

### Preparing the way

John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christ said of John: "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Lk. 7:27). John came "in the spirit and power of Elias" (1:17). Elijah and Elisha point forward in parallel to John the Baptist and Christ. In turn we can see that Elijah was very much in the spirit of Elihu. Elihu prepared the way for God to speak to Job. Later, once Job had acknowledged the words that God had spoken to him, Job took on a role that pointed forward to Christ. Thus Elihu also prepared the way for Job to speak to his friends. In other words, the pairing of Elihu and Job lies behind the pairing of Elijah and Elisha, with both pairs pointing forward to John and Christ.\*

### Before the day of the Lord

Malachi wrote: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD [Yahweh]" (4:5). The same Hebrew words translated "great" and "dreadful" were used by Elihu in his speech. Elihu spoke of God doing "great things" (Job 37:5), and he said that "with God is terrible [dreadful] majesty" (v. 22). So Elijah's future work is couched in language that echoes Elihu's.

## Exposition

# The rest that remaineth

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*Is the "rest" spoken of by the writer of the Hebrews something that will be realised in the Kingdom of God, or is it a present experience for believers? This article looks at the evidence.*

**E**XPOSITORS OF Hebrews 3 and 4 differ on whether the promised "rest" to which the apostle refers is the future reward in the Kingdom of God or the state of grace for true believers under the New Covenant. Some writers, perhaps following W. Graham Scroggie's book *The Land and Life of Rest*, take the latter view, mainly because of 4:9,10, which reads:

"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest, he

Elihu spoke of how "God thundereth marvelously with His voice" (v. 5). These words are taken up in Revelation 14:2, where John hears "a voice . . . as the voice of a great thunder". Later on in this chapter John says, "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (vv. 6,7). This preaching is primarily emphasising that God is the Creator, an initial message relevant for a world steeped in evolution. The message matches the theme of Elihu's speech, which spoke of God's power manifest in creation. Whereas Elijah goes forth to the tribes of Israel scattered round the world, could it be that Elihu will be among those responsible for preaching to the Gentiles?

(To be concluded)

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\* Brother Tom McCarthy has also drawn attention to parallels between Elihu and John the Baptist in *The Spiritual Journey of Elihu—A Reflection*, Printland, 2008, p. 68.—G.H.

also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His".

The RSV renders verse 10 much more clearly:

" . . . for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labours as God did from His".

It is argued that "own works" in the passage is a confirmation that, in Christ, the believer is no longer obliged to keep the works of the Mosaic Law, and has entered into the spiritual respite of salvation by grace. While the latter part of this statement is undeniably correct—and such an aspect of the "rest" is both novel and encouraging—we must investigate contextually whether that is what the apostle actually meant.

### The thread of the argument

First of all, the interpretation must harmonise with the latter part of the passage: “. . . as God did from His”; and therefore the word “works” in both cases must have a strong similarity. A concordance establishes that God’s works are mentioned in the same epistle in 1:10; 2:7; 3:9; 4:3 and 4:4, and refer to both His creative and His redemptive works. Works are never mentioned anywhere in this epistle in relation to the Law of Moses. The Law itself is mentioned several times, in showing that Christ is superior to it; but because he is writing to Jews the apostle is always careful not to speak against the Law or circumcision, as is the case in Romans and Galatians. In this epistle circumcision is never once mentioned.

The references to “dead works” in 6:1 and 9:14 are generally taken to mean works that bring death and that require repentance. This implies sinful actions rather than works of the Law. Thus we are left with the question of what other works a believer might cease from that would parallel God’s cessation from His creative works on the seventh day. And when does this cessation commence for believers? It would seem that the closest human parallel is the cessation of human toil, the labour that mankind inherits as a result of the Adamic curse. This understanding of the passage agrees better with the whole concept of a sabbath rest from daily labour; a day that was hallowed by God when His creative work was concluded (Gen. 2:3).

### A future rest

Returning to Hebrews 4, it now seems consistent that the rest spoken of is future glory when human nature and daily toil will be replaced with immortal tirelessness. Additionally, 4:1 suggests a future aspect to the word “rest” in calling it a “promise”. It is true that the phrase “do enter into” (v. 3) is ambiguous and has been read by some to mean ‘have already entered in’, but this rather conflicts with the exhortation in verse 11 for believers to labour to enter in; or, as the RV translates it, “give diligence to enter into”. In other words, it is a reward that is largely decided by activities in this life. Similarly, the word “remaineth” in verse 6 (Gk. *apoleipō*) implies a saving for a future occasion. It basically means ‘left’, and is the same word used of Paul’s coat *left* at Troas but to be worn by him at a later time.

The apostle speaks of future glory in at least four different concepts: (1) as a *kingdom that cannot be moved* (12:28); (2) as a *city* (11:10; 13:14); (3) as *the world to come* (2:5; 6:5) (4) as *an eternal inheritance* (9:15).

It is hard to escape the general point the apostle is making, based entirely on Psalm 95:7-11, that, as David under the Mosaic covenant cited the provocation in the wilderness as a warning to his own erring contemporaries, they too could forfeit future glory. Likewise, any backsliding Jewish Christians under the New Covenant could also fall short of the same promised rest in “the world to come” of which he had already spoken.