹⁰ It should be admitted that there are several minor differences between the Septuagint text and the quotation in Hebrews three. These may be the result of variant readings in the ms used by the author. They involve the reading ἐν δοκιμασίᾳ for ἐδοκίμασαν, the correction of the Alexandrian termination in εἶδον for εἶδον, the readings εἶπον for εἶπα, δέ for καί, and ταύτη for ἐκείνη. We should however note that many mss (including the Byzantine tradition) read ἐδοκίμασαν με instead of ἐν δοκιμασίᾳ in Hebr. 3:9. The latter reading may either be a Greek corruption, or an alternative LXX tradition based on a different reading of the Hebrew (ⲡ+ some unknown corruption + waw conjunctive). This same textual tradition in Hebrews also adds the object με after ἐπεύρασαν (missing in the Septuagint). It is therefore possible that the erroneous ἐδοκίμασαν με occurred in the manuscript tradition of Hebrews, although another explanation seems more likely. Non-Byzantine manuscripts are closer to the Septuagint by omitting με, the addition of which in the Byzantine text seems to be in order to supply the transitive verb περιάζω with an object (the Byzantine tradition also corrects ταύτη to ἐκείνη). If so, it seems probable that the Byzantine tradition also corrects the misreading of the Septuagint in the manuscripts of Hebrews. On this understanding the misreading ἐδοκίμασαν με may be original to the letter to the Hebrews which used a corrupt text of the Septuagint.

the creation of the world, cf. 4:10. Since it is clear from 3:17 that he knew and used the Septuagint text of Ps. 95:10 (LXX Ps. 94:10) as we know it, we may suppose that he read the psalm as saying that the Israelites in the generation of Moses saw the works of God's creation which are referred to in the verses 4-5 of the psalm. This gives him added reason to connect Psalm 95 with Gen. 2:2 in Hebr. 4:3-4.

We must, therefore, reject any deliberate theological motivation on the part of the writer to the Hebrews for the text in 3:10.

How then is this reading to be explained? Given the limitations of the available data, there can be no certainty on this question. It might be suggested that the writer of the letter knew the Hebrew but was reticent to change the (corrupt) Greek translation which lay before him. That his copy of the Septuagint Psalter contained corrupt readings is clear from the reading of Ps. 40:6 (LXX Ps. 39:7).¹¹ Nevertheless, it is questionable as to whether the writer had Hebrew texts of the Old Testament before him. The text of Hebr. 3:17 makes it more probable that he knew the Septuagint text as we know it. Perhaps a more likely possibility is that we are confronted here with a very early corruption in the manuscripts of this letter. It must, however, be admitted that the addition of *διό* in Hebr. 3:10 is not easily explained. Perhaps it was (part of?) a marginal comment by a copyist which later became incorporated into the text. Unless further manuscript evidence surfaces we will likely never know.

The abiding σαββατισμός

In Hebr. 4:9, after concluding that Joshua could not have given the people true rest, since Psalm 95 speaks of entering God's rest long after, the writer concludes: "There remains therefore a σαββατισμός for the people of God." Ever since Chrysostom Hebr. 4:9 has been frequently interpreted as referring to the eternal Sabbath rest promised to believers.¹² This interpretation must, however, be rejected for two important reasons.

Firstly, one's interpretation of this verse depends partly on the meaning given to the term σαββατισμός. Hebrews provides us with the first occurrence of this noun σαββατισμός and its rarity must cause us to consider it a deliberate coinage.¹³ The word is a natural enough coinage on the basis of the verb σαββατίζω, "to observe the Sabbath." The -μός termination implies activity and thus the meaning "Sabbath-keeping" or "Sabbath observance," not "Sabbath rest." Although it is true, as Ellingworth notes,¹⁴ that the implication of activity is sometimes lost in nouns in -μός, we may expect this to come about through the development of a noun's usage in the course of time. The concession has little bearing on a noun freshly coined. The writer could just as easily have coined σαββατεία if he had desired to speak of "Sabbath rest" in the abstract. We conclude that the noun is most naturally taken as "Sabbath-keeping."

In the second place, the writer to the Hebrews speaks of this "Sabbath-keeping" as something which *remains* for the people of God, presupposing that it is a practice which has a long history. If he were speaking of the

¹¹ Various attempts have been made to explain the translation "σῶμα" on the basis of a Hebrew text different than MT. No such attempt is convincing for the difference cannot easily be explained on the basis of faulty reading or transcription of the Hebrew text. It is much more likely that the reading has arisen from faulty copying of Greek manuscripts. On this supposition ΗΘΕΛΗΣΑΣΩΤΙΑ has been incorrectly read as ΗΘΕΛΗΣΑΣΣΩΜΑ. On the other hand it is interesting to note that the Psalm is quoted, not as holy scripture, but as the words of Jesus. It is hypothetically possible that Jesus introduced this textual change as a deliberate pun applying the psalm directly to his person and work. The quotation in Hebr. 12:15 from LXX Deut. 29:17b is also the result of a corrupt Greek text. Instead of ΕΝΧΟΛΗ Hebrews reads ΕΝΟΧΛΗ.

¹² Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* 6.3 (PG 63.57).

Καὶ καλῶς συνεπέρανε τὸν λόγον. Οὐ γὰρ εἶπε, κατάπαυσις, ἀλλὰ, Σαββατισμός, τὸ οἰκεῖον ὄνομα, καὶ ᾧ ἔχαιρον καὶ ἐπέτρεχον, σαββατισμὸν τὴν βασιλείαν καλῶν. Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Σαββάτῳ πάντων μὲν τῶν πονηρῶν ἀπέχεσθαι κελεύει, ἐκεῖνα δὲ μόνον γίνεσθαι τὰ πρὸς λατρείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἅπερ οἱ ἱερεῖς ἐπετέλουν, καὶ ὅσα ψυχὴν ὠφελεῖ, καὶ μὴδὲν ἕτερον οὕτω καὶ τότε.

And well did he determine the word. For he did not say *κατάπαυσις*, but *σαββατισμός*, the appropriate word, and one in which they rejoiced and hastened to, calling the kingdom *σαββατισμός*. For just as on the sabbath he commands (us) to abstain from all evil things, and that those things only which relate to the worship of God should occur, which the priests used to perform, and whatsoever benefits the soul, and nothing else; so also will it be at that time.

¹³ The word also occurs in the text of Plutarch's *de superstitione* (*Mor.* 2.166a), but Bentley's widely accepted emendation of *σαββατισμούς* to *βαπτισμούς* must surely be correct. The immediate context is the following list of superstitious practices: *πηλώσεις καταβορβωρώσεις βαπτισμούς* (for *σαββατισμούς*), *ρίψεις ἐπὶ πρόσωπον, αἰσχρὰς προκαθίσεις, ἀλλοκότους προσκυνήσεις*.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.* 255.

promise of an eternal Sabbath rest, we would have expected him to say: “There remains therefore *a promise* of Sabbath-rest.”¹⁵

We must therefore conclude that the writer to the Hebrews infers that since Joshua did not provide Israel with a true rest, the practice of Sabbath-keeping was to be maintained.¹⁶ We are then better able to understand the aorist tenses used in Hebr. 4:10: “For he who has entered into his (i.e. God’s) rest has also himself rested from his works, just as God from his own.” We may see a double reference both to Sabbath observance as a temporal entrance into God’s rest, and that which it prefigures, the eternal Sabbath promised for the people of God. Sabbath observance (σαββατισμός) is a weekly reminder of the paradisaical rest which is part and parcel of the promised restoration in salvation. The Sabbath as an institution can, in this view, not be considered a creation ordinance, but an ordinance given by God’s grace as a reminder of times past before the fall and a pointer to a gracious future. The fourth commandment as recorded in Exod. 20:8-11 roots the institution of the Sabbath in God’s rest on the seventh day. The Sabbath is here a reminder of the rest which God originally intended man to live permanently in. The version of Deut. 5:12-15 is a variant on the same theme, namely, the relative rest provided by the salvation from slavery in Egypt, which in the continuing Sabbath ordinance functions as a pointer to a complete rest in the future. It goes without saying, from the foregoing, that the nature of this salvific rest is not that of complete inoccupation, but of ruling, of praise, and of the enjoyment of a new creation untainted by sin.

¹⁵ To his credit F. W. Grosheide, in both commentaries mentioned above, also insists that the Sabbath rest spoken of in this verse is not just future, but something which begins in this life. He also connects it to the fourth commandment. However, Grosheide spiritualises the concept of rest here in the sense of rest from sin. As noted above, the letter to the Hebrews nowhere explicitly spiritualises the concept of rest in this way and, furthermore, such a spiritualising interpretation destroys the parallel between God resting from his (not evil) works and believers resting from theirs. A reference to Hebr. 6:1 is not relevant to the context here.

¹⁶ For a similar interpretation of this verse see Gerhard F. Hassel “Sabbath” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman. vol.5. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 5.855-56.