

Does Hebrews 4:9 establish that NT Churches need to assemble for worship on Saturday, as Seventh Day Adventism contends?

1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. 2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*. 3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh *day* on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. 5 And in this *place* again, If they shall enter into my rest. 6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: 7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. 8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. 9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his. 11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:1-11)

What is the significance of *sabbatismos* (“rest”) in Hebrews 4:9?

1.) The word appears to have been coined by Paul under inspiration; it is not found elsewhere in the NT, or in previous writings such as the LXX.

2.) It refers to the spiritual rest of salvation in the kingdom of God, not to worship on a particular day of the week; it certainly does not prove that NT Gentile Christians in churches need to gather for worship on Saturday.

a.) If we were to say that the “rest” of v. 9, and the context, referred to a particular day of worship, it would not establish Saturday worship for NT churches, because:

i.) The rest for the saints of this dispensation is set in contrast to the rest of OT Israel, v. 6. If OT Israel worshipped on Saturday, and the NT *sabbatismos* is set in contrast to what the nation practiced then, reference to a particular day would establish that NT worship is not for Saturday, but for another day.

ii.) If a particular day of the week is in view in v. 9, it is “another day” (v. 8) than that which was practiced in the OT worship under Joshua (v. 8, Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua; this is not to neglect that Joshua was a servant of the God of Israel, Jesus Christ, the ultimate Giver of rest, whose rest was not yet at hand in the OT dispensation), which the entire thrust of the book of Hebrews, as well as the immediate context of Hebrews 4:9, demonstrates to have been superceded; so if the *sabbatismos* of v. 9 refers to a particular day of worship, whatever day it would be, it would NOT be Saturday.

iii.) The rest was yet future in the days of king David, v. 7, when many were worshipping on the Saturday Sabbath.

iv.) “But is not Saturday worship a creation ordinance, Genesis 2:2-3, Hebrews 4:4?” While the fact of Genesis 2:2-3 was not written down, as far as we know,

until Moses' day, the church is not an institution that pertains to this world and the old creation, but to the new creation, the New Jerusalem, the world to come (cf. Colossians 3:10-3; 2:12-13). Furthermore, God was the only one who was said to rest in Genesis 2:2-3, not man (who, having just been created, had not been working for the previous six days, since he had not existed). If the sabbath was kept from the time of creation to the time of Moses, some 2,500 years, it is odd that absolutely nothing is said about this in the patriarchal narrative. Various mentions and significant emphasis upon sacrifices, circumcision, tithing, etc. appears in the mention of their worship—but no mention of sabbath keeping appears. The Bible explicitly states that legal covenant which included the sabbath was not made with the patriarchs, but with Israel when they were brought out of the land of Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:3, 12-15).¹ It is natural, then, that the church worships on “another day” than the day that pertains to this world and this creation.

¹ The entire ten commandments, as the rest of the Mosaic law, were given to the nation of Israel alone. Gentile Christians in the New Testament era (and in the Old Testament the ten commandments and their covenant were not given to Gentiles either, Ephesians 2:12; Deuteronomy 4:13) were certainly not brought up from slavery in the land of Egypt (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:15)—what percentage of Christians have ever even been tourists in Egypt? Israelites, not Christians, were given the land of Canaan (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). Christians have never been to Mount Sinai or Horeb, but God gave the ten commandments to those who were there and who saw God come down on that mountain (Exodus 19:18; Deuteronomy 5:2-4)—indeed, Christians are explicitly not of Mount Sinai and the covenant given there, including the ten commandments (Exodus 19:12-19; Deuteronomy 4:10-13; 5:22-26; Hebrews 12:18-25). 2 Corinthians 3 explicitly states that what was written on “tables of stone” (v. 3) the ten commandments, were a “ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones” (v.7), and are “done away” (v. 7, 11, 14) and “abolished” (v. 13). The Christian is to live by the spirit of all the Old Testament law, but the letter of none of it (v. 6). The spirit of “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17) is not to even be angry unjustly or hateful (Matthew 5:21-22); the spirit of “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18) is not to even have a lustful thought (Matthew 5:27-28); the spirit of the law about cities of refuge for murders (Numbers 35:6-15) is to find refuge in Christ from eternal death (Hebrews 6:18); the spirit of the law about not muzzling oxen is to provide financially for one’s pastor (Deuteronomy 25:4; 1 Corinthians 9:9-10; 1 Timothy 5:17-18); the spirit of the Passover ceremony (Exodus 12) is to be saved and glory in the saving work of Christ through His death and shed blood, and live for Him (1 Corinthians 5:7-8); the spirit of “Remember the sabbath day” is to rest from one’s own works to be saved by faith alone in Christ (Hebrews 4:9-10).

“But our legalists protest that we must have some law. Surely you cannot expect us to believe that it is not wrong to steal, kill, or commit adultery in this age, they contend. We do not expect any such thing. God has taken care of this problem also. Every moral principle contained in the ten commandments has been reiterated under grace by the Spirit in the form of an exhortation with the single exception, *Mirabile dictu*, of the commandment to keep the Sabbath. The commandment to have but one God is reiterated in Paul’s statement: “There is one God” [1 Timothy 2:5]. The second commandment is found in the exhortation: “Neither be ye idolaters” [1 Corinthians 10:7]; the third: “But above all things, my brethren, swear not” [James 5:12]; the fourth is *nowhere* in the New Testament; the fifth: “Honour thy father and mother” [Ephesians 6:2]; the sixth: “no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” [1 John 3:15]; the seventh: “whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” [Hebrews 13:4]; the eighth: “Let him that stole steal no more” [Ephesians 4:28]; the ninth: “Lie not one to another” [Colossians 3:9]; the tenth: “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you” [Ephesians 5:3]. Does it not show the perversion of thinking of some men that they should lay most stress on the fourth commandment when it is totally done away by God? . . . [One who has] undertaken to keep a part of the law, it being an integral whole . . . is of necessity a debtor to keep the whole law. To exhort Christians to keep the Sabbath . . . is a practice wholly foreign to grace. In short, it is to encourage Christians to fall from grace [Galatians 5:4]” (pg. 186, “The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day,” Charles Lee Feinberg, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 95:378 (April 38)).

v.) The rest of the New Testament explicitly tells us that the sabbath was a “shadow of things to come,” a type (Colossians 2:16-17), and that the sabbath is not binding on Christians (Romans 14:5-6). Paul was afraid that the members of the church at Galatia were not saved when they started keeping the sabbath and other Jewish festivals (Galatians 4:10-11). The Old Testament teaches that the sabbath was first given to the nation of Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 31:12-17; Nehemiah 9:13-14; Deuteronomy 5:3, 12-15; Ezekiel 20:10-12).²

² “Many in their zeal to keep the Sabbath forget that it is not an isolated factor in a religious code, but is an integral part of a legal system. The infringement of this law in any particular meant the penalty of death. In Numbers 15:32–36 we read of the incident where a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath was stoned to death. This would have been the penalty for one lighting a fire on the Sabbath [Exodus 35:3]. Can modern Gentile Sabbath-keepers evade this issue and declare their innocence before the law? They do make a distinction between what is called the ‘moral law’ and the ‘ceremonial law.’ Suffice it to say that Scripture knows of no such distinction. Nor does this relieve them of their difficulty because, granted that the regulations for punishment were ceremonial, how about the sacrifices God commanded (Numbers 28:9, 10) to be brought on the Sabbath? If these are also declared to be ceremonial, then what was there left in the Sabbath observance to be called ‘moral?’ . . . It is to the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ that many go for their proof that the law and its Sabbath are still in force today. Such a position fails to grasp the truth of the different dispensations, Jewish and Christian, the one on this side of the cross and the other on the other side. Besides, none of the New Testament had been written during the earthly life and ministry of Christ, so that the rule of life for the believer had not yet been given. This is later found in detail in the Epistles. Moreover, those who would keep the Sabbath fail to realize in what role, as it were, Christ ministered upon earth. Paul tells us plainly: “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” [Romans 15:8]. So we see that we cannot find our rule of life under grace in Christ’s keeping of the law. He said: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” [Matthew 5:18-19]. These verses are often quoted to substantiate the keeping of the Sabbath. In the first place, it should be noted that Christ is here stating what He came to do and not what He would have us to do. He came to fulfill all the law, because carnal man could not. He came to pay the penalty of the law, so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us by the Spirit [Romans 8:4], “for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” [Galatians 2:21]. Of what vital importance was the death of our precious Lord Jesus! . . .

Another passage that is often misapplied is that in Mark 2:27, 28 where Christ says: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.” It is contended that this surely proves that the Sabbath is for all mankind. But does it? “Man” here is used in a specific sense for Israel, just as “man” refers only to believers when Paul states: “Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble” [1 Corinthians 3:12]. That there was a need for the Lord to remind the Pharisees that the Sabbath was for man and not vice versa, can be seen from some of their regulations concerning the Sabbath. The Talmud teaches that Rabbi Jehudah said: “If a man stepped into loam, he should wipe his feet on the ground and not on a wall.” But Rabha said: “Why should he not do that, because it might be presumed that he plasters the wall and is engaged in building? Nay; this is not ordinary building (but more like field-work). On the contrary: If he wipe his feet on the ground he may perchance smoothen out an incavation, hence he should rather wipe his feet on the wall. For the same reason, he should not wipe his feet on the side of an incavation, lest he smoothen it out.” The rabbis taught that a small man should not wear a large shoe, lest it fall off and he be compelled to carry it on the Sabbath. He may, however, wear a large shirt, since there is no fear of his taking that off and carrying it. A woman should not go out with a torn shoe on the Sabbath, lest she be laughed at and carry the shoe. She also must not accept Chalitzah (Deut 25:5–10) in such a shoe; but if she did so, the Chalitzah is valid. If a person were in one place, and his hand filled with fruit put forth into another, and the Sabbath overtook him in this position, he would have to drop the fruit, since if he withdrew his full hand from one place to another, he would be carrying a burden on the Sabbath. Women are forbidden to look into a mirror on the Sabbath, because they might discover a white hair and try to pull it out, which act would be a

Conclusion: If the *sabbatismos* “rest” of v. 9 were a particular day of the week set apart for worship in the church of Christ, the one day it could NOT be would be Saturday. It would have to be “another day,” one different from that of OT Israel. This

grievous sin. A raddish may be dipped into salt, but not left in it too long, since this would be similar to making pickle. If on the Sabbath a wall had fallen on a person, and it were doubtful whether he were under the ruins, whether he were alive or dead, a Jew or Gentile, it would be duty to clear away the rubbish [BSac 95:378 (Apr 38) p. 186] sufficiently to find the body. If the person were not dead, the labor would have to be continued; but if he were dead, nothing further should be done to extricate the body. And so we could go on (for this is not even one-one thousandth part of the Sabbath regulations), but do not these examples suffice to reveal the urgent reason Christ said the Sabbath was for Israel and not Israel for the Sabbath, as the rabbinical regulations had actually ordained? From the earthly life and ministry of Christ, then, even though He kept the Sabbath, we cannot find proof that it is binding upon us. In short, what He really did was to keep it, so that it would no longer need to be in force” (Feinburg, “The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day,” pgs. 183-186, *ibid.*).

One could also consider the “for” (*dia*) in Mark 2:27, “the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:” as “for the benefit of.” Indeed, the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (ed. Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989, 2nd. ed) specifically illustrates the use of *dia* (with the accusative case) as “a marker of a participant who is benefited by an event or for whom an event occurs — ‘for the sake of, for, on behalf of, for the benefit of,’” with Mark 2:27, rendering the verse, “the Sabbath was made for the benefit of mankind and not mankind for the benefit of the Sabbath.” This understanding of *dia* fits the context perfectly (Mark 2:23-26; 28, 3:1-6). Verse 28 (“therefore”) draws a conclusion from v. 27—“The Son of man, because He is Lord of mankind, has the authority to determine the laws and use of the sabbath which was made to benefit mankind” makes sense of the verse, but “The Son of man has authority over the sabbath because the sabbath is binding on all men” does not. The sabbatarian declaration that Mark 2:27 requires that every member of the human race submit to the sabbath actually reverses the point the Lord Jesus made to the Pharisees—He taught that man is over the sabbath, while sabbatarians make the sabbath over man.

Even apart from the facts, which Feinburg points out, that “man” is used elsewhere of a particular category of men, rather than each and every man, and the Pharasaic regulations imposed on Israelite “man” is under consideration, the fact that something is for the benefit of mankind does not mean that each and every man is to participate in it (cf. Ezekiel 34:30-31, etc. and the use of the singular ‘*adam*’ rendered as the plural “men” in that passage and others). Chemotherapy was invented for the benefit of man, but it certainly is not for every member of the race. Snowplows are for the benefit of man, but not relevant to those in the warmth of the tropics. Man, who was created long before the sabbath was appointed and commanded to Israel, was not to be enslaved to that ordinance. Mark 2:27 should be understood as affirming that the sabbath was made for members of the category *man*, namely, those in that category who were Israelites, rather than as an affirmation that the sabbath is binding upon every single individual in the category *man*. Modern sabbatarians must read the latter conclusion into the verse, as it is not required by its grammar nor affirmed in the context of Mark 2.

Extra-Biblical Hebrew literature indicates that the Jews recognized that the sabbath was appointed only for their nation; for example, commenting on Exodus 31:17 (cf. v. 14-16), “ye shall keep the sabbath, for it is holy unto you,” “the Jews [Zohar in Exod. fol. 26. 4] make this remark, לַכֶּם וְלֹא לְשָׂאֵר עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ, ‘to you, and not to the rest of the nations’: nor did they ever think that the Gentiles were obliged to observe their sabbath, only such who became proselytes to their religion; even those who were proselytes of righteousness: for a proselyte of the gate, was not bound to observe it; for so says [Hilchot Sabbat, c. 20. sect. 14] Maimonides, ‘those who take upon them the seven commandments of Noah only, lo! they are as a proselyte of the gate, and they are free to do work on the sabbath day for themselves, openly, as an Israelite on a common day.’ Yea, they not only say, they were not obliged to keep the sabbath, but that it was not lawful for them to observe it; and that it was even punishable with death them to regard it; for so they say [Debarim Rabba, sect. 1. fol. 234. 4], ‘a Gentile that keeps the sabbath before he is circumcised, is guilty of death, because it is not commanded him’” (*An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, John Gill, on Mark 2:27, orig. pub. 1809, elec. acc. in *Online Bible* software by Ken Hamel.)

passage would prove that Sunday is the Sabbath before it would prove that NT Christians in churches need to worship on Saturday.

b.) However, the passage does not speak of a particular day of worship, but of entrance into the spiritual and eternal kingdom of God by faith without works (v. 10) in Jesus Christ.

i.) The word “rest” in v. 9 is not *sabbaton*, “Sabbath,” but *sabbatismos*. Paul could have said “There remaineth the Sabbath to the people of God,” but he said, under inspiration, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” The word *sabbaton*, Sabbath, is used 68 times in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit deliberately did NOT use that word here, because He intended to convey something different.

ii.) The rest spoken of was not entered into by unsaved Jews who kept the Sabbath in the wilderness, v. 5, cf. Psalm 95:7-11. God swore in His wrath that they would not enter into His rest, Psalm 95:11, v. 5 (The “if they shall enter” in Hebrews 4:5 is an idiomatic way of saying “they shall not enter”; note the Hebrews 3:11 translates Greek identical to Hebrews 4:5 as “they shall not enter,” etc.)

iii.) Unbelief is the reason the rest is not entered into, v. 6. One who has entered into that rest has ceased to trust in works for salvation, v. 10; one enters into the rest, the *sabbatismos*, of v. 9 by renouncing works, including the law of Moses, to trust only in Christ for salvation. How does one enter into the rest under consideration? By worshipping on Saturday? No—“we which have believed do enter into rest,” v. 3. All those who truly believe in Jesus Christ have this rest as their inheritance, whether they are saved on their deathbeds, or while being executed (Luke 23:43) and never worship in the church of God one day in their lives, while many who worship in both real Christian churches, and almost all who worship in its heretical counterfeits, never enter into that rest, regardless of what they do or do not do on the Lord’s day, even as most of the OT Israelites kept the Sabbath but never entered into rest.

iv.) One who has a hard heart that keeps him from believing in Jesus Christ alone without works for salvation does not enter into the rest, v. 7. One can rest on Saturday, Sunday, or any other day of the week but still have a hard heart.

v.) The unconverted Jews who had knowledge of truths about Jesus Christ, but were considering turning from Him back to the OT system, who were the subject of this warning passage in Hebrews (3:7-4:13) and the other warning passages (Hebrews 2:1-4; 6:4-12; 10:26-39; 12:25-29) needed to “labour” to enter into that rest (cf. “strive to enter in at the strait gate,” Luke 13:24, that is, do what it takes to understand the gospel and then receive Jesus Christ), and cease from their own works (v. 10), and were in danger of damnation on the basis of unbelief, v. 11, cf. v. 6. If they returned to Judaism they would be keeping the Sabbath with the other Jews. A warning to not return to Judaism but to believe in Jesus Christ and so enter into His salvation-rest, of which the OT Sabbath was a type and promise (even as the rest of God in creation set forth the coming of an eternal rest for those chosen in Christ for salvation from before the foundation of the world), fits the context of Hebrews 4 and makes clear sense of v. 11. There is no way to make v. 11 intelligible on the notion that the rest under discussion is a continued worship on Saturday, in common with the Jews who Paul in Hebrews is seeking to separate the audience of the epistle from.

vi.) One could “seem to come short of” the promise of “entering into his rest” (v. 1). The “entering” is an aorist Greek form, indicating the one-time action of

coming to faith in Christ. The verse makes sense if the question under consideration is the possession of genuine saving faith versus mere profession of Christianity, but how can this possibly fit into worshipping Saturday?

vii.) The passage explicitly says how one enters into the rest under consideration: by means of “the gospel preached” being “mixed with faith,” “we which have believed do enter into rest” (v. 2-3). What more needs to be said? The rest under consideration is salvation-rest through faith in Christ. Hebrews 4:9, in context, gives zero support to Saturday NT worship.

Conclusion: The *sabbatismos*, “rest,” of v. 8 is salvation-rest in Jesus Christ, which is entered into by being born again through faith, and of which the OT Sabbath was merely a “shadow of things to come” (Colossians 2:16-17). For the Seventh Day Adventist movement to seize upon Hebrews 4:8 to attempt to prove that the Jewish Sabbath is binding on NT Christians and churches demonstrates a radical, severe misinterpretation of the passage. Seventh Day Adventism practices Saturday worship because of the “inspired” writings of Ellen White, not because of the Bible.