

Appendix N-a

The True Meaning of *Sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9

“There remaineth therefore a **rest** to the people of God” (*King James Version*). As we will see this is an incorrect translation, rooted in bias against the holy Sabbath day of God.

Because of this erroneous translation, and Protestant hostility against the seventh-day weekly Sabbath—the Fourth Commandment—in preference to Sunday, this verse is almost universally misinterpreted and misunderstood. In fact, the true meaning of Hebrews 4:9 is the *very opposite* of the false interpretation assumed and taught by many churches, ministers and theologians.

Today, mainstream “Christianity” teaches that Christians are no longer required to observe the seventh-day Sabbath, because they deliberately misconstrue this verse to mean, “Christ has given them ‘rest’ (or, as some say, a ‘release’) from commandment-keeping.” This false claim feeds the premise that Jesus has “fulfilled the Law” *for* them. As a result, people are told, the Christian has entered into a “spiritual rest” from sin, and that Jesus Himself *is* their “spiritual Sabbath.”

Such absurd reasoning is completely contrary to the Word of God. Jesus Himself said that He did not come to abolish or “do away with” the laws and commandments of God, but “to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17-18). Nor did Christ fulfill any commandment in order to release Christians from their obligation to keep God’s laws. Indeed, He set the perfect example for us in order to *free us* from committing sin, which is the transgression of the Law (I Pet. 2:21-22, I John 3:4). Jesus did not come to keep the commandments in our stead. Years into his ministry, the apostle Paul said that he was still zealous for the laws of God (Acts 22:3)—which would certainly include the Sabbath commandment.

When we understand and absorb the full meaning of the Greek text of Hebrew 4:9, there is no question that the New Testament upholds the authority of the Fourth Commandment. The Greek word used here for “rest” is *sabbatismos* (σαββατισμος), which means “Sabbath rest, Sabbath observance” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

This definition is confirmed by other historical works: “The words ‘sabbath rest’ is from the [Greek] noun *sabbatismos*, [and is] a unique word in the NT. This term appears also in Plutarch (*Superses. 3 [Moralia 166a]*) for sabbath observance, and in four post-canonical Christian writings which are not dependent on Heb. 4:9” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, p. 856). This is historical evidence that true Christians were observing the seventh-day Sabbath long after Emperor Constantine falsely declared that Sunday was the “Christian” day of worship in 325 AD.

While *sabbatismos* is a noun, the verb form of the word is *sabbatizo* (σαββατιζω), which means, “to keep the Sabbath” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

This definition of *sabbatizo* is confirmed by its use in the *Septuagint*, a Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from third century BC. Jews used the *Septuagint* in synagogues throughout the Roman Empire; Greek-speaking Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity used this translation throughout the early New Testament period. This is why the apostle Paul quotes extensively from the *Septuagint* in his Epistle to the Hebrews, which went to all the true churches of God—Jew and Gentile.

When Paul used *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9, he did so knowing that its meaning was **well known** to the Greek-speaking believers of that day. After all, its verb form (*sabbatizo*) is widely employed in the *Septuagint*—which, as a translation, was as familiar to the Greek-speaking Jews and Gentiles of the early Church as the *King James Bible* is to Christians today.

For example, the use of the verb *sabbatizo* in Leviticus 23:32 in the *Septuagint* substantiates its meaning. *The Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint* defines *sabbatizo* as “to keep [a] sabbath, to rest” (Lust, Eynikel, Hauspie). The English translation of this verse in the *Septuagint* reads: “It [the Day of Atonement] shall be a holy sabbath [literally, ‘a Sabbath of Sabbaths’] to you; and ye shall humble your souls, from the ninth day of the month: from evening to evening **shall ye keep your sabbaths**” (*The Septuagint With the Apocrypha*, Brenton).

The phrase “shall ye keep your sabbaths” is translated from the Greek phrase, *sabbatiete ta sabbata* (σαββατιετε τα σαββατα)—which literally means, “you shall **sabbathize** the Sabbaths.” The form of the Greek verb *sabbatizo* is the second person plural *sabbatiete*, which

means, “ye shall keep”—“you all,” meaning everyone shall keep the Sabbath. Throughout the entire *Septuagint*, the verb *sabbatizo* is never used except in relation to “Sabbath-keeping.” Understanding this definition, the *KJV* translators translated *sabbatizeite* as, “shall ye celebrate your sabbath.” However, they deliberately did not translate *sabbatismos* that way in Hebrews 4:9 because of Sunday keeping bias—following the lead of the Roman Catholic Church, as *Rome’s Challenge* so forcefully argues.

There is no question that the Greek verb *sabbatizo* in Leviticus 23:32 is specifically referring to Sabbath observance. This meaning equally applies to the noun form *sabbatismos*, used by Paul. Thus, the continuity of the *Septuagint’s* use of *sabbatizo* and the use of *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 confirms that Paul was upholding the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath for all true Christians.

The use of *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 directly contradicts any false teaching that the Fourth Commandment has been abolished. As the context of Hebrews Four shows, the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest and worship is as binding for the people of God today as it was since creation, the days of King David and for all Israel of old.

It becomes clear that Hebrews 4:9 does not mean that Christians have entered into some sort of “spiritual rest” which exempts them from their obligation to keep the Sabbath, or any other commandments of God. Rather, this verse must be taken as *instructive*—that Christians are indeed commanded to keep the Sabbath day. Consequently, this verse should be translated correctly as the original Greek meant, “**There remains, therefore, Sabbath-keeping for the people of God**”—Jew and Gentile alike.