

**Church as Wilderness Community and Sabbath Rest**  
**Hebrews 3:7-4:13**

I. Church as New Wilderness Community (Hebrews 3:7-4:13)

- A. We can focus our understanding of this now in more detail as we look at the church as a new wilderness community.
1. What we have in this passage is the writer's concern to provide us, the church, with the context that we occupy in these last days. We are given a model by which we can understand our experience as the church.
  2. At a first glance, this section may seem to be parenthetical to us, and therefore, we might want to conclude that it is valuable in its own right, but it makes no central contribution to the document as a whole. It seems to be an interruption of the writer's discussion of Christ as high priest (2:17 was the introduction). The theme of Christ's high priesthood does not appear again until 4:14. This makes the wilderness material seem like a distraction of sorts—a movement away from the main point of Christ's high priestly ministry.
  3. But it is not in any material sense a digression. What happens in this passage is a development that introduces something basic to the whole book.
    - a. In this section, the writer makes the situation explicit those for whom Christ is high priest.
    - b. The writer is elucidating the situation for whom Christ is high priest in heaven.

B. Exposition of the Text

1. <sup>NAS</sup> **Hebrews 3:1** Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. <sup>2</sup> He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. <sup>3</sup> For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. <sup>4</sup> For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. <sup>5</sup> Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; <sup>6</sup> but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. <sup>BNT</sup> **Hebrews 3:1** Ὁθεν, ἀδελφοὶ ἅγιοι, κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι, κατανοήσατε τὸν ἀπόστολον καὶ ἀρχιερέα τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν, <sup>2</sup> πιστὸν ὄντα τῷ ποιήσαντι αὐτὸν ὡς καὶ Μωϋσῆς ἐν [ὄλω] τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ. <sup>3</sup> πλείονος γὰρ οὗτος δόξης παρὰ Μωϋσῆν ἤξιώται, καθ' ὅσον πλείονα τιμὴν ἔχει τοῦ οἴκου ὁ κατασκευάσας αὐτόν. <sup>4</sup> πᾶς γὰρ οἶκος κατασκευάζεται ὑπὸ τινος, ὁ δὲ πάντα κατασκευάσας θεός. <sup>5</sup> καὶ Μωϋσῆς μὲν πιστὸς ἐν ὄλω τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ ὡς θεράπων εἰς

μαρτύριον τῶν λαληθησομένων, <sup>6</sup> Χριστὸς δὲ ὡς υἱὸς ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ· οὐ οἶκός ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς, ἂν[περ] τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος κατάσχωμεν.

2. Commentary and Observations

a. This refers back to **Numbers 12:1-7**: Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. <sup>2</sup> And they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. <sup>3</sup> Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth. <sup>4</sup> And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." And the three of them came out. <sup>5</sup> And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. <sup>6</sup> And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. <sup>7</sup> Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. <sup>8</sup> With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

(1) Moses had climactic significance for the Old order.

(2) Now Christ has climactic significance for the new order.

b. The structural paradigm in common with the opening words of the document is obvious.

(1) Here is a variant of the contrast between the fathers through the prophets and to us in the Son is elaborated here.

(2) Once again, the accent falls on the finality of Christ.

(3) His person and work are eschatological, as we saw in 1-2.

(4) Now the accent falls on the contrast between not the son and prophets, but the Son and Moses—and Moses is in view as prophet par excellence (Deut. 18:15-18).

(5) Verse 1 is the only place in the NT where Jesus is referred to as an apostle, and apostle serves the prophetic identity of the Son of God.

c. And here the writer begins to anticipate the distinction based on covenant—old and new covenant.

3. 3:1-6 brings out both the continuities and differences between the two covenants.

a. The element of continuity is more basic in his text.

- (1) That comes out in the image of the house.
  - (2) Both Moses and Christ are involved in building God's house, which we can qualify immediately as the redemptive edifice that is being built by God.
    - (a) Both are faithful to their respective tasks with regard to house building.
    - (b) What is in common is that they are involved in the same building project.
  - (3) What this building imagery is used to describe metaphorically can be described either as the covenantal household of God, on the one hand, or the covenantal kingdom of God, on the other hand.
    - (a) Using dogmatic language, we can say that what this text describes is the common, or unified, saving activity of God, communicated here in terms of a house metaphor.
    - (b) God is building a house, and that house is the structural locus of God's saving activity.
- b. A major difference is that Moses is a witness to the things that would be spoken (vs. 5).
- (1) Moses has a prophetic function to witness to that which would come.
  - (2) Surely Moses is a witness to the speech of God to come in the Son—Moses is a witness to Christ. That is what Moses is all about.
  - (3) And Christ is the one then about whom, or two whom, Moses would witness.
- c. Moreover, the one who builds the house is reckoned of greater honor than the house itself: **Hebrews 3:3** For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses- as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.
- (1) Moses is the house—the thing that is being built by God.
  - (2) Jesus, however, is the builder of the house, and verse 4 adds that the builder of all things is God.
  - (3) Verse 4 is an unmistakable reference to the deity of Christ, because having made the comparison in verse 3, Christ is the builder, and the builder of all things is God.
- d. More significantly, the difference is that Moses is a “servant (ὡς θεράπων) in all the house” ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ, whereas Christ is faithful as a Son over all the house” ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ.
- (1) Moses is a servant; Christ is a Son.

- (2) Moses is *in* all the house; the Son is *over* all the house.
- e. Without doubt, the accent falls on the finality of this house, particularly the building activity over which Christ rules as Son.
  - (1) Just as the work of Moses is subeschatological, Christ's is not. His work is final and eschatological.
  - (2) This hearkens back to 1:2.
- f. This is the christological axis or line.
- 4. 6b: whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.
  - a. This is a definite turn and a somewhat unexpected one.
  - b. Up until 6a, the writer is developing a theology of redemptive history from Moses to Christ, brining out continuities and discontinuities within that history.
  - c. Abruptly, he turns attention on the readers.
  - d. Two key points need to be made about this text.
    - (1) First, note the indicative: the recipients are in that house.
      - (a) The "we" has a share in the house building activity of God.
      - (b) The we share in the end time salvation revealed in Christ.
      - (c) The recipients have laid hold of Christ and are partakers of the heavenly calling.
      - (d) Verse 14: we have become partakers of Christ (μέτοχοι γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ). Being of the house of God is to partake in Christ, to share in all that he has accomplished as high priest.
    - (2) Second, immediately qualifying this indicative is a conditional: if they hold fast.
      - (a) It is fair to say that the latter part of 6 brings to a focus in one basic construction the constitutive factors in the readers situation—the situation that is addressed throughout the whole book.
      - (b) That situation is the final and definitive, yet conditional character, of the believers's present experience of salvation.
      - (c) This paradox needs to be appreciated: definitive and yet conditional.
      - (d) This is "contingent confidence" in that we can boast and have confidence, yet it is contingent.
      - (e) Hence, there is a tension of sorts that exists here.
      - (f) And it is that tension that characterizes the present

- experience of the church.
- (g) We have an apodosis: whose house we are (christological interest) followed by a present general condition, if we hold fast (protasis). Lying in back of this clause is the entire paranetic element we have noted up to this point.
  - (h) Here we have an indicative and imperative movement.
    - i) The indicative is always conditional, and the imperative is the consequent.
    - ii) Grammatically, here, we have the indicative in the consequent and the imperative in the conditional clause.
5. Verse 6 pinpoints our contingent confidence, and the conditional clause becomes the occasion for what the writer says in 3:7 and continues through to vers 4:13.
- a. This is a more or less self-contained discussion.
  - b. These verses amplify the situation in which NC believers find themselves and grounds the contingent confidence that we have in Christ as a wilderness community.
  - c. This passage provides a redemptive-historical rationale for the exhortation that permeates the entire letter.
- C. Looking into these verses from 3:7-4:11, the pattern of argumentation has drawn interest from many.
- 1. We can describe it this way: the progression of the argument seems puzzling.
  - 2. More specifically, there seem to be gaps in the argument at key points.
  - 3. The writer uses Scripture in a way that seems a bit unusual to us.
  - 4. We tend to read the passage with the presumption that he is arguing the way that we would argue, and this could present a problem if we believe that it is largely complete and coherent apart from his use of the OT Scripture.
    - a. This would assume that appeal to the OT would serve to reinforce or undergird an essentially complete argument.
    - b. In other words, we could think that the writer is using Scripture as a proof-text—that the OT text proves the terms of his argument.
  - 5. The problem with that is that the situation is precisely the reverse here.
    - a. The Scriptures cited are the major element.
    - b. The writer's remarks are the minor element in the text.
    - c. Recognizing this gets us on the right track in understanding this text.

- d. What the writer is doing here is providing an annotated treatment of OT passage—an interpretive handling of Scripture applied to his readers situation.
  - e. It is a passage in which OT Scripture is the base, and the comments are made upon that base.
6. The background that helps us here is the contemporary Jewish background to NT studies.
- a. What we have here is a handling of Scripture that has close correspondence with the Peshar method that is evident in the Qumran materials.
  - b. This is so called Midrash Peshar method.
  - c. There are three characteristics of this method.
    - (1) First, there is a relatively lengthy quotation, followed by interpretation.
      - (a) Opens with Psalm 95:7-11.
      - (b) This is a long quotation from the Old Testament.
      - (c) The Psalm 95 material is not cited to support what precedes.
      - (d) Rather, the 95 material marks a shift in the movement in the discussion.
      - (e) It is cited to advance the discussion on the basis of the OT material.
      - (f) It is designed to provide the basis for what the writer will say in verse 12 and following. It is quoted primarily for the sake of the exposition and application that follows.
      - (g) We have the LXX of Psalm 94.
      - (h) 3:12-4:11 we have the interpretation of that passage—what the writer wishes to draw out of the textual base in Psalm 95.
    - (2) The second feature of the method is that in quoting the material, it is interpreted.
      - (a) There is an interpretive molding of the material.
      - (b) Here there is quite a contrast with the extra-biblical material, where the handling becomes very strained.
      - (c) It is very restrained and modest in our passage.
      - (d) For instance, notice that there is a shift in the punctuation over against the LXX text.
        - i) Heb. 3:10: οὐ ἐπείρασαν οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν ἐν δοκιμασίᾳ καὶ εἶδον τὰ ἔργα μου τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη· διὸ προσώχθισα τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ καὶ εἶπον· ἀεὶ πλανῶνται τῇ καρδίᾳ, αὐτοὶ δὲ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰς ὁδοὺς μου, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.<sup>10</sup> That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.'
        - ii) LXX: For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη προσώχθισα τῇ γενεᾷ ἐκείνῃ καὶ εἶπα ἀεὶ πλανῶνται τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰς ὁδοὺς μου"and they saw my works. I was angry with them forty years."
        - iii) In Hebrews 3:9-10, by the assertion of the dio, the 40 years qualify seeing my works rather than my being

- angry.
          - iv) Materially, there is no change: seeing my works and being angry with them are correlatives. They did not respond to the works of God as they should have, and so he was angry.
        - (3) Third, this becomes much more important, the repetition of key words or phrases in the commentary that follows the text.
          - (a) The key words are today (13, 15 and 4:7 twice).
          - (b) The other key word the rest (18, 4:35,5, 10, 11).
      - d. This is an applied exposition of Psalm 95 and Genesis 2.
        - (1) What should be appreciated is that this is the only treatment of those two passages in the NT.
        - (2) That should grab our attention.
        - (3) Simon Kistemacher wrote a dissertation on the Psalm citations on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Very helpful handling of the Peshet background.
- D. Key insight: In the reference to Israel in the desert of Sinai he finds features that bear directly on the recipients of the letter.
  1. 3:7 equates what Scripture says with what the Spirit says.
    - a. It says, Scripture says, God says, is something Warfield pointed out.
    - b. Psalm 95 is the Holy Spirit speaking.
  2. Also, in 4:7, we have the qualification “through David” is used.
    - a. This means that it is both the Spirit who spoke, and David who spoke.
    - b. The primary divine authorship coexists with David as the human author.
  3. The factors that bear:
    - a. God’s voice speaking both promises and threats.
    - b. The promise: entering God’s rest.
      - (1) The promise of entering that rest soon is held out to those who believe.
      - (2) The promise is to faith.
    - c. But there is also in the Psalm material the reality of wrath poured out upon the wilderness generation and their failure to enter because of unbelief.
    - d. God’s promise and warning, with the correlatives of faith and unbelief.
  4. The underlying assumption: *Israel in the wilderness, believers in the New Covenant, are in analogous situations.*
    - a. NT Christians: receive the same promise of rest (3:11 and 4:1).
    - b. NT believers are exposed to trials and along with trials the same danger of unbelief or threat of apostasy (3:12 “take heed that there not be in you an evil heart of unbelief in falling away from

- the living God"; 3:19 and 4:6).
- c. Believers in 3:8, 14; 4:1 and 11 are commanded to persevere.
  - d. The controlling situation: in OT and NT times, God's people are pilgrim people. They are essentially aliens on the way—they are on the way toward rest.
  - e. Their being on the way is bracketed.
    - (1) They have already experienced deliverance from the power of sin, which in the case of wilderness is pictured in release from bondage in Egypt.
    - (2) However, they have not yet attained to the experience of salvation that is unthreatened or unchallenged.
    - (3) Put simply, they are not yet in Canaan. This is the threatened certainty of the community is in view.
  - f. Put in a broad, redemptive historical sense of the term, the NT church is a wilderness community.
    - (1) The language of 11:13, as it is put, God's people in the New Covenant, no less than the patriarchs, are "strangers and exiles on the earth"
    - (2) Outside the document, that is a strong theme in I Peter.
      - (a) **1 Peter 1:1-4** <sup>SV</sup> **1 Peter 1:1** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion ( ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασποράς ) in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. <sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,
        - i) Elect, yet exiles.
        - ii) And, I want to point out from Peter's standpoint, that the exile is specifically viewed here over against a heavenly inheritance.
        - iii) To the extent that the church has not yet been brought to heaven, to the inheritance reserved in heaven, the church generally,



and those individually who are in it, are exiles.

(b) **1 Peter 2:11** <sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles (ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπιδήμους) to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

i) In this text, is as the people of God (Vs. 10) that the church in this age are sojourners and exiles.

ii) It is as they belong to another realm, another place, that they are to abstain from the lusts of the flesh that characterize this present age.

(c) The point for our purposes in Hebrews is that is precisely the notion of what it means to occupy the wilderness—to be a people on the way—as long as we are people on the way, the church is in the wilderness.

g. Ernst Kasemann, for instance, back in the 30's *The Wandering People of God*, and the whole thesis of that study is that the notion of the church as a company of aliens is the basic theme of the entire book.

h. The model of the church as wilderness community clarifies all of the hortatory material in the document.

(1) It is here that the historical analogy of wilderness supplies the graphic representation of all that lies in back of the book as a word of exhortation.

(2) Wilderness, in other words, is the context in terms of which the exhortation derives its urgency.

E. Hebrews 3:7-4:13

1. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup> where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works <sup>10</sup> for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' <sup>11</sup> As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"

a. The two words that are key for understanding the opening citation are as follows: σήμερον and κατάπαυσίν μου.

(1) It is important to note that both in English and Greek these expressions bracket the material.

(2) This is intentional.

- b. What, more exactly, do these terms reference?
    - (1) These two expressions are not to be equated.
    - (2) That is, they are not to be equated in the sense that they are not looking at the same state of affairs.
    - (3) We need to appreciate that, despite a number of attempts to argue the opposite.
2. σήμερον is plainly applied to the present situation of the recipients.
- a. More specifically, it refers to the “good news” or “word of hearing” is being proclaimed (4:2). So, when the writer quotes from the Psalm and says, “Today, if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts (3:7)” that today is the time during which good news is being proclaimed.
  - b. It is the time (4:1) where the promise of entering God’s rest remains.
  - c. 3:15 and 4:7, makes today a time of summons—a calling to faith and obedience.
  - d. Looking at the wider framework of the document, today is a time in which consummation and final judgment remain future (cf. 9:28 makes this clear, as well as 12:25-29 make clear).
  - e. Today is also a time in which a time of hardness of heart and apostasy are a very present and real threat (3:13).
  - f. In short, “Today” is the time of wilderness wandering. Today is wilderness time for the church. Today is the time that the church wanders in the wilderness.
  - g. Or, in II Cor. 5:7, Today is the time where the church walks by faith and not by sight.
  - h. Hebrews 11:1 and following is a long elaboration of what it means to walk by faith and not by sight.
3. κατάπανσίν μου.
- a. Here we cannot tone down the notion of rest.
    - (1) Rest stands in contrast to the believer’s situation.
    - (2) Within this passage, and this is critical to note, that we are concerned not with what the writer could have said, but how he is using the notion of rest within this context.
    - (3) And in this context, rest stands in pointed contrast to “Today” in the present situation.
    - (4) Rest is the antithesis to exposure and hardship. It is the antithesis to the toil and trial that the present situation involves.
  - b. The capstone statement in 4:11 makes this clear: believers are not at rest but are diligently, energetically and actively seeking to

enter that rest.

- (1) This ties in with what the writer says in 6:10 and 10:24, which I will talk about later on.
    - (a) 6:10 "God will not forget your work and the love you have shown in his name."
    - (b) 10:24 "Encourage one another to love and good works."
  - (2) On a more positive note, within this passage, rest has a focus of hope.
    - (a) It is, as 4:1, a matter of "promise" that the church will enter rest.
    - (b) Rest stands before the church as Canaan stands before Israel in the desert.
    - (c) If Joshua had given them rest, there would not be another place that speaks of rest.
    - (d) If Joshua had given them rest, David would not write Psalm 95.
- c. The rest has a local character. It is something into which people enter.

F. **OC Paradigm: Exodus/Wilderness/Land-Rest**

1. The Old Testament background to the "Today/Rest" bracketing of the church as a new wilderness community is critical to grasp, and so I want to walk you through the series of events that supply the basis for the analogy drawn between Israel and the church.
2. Exodus
  - a. The prototypical event of salvation in the Old Testament is the Exodus from Egypt.
    - (1) God hears the cry of his people in Egypt, and he remembers the promise that he made to Abraham, saying, "To your offspring I will give this land" (12:7).
    - (2) **Genesis 15:18-21** <sup>8</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: <sup>19</sup> the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite <sup>20</sup> and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim <sup>21</sup> and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."
    - (3) And then God calls through Moses to Pharaoh, Let my people go so they may worship me in the land I swore on oath to Abraham.
  - b. And in order to bring God's people out of Egypt, God brings the

plagues: blood, frogs, lice, flies, livestock, boils, hail, locust, darkness. And then, most painful and powerful of all—the death of the firstborn.

- (1) But God tells Moses to place blood the blood of lamb and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.
- (2) And the Lord himself does not allow the destroying angle to bring death the firstborn of Israel; he stations himself there as a shield against the destroyer.
- (3) But there is no such protection for the Egyptians. The Lord does not protect them, and the destroying angel brings death to all the firstborn of Israel.

c. The Red Sea

- (1) And the Lord protects his people as they leave Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.
- (2) Nothing is able to harm God’s people in this Exodus out of Egypt to Canaan, the land he promised to Abraham and his offspring.
- (3) And when the Lord brings his people through the Red Sea on dry ground, it is a redemptive event that is so profound that Isaiah can speak of Israel as a nation being “created” through the waters of the Red Sea.
- (4) The Exodus is a act of redemptive re-creation of Israel. It is the pinnacle of redemption in the OT—the primary explanatory category for understanding redemption in its most basic sense of the term.

3. Wilderness

- a. But intervening the time between the Red Sea and entering the land of Canaan is the wilderness.
- b. The wilderness is the place of temporary pilgrimage, trial, testing and hardship en route to the promised land of Canaan.
- c. The wilderness is a place of grumbling. Numbers 14 records Israel’s experience in the land in the following way.
  - (1) **Numbers 14:1-3** hen all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup> And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup>"And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to

return to Egypt?"

- (a) The point: we want to be de-created!
  - (b) Take us back to Egypt. The wilderness is too difficult!
  - (c) We want to return to the safe haven of Egypt!
  - (d) And God responds by saying that he will wipe them from the face of the earth.
  - (e) And then Moses intercedes for them.
- (2) **Numbers 14:17-20** <sup>7</sup> "But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as Thou hast declared, <sup>18</sup> "The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth *generations*.' <sup>19</sup> "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Thy lovingkindness, just as Thou also hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." <sup>20</sup> So the LORD said, "I have pardoned *them* according to your word;
- (a) Moses, as a type of Christ, intercedes for Israel, and God pardons them according to Moses word.
  - (b) This is beautiful in the way it points to Christ.
- (3) But even though God pardoned their sins according to Moses' word, God says this: **Numbers 14:22-29** <sup>22</sup> "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, <sup>23</sup> shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. <sup>24</sup> "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it. <sup>25</sup> "Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea." <sup>26</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, <sup>27</sup> "How long *shall I bear* with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. <sup>28</sup> "Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; <sup>29</sup> your corpses shall

fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me.

- (a) Even though God pardoned their iniquity, the generation that grumbled against him, twenty and upward, will fall in the wilderness.
- (b) In short, even though they had been brought out of Egypt, they will not enter the land God swore to Abraham to give his descendants.

4. Rest

- a. Put in a different perspective, those whose bodies fall in the wilderness do not enter God's rest. Why do I put it that way?
- b. The Old Testament itself associates the land of Canaan with rest.
  - (1) **Joshua 1:13** <sup>13</sup> "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God gives you rest, and will give you this land.'
  - (2) The land of Canaan was associated with rest in direct opposition to the striving and toiling in the wilderness.
- c. Psalm 95:7-11 reflects on the matter in this way: **Psalm 95:7-11** **"Today, if you would hear his voice,** <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness; <sup>9</sup> "When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. <sup>10</sup> "For forty years I loathed *that* generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. <sup>11</sup> "Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest."
  - (1) The prohibition that Israel will not enter the land is referred to in this text as My rest.
  - (2) The land of Canaan is a place of worship and rest—and it stands in direct contrast to the wilderness.

5. The key here is very simple: as long as you are in the wilderness, you have not entered rest. As long as you are in the wilderness, you are not in the land.

- a. Wilderness is the place of testing.
- b. Land is the place of rest.
- c. And the movement in view is from Exodus to Wilderness to the land of Rest in Canaan.

G. As we focus on its character as *rest*, considerations point to recognizing that the situation is *not present* in the reader's experience.

- 1. First, the concept of rest does not cohere with the hardships experienced in terms of "Today."

- a. Today is marked by trial and testing, where sin is present and functions to deceive God's people. But rest is precisely what we do not have with regard to trial and testing.
  - b. The rest situation is the end of striving against such sin, the end of hardship in the trial of the wilderness sojourn. Rest is the antithesis of the toil which the present wilderness situation involves.
2. Second, the book of Hebrews makes clear that presently believers are at work; they are not at rest but at work
- a. (6:10 "God will not forget your work and the love you have shown in his name;
  - b. 10:24 "Let us stimulate one another to love and good works.").
  - c. The present is a work situation, not a rest situation.
3. Third, look at Hebrews 4:11. "Let us be diligent to enter that rest."
- a. The rest here is something which the believer is diligently seeking to enter.
  - b. And from this perspective, rest is a matter of promise! It is a future prospect to which the believer aspires.
4. And it is precisely here that the analogy to the OT situation of Israel becomes so all-important.
- a. The rest stands before the church as Canaan is before Israel in the desert (Heb. 4:8).
    - (1) Rest is to NT church as Canaan to Israel in the wilderness.
      - (a) In fact, Deut. 12:9-10 identifies Israel's rest with the land of Canaan. "You have *not yet reached* the rest and the inheritance the Lord your God is giving you, but you shall cross the Jordan and settle in the land, the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest."
      - (b) It was theirs in terms of promise, and they were in the process of seeking to enter it—on the way to entering it—but they were not yet there.
    - (2) Accordingly, the rest has an unmistakable local connection about it, and involves actually entering into it (4:1,11; 3:11).
      - (a) To be consistent with this analogy, then, the rest is a *resting-place*; it is a place of rest.
      - (b) It appears to be identical with other expressions which localize (i.e., geographical references).
  - b. Rest, particularly here in the book of Hebrews, is a *wholly future reality*; it lies on the horizon of the future. *My rest refers to what is*

- still future while it is still called today.*
- c. The wilderness pilgrimage of OC Israel is generalized to include the entire time between the first and second coming of Christ.
    - (1) As long as Christ has not returned, as long as Christ has not given us rest, we are still in the wilderness, awaiting the city that is to come.
    - (2) This is a controlling perspective on the whole of the time between Christ's first and second coming.
  - d. There are two stages, two ages, to modes of reality for the church: there is the today, the already, of wilderness pilgrimage and there is "My Rest", the not yet, of Sabbath rest.
    - (1) Today is marked by faith being tested by adversity and hardship. Today is the time of toiling in the wilderness of this age.
    - (2) My Rest is the end of testing and the beginning of resting. My Rest signals the end of the church's trial and testing in the wilderness and entrance into the land of rest in the heavenly country.
5. Put a little differently, the wilderness/rest paradigm that informed Israel's experience in the Exodus is a type of the church's present experience. There is an eschatological tension, then, between wilderness and rest.
- a. Today is the time of Christ's eschatological triumph, but it is at the same time the time of eschatological testing.
  - b. The time of eschatological *triumph* for the Son is the time of eschatological *testing* for his people, and the testing *begins* in the wilderness and *ends* in rest.
6. Adding to the notion that the church seeks a resting place, notice the way that the church's future is bound up with a realm, understood in Hebrews as city or homeland. The connection between land and rest in the OT is brought out also in Hebrews 11, which uses spatial, geographical images to depict the not yet of the church's wilderness sojourn.
- a. **Hebrews 11:9-10** <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city (πόλιν) that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.
  - b. **Hebrews 11:13-14** <sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers



- and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland (πατρίδα from πατρίς).
- c. <sup>NAS</sup> **Hebrews 11:16** But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one (κρείττονος ὀρέγονται, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐπουρανίου). Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.
  - d. 13:14 "we have no abiding city here, but are seeking a city which is to come" οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ὧδε μένουσαν πόλιν ἀλλὰ τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐπιζητοῦμεν.
  - e. The point in broader context is that the city, the homeland and the rest condition one another.
7. These are prominent themes, particularly as we think about future salvation.
    - a. The rest is the eschatological order in its still future sense. Rest is the eschatological order as it is yet to be realized. It is the eschatological not-yet.
    - b. As long as it is still called today, the rest in light of this passage is still future.
    - c. Today is the time of work time that is to be distinguished from rest time that is still future.
- H. What is the discontinuity between the situation of Israel, on the one hand, and the church, on the other?
1. The writer of Hebrews is a covenantal theologian in the deep sense of the term, who emphasizes the continuity between the covenants.
    - a. Promise and warning—the indicative and the imperative—is the point of continuity.
    - b. Promises were given to Israel and there were warnings to enter into that rest by faith.
    - c. Promise and threat—indicative and imperative—are nuclear to both covenantal administrations—the Old Covenant with Moses and the New Covenant with Christ.
  2. However, there are some marked discontinuities, which we have looked at in Hebrews 1:1-2 and Hebrews 3:1-6.
    - a. We have a certain solidarity with the ascended Christ—as he is ascended in the context of their wilderness work of Christ.
    - b. In that respect, the experience of the NC people of God but supercedes the experience of the OC people of God.
    - c. It supercedes in the sense that there is a finality—the blessings are uniquely eschatological in comparison to the OC.
    - d. We have a high priest who is a high priest forever.
  3. So, for instance, in 12:22, believers have already come to Mt. Zion, the

city, the polis of the living God.

- a. The perfect tense makes that emphatic.
  - b. We have come to Mt. Zion, which stands in contrast to Israel in the desert who came to Sinai.
  - c. The church has already come to Mt. Zion, even though at present they are still seeking the city that is to come (13:14).
  - d. The already involves coming to Zion, the not yet is that we are still seeking a city to come. Both are true.
4. In terms of the overall structure, the writer could have said that we have already entered rest, even as we have already come to Mt. Zion.
- a. But, within the context of 3:7ff and the use of rest there, the issue is this: is the rest present or future?
  - b. And the argument up to this point is that the rest is future.
  - c. To push this a bit further, there is in a sense no stronger statement than what we have in 6:5: we have tasted the powers of the age to come.
    - (1) This is as explicit a statement of realized eschatology found anywhere in Scripture.
    - (2) But in verse 5 this statement is joined at the same time with what perhaps the most fearful warning against apostasy in the book.
    - (3) And that points up the tension in view in 3:7 and following.
  - d. It is not simply a replication of the tension of Israel, but it is a tension that has an eschatological heightening.
    - (1) Today, the present time, is a time of both the eschatological triumph of the high priest.
    - (2) But at the same time it is a time of eschatological testing for his brothers, for the people of God.
    - (3) The present is a time of eschatological triumph for Christ but eschatological testing for the church.

I. "My Rest" and "Sabbath Rest"

- A. We need to focus specifically on 4:4 and 4:9, which bring into view the Sabbath Rest of God, and this will continue to clarify the issue now in light of Genesis 2:2.
1. **Hebrews 4:2-9** y faith with those who listened. <sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest," although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." <sup>5</sup> And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest." <sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." <sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. <sup>9</sup> So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,
    - a. This text is not about a theology of Sabbath observation per se.
    - b. But this text does develop strongly our understanding of Sabbath rest.
  2. Hebrews 4 has been passed over in much of the history of interpretation on the Sabbath.
    - a. But John Owen is an exception.
    - b. He spends just under 200 pages dealing with only the issue of the Sabbath in Hebrews.
  3. Focusing on the Sabbath will bring out more clearly the themes we have already surveyed.
- B. **Hebrews 4:3-4** <sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest," although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." <sup>5</sup> And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest." <sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." <sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. <sup>9</sup> So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who entered into his rest, has rested from his works, just as God has rested from his works. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one of you fall by the same example of disobedience."

- C. Comments on these texts
1. 4:4 is where the author adds to the foundation of his argument almost all of the main clause from the LXX of Genesis 2:2. This is the only citation of Genesis 2:2 in the NT.
    - a. This brings into view the Sabbath institution, because it is just this verse that is referred to in stating the Sabbath ordinance.
    - b. The basis for the Sabbath is stipulated by Genesis 2:2 in Exodus 20:11. It also stated in Exodus 31:17 for another example.
  2. The author supports what he has just said in verse 3, although works were completed from the foundation of the world.
    - a. The citation and commentary of Genesis pinpoints the origin of God's rest and its character.
    - b. Doing all of that, pinpointing the origin and character of God's rest, is in the interest of establishing the unqualified nature of antithesis between faith and unbelief, which is central to the entire passage.
    - c. The writer's over-riding concern is to set the antithesis between faith and unbelief.
  3. The point of 3-5 is that the wilderness generation failed to enter rest, not because it was unavailable, but because of unbelief.
    - a. The rest had been there since the foundation of the world.
    - b. Unbelief is the root cause of failing to enter into that rest.
    - c. In contrast, those who have believed may be certain, to enter that rest (4:3). By the way, it is certain that they will enter into this rest—the present is best viewed a movement that is in process but its certain fruition will be attained. I will comment more on the meaning of the present in verse 3, but do know that the present tense in Greek has the semantic range that includes a future sense (Burton's Mood and Tenses, ).
  4. In two texts within our passage, the author correlates very closely unbelief and disobedience, using them as functional synonyms.
    - a. **Hebrews 4:6** Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,
    - b. **Hebrews 3:19** So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.
    - c. ἀπειθείαν, (disobedience) in 4:6, and unbelief ἀπιστίαν. (unbelief) in 3:19 are functionally identical. Though the have different semantic ranges, and can be distinguished from one another, they are used in these texts in such a way that their function are one.
    - d. The same issue appears in Paul's notion of the obedience of faith

- among the Gentiles (1:5) and faith working by love in Gal. 5:6.
5. But back to the issue at hand regarding the role that Sabbath rest plays in this text.
- a. From Genesis 2:2 in combination with 95, there are two premises in Hebrews 4:6:
    - (1) It remains for some to enter it (premise one), and this premise is derived from Genesis 2:2.
    - (2) Those who formerly had the gospel preached did not enter it (premise two), and this premise is derived from Psalm 95.
  - b. The point then is that some are to enter God's rest, as per Genesis 2:2, and lack of faith bars entrance into God's rest.
  - c. What we must grasp is the breadth of the range in view here.
    - (1) Up to this point, looking at rest in Psalm 95, he has identified it as the consummation of redemption and the end of wilderness.
    - (2) The land of Canaan was a type of this rest to be enjoyed by the church at the end of the age.
  - d. Now he says that the rest of God is none other than the rest of God at creation.
    - (1) The rest of God which is the goal of redemption is the rest of God from creation.
    - (2) Eschatological redemption rest brings into view God's original rest at the end of the creation week.
    - (3) Our writer knows of only one rest: the rest of God, entered by God at creation and believers at the consummation.
    - (4) This is a fundamental characteristic of biblical eschatology.
  - e. In addition to this, we need to note that the writer specifically in Genesis 2:2 finds not simply a reference to the existence of rest or fact of God's rest, but he also detects a design or mandate that others should enter that rest and share in it.
    - (1) As the writer reads the Genesis narrative, he not only sees it as descriptive, but prescriptive.
    - (2) That is to say, he finds that the indicative of Genesis 2:2 (God resting) contains an imperative (enter that rest).
    - (3) This means that Sabbath rest is to be joined.
  - f. If Genesis 2:2 does not have this prescriptive character to it, then the first premise would have no support: it remains for some to enter it.
    - (1) Genesis 2:2 is support for the imperative or invitation to enter Sabbath rest.

- (2) God's rest is something that pertains to God, insofar as God enters into his rest, he enters into that rest to offer it to his people.
- (3) In systematic theological categories, this is one way to accent the eschatology of the covenant of works.
- g. This brings into view, then, the scope of the promised rest.
  - (1) The fulfillment of the church's hope is nothing less than the fulfillment of the original purpose of God in creation.
  - (2) To say it better, perhaps, what the writer wants to bring across is that the realization of the purpose of redemption is the means to the end of the purpose of creation.
  - (3) Redemption is the means to the consummation of creation—the consummation of God's covenantal purpose under creation.
  - (4) Patrick Fairbairn in *Typology of Scripture*, volume one, 420 develops this well.
- 6. The author of Hebrews is making explicit in the NC what is latent in the OT text.
  - a. Creation: eschatological rest.
  - b. Canaan: type of that eschatological rest.
  - c. Redemption in NT: entering into that eschatological rest.
  - d. The point is that the rest in Canaan serves as a type or old covenant expression, a redemptive-historical preview of sorts, of creation Sabbath rest.
    - (1) The rest in Psalm 95 therefore typifies the creation rest of God in an earthly form.
    - (2) The land of Canaan is typico-symbolic of the rest into which God entered.
    - (3) But the land, while being a rest, is not the eschatological reality itself.
    - (4) The rest is eschatological in character.
- D. **Hebrews 4:9** ἄρα ἀπολείπεται σαββατισμὸς τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ. **Hebrews 4:9** There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.
  - 1. Repeatedly, as we have seen, throughout this passage, we have seen that the rest for the people of God is wholly future; it is here now called a σαββατισμὸς which is a substitution in vocabulary. It requires some explanation.
    - a. It is clear that the substitution is deliberate. The question is why he does so.
    - b. σαββατισμὸς is unique to the NT, and there is good reason to think that the author has coined this term.

- c. This is formed on the basis of the LXX usage of *sabatizo*, which you find in Exodus 16:30 and II Chronicles 36:21.
    - (1) These texts have weekly Sabbath and the land given a Sabbath.
    - (2) The noun, as the verb has the reference to Sabbath observance, so also the noun.
    - (3) Sabbath resting is what comes into view here.
  - d. What motivated this term selection?
    - (1) Whatever motivated him, the effect of his using this term is quite plain.
    - (2) He is identifying God's rest (my rest) with Sabbath Rest.
      - (a) In an explicit fashion, the writer is tying together the rest (my rest) to the institution of the Sabbath and its observance.
      - (b) That is reinforced by the fact that in 4:4 he has already brought Gen. 2:2 into the discussion.
    - (3) Further, and building on this notion, we can say that because God's rest, as it is to be entered by believers at the consummation, is called a Sabbath resting, it seems that he wants to pick up on the fact that Sabbath Day observance is related to the future eschatological rest as an anticipatory sign.
    - (4) The weekly Sabbath has its significance, then, as a sign of eschatological rest. The Sabbath is an eschatological sign.
    - (5) The point of 9, then, is not to the weekly sign, but to the reality to which the sign points. The writer is not concerned here to argue for weekly Sabbath keeping, although that is there by inference.
    - (6) But the primary focus is on the eschatological reality of rest—the rest that is future.
  - e. In view of the fact that the writer's appeal is to Genesis 2:2, it would appear to be the seventh day sign.
    - (1) The import here is bound up with what happened on Day 7 relative to God's rest.
    - (2) That is the primary focus on verse 9.
2. The central thread through all of this discussion is this: is the rest in view in this passage realized in and future, or is it entirely future?
    - a. So far, the wilderness model pushed us to say that the rest is exclusively future—a not-yet eschatological category.
    - b. It is not in this passage a category of realized eschatology.
  3. There are some objections to the notion that the rest is entirely future.

- E. There are three lines of objection to the wholly future thesis.
1. The wider context argument
    - a. The writer has a strong realized eschatology.
      - (1) In 12:22, we have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem of the future is something already present and accessible to believers: **Hebrews 12:22** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,
        - (a) Certainly there is realized eschatology throughout the book.
          - i) In Hebrews 1:1-2 the book begins with this notion.
          - ii) Hebrews 9:26 makes clear that Christ appeared once at the consummation of the ages.
        - (b) That being said, however, the issue on which we must insist is that within this immediate context, controlled by 3:7-4:13, and the reference to rest that we have here, it is hard to avoid the notion that the rest is entirely future.
      - (2) Quite consistent with the overall emphasis, the writer could have used the vocabulary in a present sense.
        - (a) The writer would agree with Jesus in Matt. 11:28 "I will give you rest."
        - (b) But the issue is, in this passage, is rest realized or future?
    - b. Therefore, the appeal to the broader context only confuses the issue. We must remain focused on the passage.
  2. The second line of objection to the notion that the rest is wholly future is found in the present tense verb in 4:3: Εἰσερχόμεθα γὰρ εἰς [τὴν] κατάπαυσιν οἱ πιστεύσαντες,
    - a. Εἰσερχόμεθα indicative present middle 1st person plural.
      - (1) This is a very clear indication that the rest is present.
      - (2) The present tense demands that this rest be realized.
    - b. As we begin to reflect on the Greek syntax, something important comes into view.
      - (1) First, the present tense form that we have here certainly gives a presumption of a present time force, but it does no more than that. It does not settle or clinch the issue.
        - (a) This is so, because as Burton notes in Moods and Tenses, the present indicative can have various



- forces.
- (b) A true present would be excluded because it would violate the wilderness model and the way it is being employed by the author.
    - i) It can have the force of having begun something in the present that is not yet completed, but will be at a future point. The translation: "We are entering but not yet there."
    - ii) Or it can have a straightforward present for the future sense. It could be translated, "We will enter"
    - iii) Funk: verbs of going or coming also have the meaning of "to be in the process of coming or going for which reaching the destination still lies in the future." And that is someone without a strong Reformed eschatology commenting on the passage.
  - (2) The force of the present, in other words, can accommodate either a progressive action with a future telos, or it can have a straightforward future force.
  - (3) What is decisive for the force of the present indicative is context. And the context seems strongly to demand, at minimum, a process that is underway with a yet future fulfillment.
- c. Third, many understand the force of verse 9 and present as well as future, but because of the way they understand verse 10: **Hebrews 4:10** For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his own works, as God did from His.
- (1) There are key points to note about this text.
  - (2) Two controlling points need to be made in order to understand this text properly.
    - (a) First, because of the introduction back in 4:4, God's rest on Day 7 in Genesis 2:2 is in view.
    - (b) Second, and this is critical, a parallel between the believer and God.
      - i) And the parallel is this: the resting of the believer is to his works as God's resting is to his works.
      - ii) This means that the believer rests in relation to his work as God rested in

relation to his works.

- (3) Some commentators, even Calvin, think that the works from which the believer rests are the dead works alluded to in 6:1 and 9:14.
- (a) **Hebrews 6:1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.
  - (b) <sup>NAS</sup> **Hebrews 9:14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
    - i) Rest, on this view, means to cease from relying from your own works.
    - ii) You rest from relying on your own efforts, which are dead works.
    - iii) It means to cease from your evil works.
    - iv) The point of verse 10 is justification by faith—resting from dead works that might commend a person to God.
  - (c) But there is a problem with this view—a major problem in my estimate.
- (4) Two reasons:
- (a) First, it loses sight of the local character of the rest throughout the passage.
    - i) It is a resting place to which the writer has referred repeatedly.
    - ii) It ignores the wilderness motif.
  - (b) Second, to make this about justification involves a jarring incongruity. He would draw a direct parallel between our sinful works and God's very good works at creation.
    - i) The comparison is between God resting from his very good works of creation, on the one hand, and the believer resting from his good works in the wilderness, on the other hand.
      - a) In other words, God's just as God rests from his very good works of creation, so also believers rest from

- their good works in the wilderness.
- b) Also, and to fill out the comparison, just as God's resting is good, so the believer's resting is good.
  - ii) The point is not only rest, but that from which one rests.
  - (c) In a sense, it is a theological point.
    - i) Nowhere else does the NT remotely approach the notion that repentance from dead works is analogous to God resting from his works at creation.
    - ii) What we have, then, is a synthetic association between sin and God's activity.
    - iii) That is not permissible. Certainly it can't be the point.
  - (5) More positively, then, we should see the work of the believer is viewed positively, given the nature of the analogy between God's work and the believer's work.
    - (a) The works here are not the dead works of 6:1 and 9:14, but love and good works.
      - i) **Hebrews 6:10** For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 6:11** And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,
      - ii) **Hebrews 10:24** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **Hebrews 10:25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.
    - (b) God will not overlook your work and love as you serve the saints.
      - i) Where are these good works evidence?
      - ii) Where are these good works performed?
      - iii) Where are the saints served?
      - iv) In the wilderness as you see the day approaching—in the wilderness until the end—that is the context of the good works.

- (6) These are not dead works, but desert works.
  - (a) They are the wilderness works of the church on the way between Exodus and Sabbath Rest.
  - (b) These are the wilderness works of the church as the end or day approaches.
- d. The rest is the reality to be entered after wilderness works are over.
- e. And he concludes this section by exhorting the believers to strive to enter into that rest.
- 3. **Hebrews 4:11** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. Σπουδάσωμεν οὖν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς ἐκείνην τὴν κατάπαυσιν, ἵνα μὴ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τις ὑποδείγματι πέσῃ τῆς ἀπειθείας
  - a. Note two keys here.
    - (1) First, he speaks in the subjunctive, let us strive.
      - (a) The church is to be about the business of striving.
      - (b) And the subjunctive here has a hortatory force. It is an exhortation.
      - (c) And the striving has its telos in rest, understood here as Sabbath rest.
    - (2) Second, the purpose clause explicitly tethers the church's situation to the wilderness testing of Israel, urging that no one fall by following the same pattern of disobedience.
      - (a) Clearly, disobedience is the reality that stands in the way of rest.
      - (b) That rest, then, is something that the disobedient will not attain.
  - b. This places rest as future.
- 4. Now, to return to the other view that sees the believers resting from dead works breaks down the basic distinction the author has made throughout the passage: the present need for perseverance, on the one hand, and the future when there will be no need to persevere, on the other hand.
  - a. The present is the wilderness; the future is rest.
  - b. In this passage, *the opposite of rest is not sin but tested faith*.
    - (1) The view that finds present rest in verse 10 confuses the goal, which is rest, with the means to the goal (persevering faith).
    - (2) It confuses hoping in the present with the thing hoped for (rest).
- 5. The wilderness/rest motif makes it clear that what is called for is good works in the wilderness, and the antithesis of works is rest.

- a. The wilderness, while it is a place of testing, is also a place of redemption.
- b. 3:16 includes "all those Moses led out of Egypt."
  - (1) It is both a place of testing and salvation.
  - (2) The presupposition of temptation to apostasy is salvation.
- 6. Realized eschatology creates the wilderness congregation as the new and final wilderness community.
  - a. The index of present eschatology throughout this passage is not rest but the rest, but wilderness contrasted with rest.
  - b. The works in view in 4:10 are not sinful works but wilderness works.
  - c. The closest NT parallel to Hebrews 4:10: **Revelation 14:13** And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"
- F. Millennial Implications
  - 1. The writer is not a premillennialist.
    - a. He says that Jesus has gone through the heavens (4:14), and he has sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven (8:1).
      - (1) Once this is true, his return for a provisional earthly rule, prior to the eternal heavenly order, would be a step backward.
      - (2) It would be an eschatological retreat–retrogressive.
        - (a) Christ's return is the return of the heavenly high priest—not as an earthly one.
        - (b) Christ's return will not be his appearance, temporarily exchanging heavenly ministry for earthly duties.
        - (c) Rather, the return of Christ will mean the appearance on earth of the heavenly order.
        - (d) Christ is high priest forever, so that his return on earth will be the appearance of the heavenly order sanctuary and priest (6:20).
        - (e) Or, the return of Christ will be the earthly manifestation fo the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22), the lasting city (13:14), the eternal rest order.
        - (f) All of this happens without delay at his return.
    - b. The return of Christ will be the manifestation of the heavenly order on earth without delay.
  - 2. The writer is not postmillennial, either.

- a. First, the writer teaches that until Christ returns, the church remains a wilderness congregation
  - (1) The church remains a pilgrim people.
  - (2) The church remains a people on the way.
  - (3) This is retained until Christ returns. The church is like the patriarchs in the land of promise until Christ returns—aliens and strangers on earth.
  - (4) The creation order is theirs by right, and the restoration and consummation of it has been secured, but they do not yet possess it; they remain aliens.
- b. Second, more pointedly, the writer teaches us that there is no golden age coming for the church before Christ's return that will somehow replace or ameliorate these conditions.
  - (1) No success of the gospel will bring the church into a position of earthly prosperity and dominion, if that means the wilderness will be eliminate or marginalized.
  - (2) If you take Is. 65:17 to a future time before the coming of Christ, that is how you will have to understand the situation.
  - (3) But wilderness is not marginalized or eliminated.
- 3. The writer operates with a simple eschatological profile.
  - a. Christ and the church: the bodily absence of Christ means the church's wilderness existence, but the bodily presence of Christ means the church's rest.
  - b. That is the most basic way to put the matter.

## II. Christological Axis: Heavenly High Priesthood: Introduction in Connection with Wilderness

- A. **Hebrews 4:14 - 16** <sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. **Hebrews 4:14-16** <sup>14</sup> Ἐχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας. <sup>15</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθεῖσαι ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας. <sup>16</sup> προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος, ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὐρωμεν εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν.
- B. Hebrews 4:14-16 is an exhortation for the church to hold fast its confession during its wilderness pilgrimage *en route* to Sabbath rest, and this text marks a transition for us in our study into the heavenly high priesthood of Christ. We are

transitioning, and I think seamlessly, into the christological concern of the book.

1. Two controlling points stand out as we note the location and content of 4:14-16, and they graph onto the geographical aspects of wilderness and rest, respectively.

a. First, the location of 4:14, coming as it does on the heels of the long section on wilderness is not accidental.

(1) The writer is not introducing high priesthood arbitrarily; rather, he introduces high priesthood as it address the need of the church in the wilderness.

(2) High priesthood, as the author says, is something “we have” (“Ἐχομεν”).

(a) The we is clearly those who are in the wilderness.

(b) Christ’s high priesthood, his heavenly ministry, exists with a view toward those who are not yet resting.

(c) His high priesthood brings into focus the concrete need of those who are in the wilderness.

(3) Related to this, the author sets the earthly situation of Christ into a context that is compatible with that of the church in the wilderness: He can empathize with those who suffer and are tempted, because he has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he is without sin.

(a) The implication, of course, though not made explicit, is that Christ was himself tempted in the context of wilderness.

(b) Christ’s suffering is a thematized suffering, and it is not suffering in general; rather it is a suffering that partakes of the wilderness-hardships that test faith and obedience.

(4) Christ, in other words, to the extent he was tempted *πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ’ ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας*.

(a) Literally, in all things in like manner, he was tempted as we are.

(b) Christ, in other words, as high priest, has entered into the precise situation in which the readers find themselves.

(c) He was tempted in the wilderness and therefore is familiar with those temptations.

(d) Assumed here is not merely a common humanity, but a common context in which that humanity existed—under the wilderness conditions.

- (5) Christ, as high priest, has experienced the temptation of the wilderness, as one without sin.
- b. Second, and related closely to this, he has passed through the *heavens*. Prepare for a somewhat extended discussion of this point.
- (1) This gives a decidedly vertical orientation to the heavens, now in relation to the wilderness, and it correlates Christ's present exaltation (4:14) with the present wilderness testing of the church (3:7-4:11), as the former, Christ, serves the latter, the church.
- (a) Rest, as rest from wilderness, brings into view a future, heavenly place, with something of a temporal concern.
- (b) And, the movement in view is temporal movement from the earthly wilderness to a passage through the heavens.
- (c) Following wilderness comes entrance into the heavens, which is construed as rest.
- (d) Rest is the telos, the end point of the wilderness, and the rest is a heavenly rest.
- (2) Hence, when it says, Christ as high priest has passed through the heavens (*διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς*), the heavens, this is both the inauguration of the church' NC status as earthly wilderness pilgrims in possession and pursuit of heavenly rest, and it signals the actual entrance into rest by the HP who then confers that rest progressively on his people (4:3) and brings it to consummation (4:11).
- (a) Christ has entered rest, precisely as he has left wilderness.
- (b) And the church is now joined to this High Priest, as 4:14 says, we have such a high priest.
- c. This brings into view a vertical dimension that in some sense exists above and beyond the wilderness.
- (1) And the verbal idea of *διεληλυθότα* is that of passage.
- (a) *διελεῖσομαι* (future middle 1 sing) in Exo 12:12 brings into view the Lord "passing through" the land of Egypt to strike down the firstborn.
- i) This "passing through" is the event that inaugurates Israel's passage out of Egypt.
- ii) The Lord's passing through Egypt is the



- ground for Israel's passage out of Egypt and into the Land of Rest.
- iii) Jesus has passed through the heavens, with the context of wilderness as that which he has left.
  - iv) He passes beyond wilderness into the heavens.
- (b) What I think this brings into view is that the "passage" of the son of God through the heavens has an Exodus inaugurating dimension to it.
- (2) What is clear, at least by implication, is that the heavens are a realm beyond wilderness.
- (a) Having been tempted in every way as we are, without sin, Jesus has now passed through the heavens. And this is an Exodus out of death into life, the eschatological fulfillment of what God wrought in the Exodus out of Egypt.
  - (b) And the heavens are the geographical locus of the city, the homeland, the realm of rest.
- d. This vertical dimension, we will see, becomes a constitutive element in understanding Christ's high priestly ministry in heaven. Just a few texts will help us see this point.
- (1) First, in Hebrews 8:2, Christ as high priest, is a minister in the true tabernacle, set up by the Lord and not man.
- (a) The distinction here is between what is built by human hands and what the Lord has built.
  - (b) Human hands correspond to the earthly, and that which the Lord has set up corresponds to the heavenly.
  - (c) This is a vertical, spatial conception.
- (2) Second, Hebrews 8:5, taking into view the Old Covenant tabernacle, says that it is actually a copy and shadow of heaven: ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ λατρεύουσιν τῶν ἐπουρανίων,
- (a) Here in verse five the earthly (a reference back to verse 4) is a replication in earthly form of a corresponding heavenly reality.
  - (b) And Christ, simply because he does not minister on earth, must minister in the heavenly.
    - i) Brief point: ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ, accents similarity and difference.
    - ii) Copy accents the way that the earthly

suggests significant points of continuity with the heavenly pattern after which the earthly copied. Shadow language accents the way that the heavenly supersedes that earthly reality—the latter shadowing the former.

- (c) Third, and very briefly, **Hebrews 9:11** accents the way that Christ's high priestly service has its focus above, in the greater and more perfect tent that is not a part of this creation. <sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come (ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν), then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, which 9:24 refers to tersely as τὸν οὐρανόν, the heavens) needs to be read in conjunction with <sup>NAS</sup> **Hebrews 10:1** For the Law, since it has a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near.
- i) Verse 11, note the τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν (aorist middle translated have come, although there is debate).
  - ii) Key here, the law, as an administration in redemptive history, has a “shadow” of the “coming good things” or the good things that come in Christ.
  - iii) τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, the good things to come are given in shadow form under the law.
- (d) Good things “have come” in the ascended Christ (9:11) and the law was a shadow of those good things to come (10:1).
- i) That means that the law is a provisional redemptive communication of the good things to which it is organically connected.
  - ii) The law's as Σκιά is not “bad things” in contrast to the good things to come. Rather, the law, as the law, is itself the coming

- good things in shadow form.
- iii) The τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων, (Heb 10:1 BGT) “image of the things (in heaven)” or the “form of the things (in heaven)” render the sense here.
    - a) Inherent to the law is a terrestrial rendering of heavenly reality, as that heavenly reality is “good” and brings the redemptive glory-dwelling of God.
    - b) The earthly, (cf. 8:5 for a concrete example) is the “shadow” and the heavenly is the “form of the things” or the things as they are in heaven.
  - (e) What is of note to us is this: the common thing is the “good thing” that deals with sin.
    - i) The good things to come are “shadowed” in the sacrifices that address sin on an annual basis.
    - ii) The “good things to come” are “shadowed” in the laying of hands and confessing sin over the head of the goat.
    - iii) That is, there is a gospel efficacy, a redemptive efficacy, that supplies a “shadow” of the good things to come in the ascended Christ.
    - iv) Putting it that way requires some comment.
  - (f) In other words, the “shadow” is the promise of the ascended Christ, even as it supplied the redemptive efficacy of his presence, prior to his ascension.
    - i) Certainly this is the direction that 9:11 suggests: But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come (ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν
      - a) The good things pertain to Him.
        - 1) Good things are explicative of Him—his person and his work.
        - 2) The “good” things in view

are nothing more or less than the humiliation and exaltation of Christ as high priest.

- b) Christ, in his ascension into heaven, inaugurates climactically, eschatologically, these good things.
  - ii) The law, I hope you can see, is a shadow of these good things in the ascended Christ.
    - a) The typical, shadowy function for the law, is to mediate the virtue and efficacy of the promised Messiah, prior to his historical advent, prior to his humiliation and ascension.
    - b) The law was itself a shadow of the good things of the Messiah.
  - iii) They were promised, and not yet brought to realization in heaven, in his ascension, but they are nonetheless “the good things” associated with Christ and his kingdom.
  - iv) This is another way of speaking of the one covenantal household of God. There is one covenantal household of those united to Christ. But it is either—united with the *promised* Messiah under the “shadow” administration (a shadow of the good things to come in the NC) and union with the ascended Messiah under the “form of the things themselves in heaven” administration of the same redemptive covenant.
  - v) One covenant, two administrations, the former of which is a “shadow” communication in earthly forms of the coming glory in the ascended Messiah.
    - a) The redemptive reality is the same in substance.
    - b) But there is greater and more direct access to heaven in the NC—in the ascended Christ.
- (3) This means, then, that the whole administration of the law, the law as a covenantal administration of the

covenant of grace, is itself a “shadow” of the future “good things” to come in the ascension of Christ into heaven.

- (a) The “main point” of Hebrews 8:2, is then, at the same time, the “main point” writ across the entire administration of the law as the a shadow of the good things to come.
- (b) The first covenant, in its entirety—its typical land-rest and high priesthood and tabernacle—was the earthly and typical form by which the “coming good things” of Christ were typically given in the Old Covenant.
- (c) There is then an organic connection, a redemptive continuity, between the redemptive relation of God to Israel and the redemptive relation of God to the NC church.
  - i) The relation between them is that of “shadow” and “substance” or “shadow of good things” and the “form of the things in heaven”
  - ii) It is from fellowship with God in union with the promised Messiah in typical earthly forms to fellowship with God in union with the ascended Christ in the heavenly places those earthly forms typified.
  - iii) This is what MG Kline was talking about when he understood the theocracy as an intrusion.
    - a) The entire theocratic order, Kline argues, is a redemptive intrusion that anticipates the glory of the Christ to come.
    - b) Amid temporary earthly forms Kline notes that you find everlasting, eschatological realities (*Structure*, 156-57). Here is his point: “The pattern of things earthly embodies an actual projection of the heavenly reality.”
      - 1) This is the theological way of putting what Hebrews 10:1

- asserts about “shadow” on earth and “form” in heaven.
- 2) The heavenly reality is embodied in the earthly pattern.
  - 3) The earthly pattern is a “shadow” a redemptive and historical shadow of the heavenly things to come in the ascended Messiah.
  - 4) Kline’s formulation is a penetrating in its summary as anything I have seen.
- c) He adds, “Taking an Old Testament standpoint among these forms as belonging to the reality that is, we may say that they also point to a reality that was (as an archetype in the heavens) and that is to come (in the Messianic age).”
- 1) The heavenly place without the ascended Messiah seated (OC).
  - 2) The heavenly place with the ascended Messiah seated (NC).
  - 3) Same “good things” of heaven with law having in it a “shadow” of the coming heavenly things in the ascended Christ.
- d) WCF 8:6 Christ is both foresignified and presented to the faith of the elect in the OC.
- (4) Hebrews 10:1, then, becomes a proof-text for the entire hermeneutical understanding of how to distinguish and relate the Mosaic and New Covenant administrations of the covenant of grace.
2. What the author is saying, as I have argued extensively, depends in a very large extent upon understanding the church as a wilderness community.

3. Just as God brought Israel out of Egypt, into the wilderness, en route to the land of rest in Canaan, so the church is in a similar situation.
  - a. So, bringing into view now a larger redemptive-historical perspective, viewing things from a wider angle, God in Christ has wrought a second exodus in one greater than Moses to a realm greater than Canaan.
  - b. God in Christ is bringing his people out of the present world, understood as a wilderness, to enter into the glorious Sabbath rest of God.
  - c. That is the essential, eschatological function performed by Christ as high priest.
- C. It is in this context that the connecting gar in 15 and the statement about high priestly empathy sheds light on the significance of verse 14.
  1. Matching what we have in verse 14, but stating it negatively, the emphasis falls on why it is that the high priest who has passed through the heavens is able to sympathize with us.
  2. We have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, who has been tempted in every way as we have, yet without sin.
    - a. πεπειρασμενον δε κατα παντα καθ ομοιωματι (who has been tempted in all things as we have been)
      - (1) The kata panta, at minimum, brings into view the sense in which Christ, in his empathy, has been tempted with the similar kind of temptations we face.
      - (2) But what is the thematizing context for our temptation?
      - (3) IT is the wilderness.
      - (4) And wilderness is the place of testing, set in contrast the Sabbath-place of resting.
      - (5)
  3. But it is just in this context that the church is told to hold fast.
    - a. Hold fast to your confession.
    - b. Why? Because of the wilderness situation of the church and the way that forces from outside push us to abandon our confession—to grow weary.
      - (1) During our time of wilderness testing, we are to hold fast our confession, because the wilderness is a place of testing, threat, difficulty and trial.
      - (2) The exhortation to hold fast assumes that the wilderness trials place us in a context that is not storm free, that is not free from hardship and difficulty.
    - c. And the holding fast has a clear telos, a clear goal in view: it is entrance into Sabbath rest.

- (1) Sabbath rest is the end of wilderness testing.
  - (2) Sabbath rest in the reality into which we are pressing by faith to enter.
  - (3) In fact, Hebrews 4:10 calls the church “to strive to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by the same sort of disobedience” that characterized the first generation out of Egypt.
- d. The exhortation, therefore, is an exhortation not to grow weary in the wilderness of this world, not to grumble against the Lord or lose sight of His Word.
- (1) That is why the author of Hebrews expounds the character of the Word of God in 12-13.
  - (2) The Word searches the heart in the wilderness; it exposes sin, lays bare the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
  - (3) But as it lays bare the heart, it also directs the heart.
  - (4) As it exhorts the heart, it also comforts the heart.
  - (5) As the Word exhorts to hold fast, it reveals the good news, the gospel, concerning the one to whom we are to hold fast.
4. And here is where the author of Hebrews says something stunning about the Lord Jesus Christ.
- a. **Hebrews 4:14** <sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.
  - b. Jesus, as the Son of God and our high priest, has passed through the heavens.
    - (1) What does this mean?
      - (a) First, it means that Jesus has left the realm of wilderness.
        - i) He has entered into the realm of Sabbath rest.
        - ii) He has passed through the heavens and entered into the heavenly realm.
        - iii) In the context of 14-16, it means that he has been raised and ascended to the throne of grace.
          - a) In other texts, we read that he has sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high (1:3).
          - b) Hebrews 8:1 is particularly useful: he has sat down at the right hand of



- the throne of the majesty in heaven.
- c) The throne of grace is a heavenly throne.
- (b) This means that the author of Hebrews is saying something to this effect: Jesus has passed through the heavens in the sense that he is now in the heavenly realm, the invisible but real heavenly realm.
- (c) His pilgrimage through the wilderness has issued in his passing through the present world of wilderness into the realm of Sabbath rest in heaven.
- (2) The author makes this explicit in Hebrews 9:11-12: Hebrews 9:11-12 <sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent ( not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood.
- (a) The passing through the heavens is shorthand for entering into that realm that is not wilderness.
- (b) Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven.
- c. Second, notice that he has passed through the heavens as a high priest.
- (1) This is significant for us.
- (2) A high priest, especially in the Old Testament background, represented the people before God.
- (a) The Old Testament high priest interceded on behalf of the people, bringing them to remembrance before God.
- (b) One particular text is useful for our purposes: **Exodus 28:29-30** <sup>29</sup> So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD. <sup>30</sup> And in the breast-piece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the LORD. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the LORD

regularly.

i) The High Priest represented the people before the Lord—he had them as it were over his heart.

ii) He mediated in the presence of God for them.

(3) But the Old Testament high priest could not bring himself, nor those he represented, out of wilderness.

(a) Aaron did not have the resources to pass from wilderness into the heavenlies.

(b) Aaron was himself still on the way, still in the wilderness.

(c) The resources for overcoming the wilderness could not be found in Aaron as a high priest.

(d) He, like the people he represented, was a wilderness pilgrim.

(4) Not so with Jesus.

(a) Jesus, as your high priest, has traversed the wilderness.

(b) Jesus, as your high priest, has passed into the heavenlies and attained rest.

(c) Jesus, as your high priest, is not bound by the same wilderness conditions as you.

(d) He is beyond wilderness at the right hand of God in heaven.

(5) And when he enters into heaven as your high priest, he does so with you over his heart.

(a) Jesus enters into heaven as your high priest, not as Aaron, a mere man, but as the Son of God.

(b) The Son of God is your high priest, and he has entered into heaven as the one who opens the way for you.

(c) He leaves the wilderness and enters into heaven as the one who goes before you, and He does so in order to bring you where he is: to a place of resting beyond testing.

(d) He lives to bring you out of the wilderness to enter into Sabbath rest.

d. It is this that comes into view in verse 15: For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without

sin.

(1) As our high priest, who has traversed the wilderness and entered into rest, Christ sympathizes with your weaknesses.

(2) He has been tempted.

(a) In fact, he was tempted by Satan in the desert as was Israel.

(b) Jesus was tempted in the wilderness—alone.

(3) And to the extent that Jesus has already traversed the wilderness, you see, he has done so without sin—he has offered the obedience necessary to move from wilderness to rest. That appears to be what is being said in context.

e. Wilderness for Christ gave way to paradise.

(1) And Jesus, who is now in paradise, is there for you.

(2) He is there to raise you to paradise, to bring you through the wilderness.

(3) He has been tempted in the wilderness in every way that you have been tempted, yet he is without sin.

5. <sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 4:16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

a. Here the writer sums up the point of Jesus' high priesthood as that high priesthood addresses the need of his people in their time of need (εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν.).

b. Jesus has entered into heaven to make heaven a throne of grace, so that we might receive mercy and find grace in the wilderness.

c. When you enter into the presence of God in the name of Christ, with Christ seated at the right hand of the throne of God, that throne is a throne of grace.

(1) Grace is demerited favor to those who have no claim to it.

(a) Jesus makes the throne of God not a throne of judgment but a throne of grace.

(b) It is free, full, God given grace to sinners, who, apart from Christ have no claim to it, but in Christ have every claim to it.

(2) You can enter into the throne of grace with confidence!

(a) Christ is there, with your name written over his heart.

(b) Christ is there, interceding for you.

(c) Christ is there for you; not against you. He is there praying for you; not against you.

(d) He lives to make intercession for you in heaven.

- d. In the wilderness, you see, things are difficult.
    - (1) The wilderness is the place of hardship and trial, of testing and suffering, of loss and even death.
      - (a) Jesus is beyond hardship.
      - (b) Jesus is beyond trial.
      - (c) Jesus is beyond suffering.
      - (d) Jesus is beyond death.
    - (2) And this Jesus perfectly empathizes with you as you live in the wilderness of this world.
  - e. And as your high priest, he gives you mercy and grace to assist you in your time of need.
    - (1) Mercy is tender affection.
      - (a) Mercy involves the Lord taking pity on you as his child.
      - (b) Mercy involves a kind and loving disposition toward you in your affliction.
      - (c) The one seated at the right hand of the throne of grace has compassion for you and love for you—tenderness and care for you.
      - (d) And when you look to him, you find mercy from him.
    - (2) But he also gives you grace to assist you in your time of need.
      - (a) Think about that for a moment with me.
      - (b) Your time of need is not first and foremost some crisis in your life; your time of need is in this entire wilderness age.
        - i) Your time of need is the time between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ.
        - ii) Your time of need is your wilderness testing in this age.
      - (c) Jesus, not only empathizes with you, but he gives you grace, the demerited favor to assist you in your time of need.
6. He gives you what Aaron could not give to Israel, as we saw on 4:8.
- a. Why? Because he is the Son of God, who has passed through the heavens as your high priest.
    - (1) He lives to give you life. He has been raised to raise you. He has entered into heaven to take you where he is.
    - (2) His giving grace to you in your time of need is to sustain you until that time where you will no longer be in the

- wilderness, but at his feet before the throne of grace.
- b. He gives you grace so that you might hold fast your confession.
    - (1) What is that confession?
    - (2) That we have a faithful a merciful high priest, who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.
    - (3) That is what we confess—that is the substance of our confession.
7. And the wonder of the Christian faith is this: the one we confess gives us what we need to hold fast our confession.
- a. Jesus shows you mercy when you do not hold fast your confession, and he gives you grace to help you in your time of need to hold fast your confession.
  - b. Jesus gives what he requires; he supplies what he demands.
  - c. He himself has passed through the wilderness, and he himself will supply you with the grace to enter before the throne of grace to find mercy and receive grace to help you in your time of need.
8. First, we can say from this material that the basic focus of Jesus high priesthood is two-fold.
- a. On the one hand, in terms of his earthly ministry, he empathizes with his people in the wilderness.
    - (1) That is, he is tempted in every way as are his people, yet he is without sin.
    - (2) But the temptation is, more specifically, wilderness temptation.
    - (3) Christ assumes not only the common nature of his people in order to save, but he does so in the same context of his people—the wilderness.
    - (4) Additionally, and complementing this point, such suffering is a perquisite of sorts for him to become a faithful and merciful high priest.
      - (a) The sufferings in the wilderness are a preparation for faithful high priestly ministry.
      - (b) The high priest suffers as does his people in the same context as his people.
  - b. Second, it is specifically as the Son of God, who passed through the heavens, that we find the mercy and grace to assist us in time of need.
    - (1) That is to say, it is specifically in Christ that we find the resources to overcome wilderness and enter rest.
    - (2) Christ, having passed through the heavens, has passed beyond wilderness.

- (3) So that in him are the resources for traversing wilderness and entering into the rest that is held out for the people of God.
9. In addition to these two points, let me make another, related point.
  - a. That point is that the high priesthood of Christ in heaven is fundamentally an eschatological ministry.
  - b. That is to say, Christ continues to labor in heaven on behalf of his church, precisely because the church has not yet been brought to rest.
  - c. Intercession in heaven is not merely to provide ongoing grace and mercy in the wilderness, although that is certainly the case, it is mercy and grace to assist the church in her pilgrimage.
  - d. The mercy and grace supplied by Christ is therefore to be thought of as a grace that also brings the church through the heavens and into rest.
  - e. From this vantage point, then, the author of Hebrews associates the ongoing work of Christ as high priest with bringing redemption to its consummation in Sabbath rest.
10. High priesthood has a unique, eschatological focus.
  - a. High priesthood is the office in terms of which Christ not only secures the redemption of his people from sin, but translates them out of the wilderness and grants them rest.
  - b. It is here that we see the deepest eschatological rationale of the priesthood—to bring the church into rest in the presence of God.