

Entering God's Rest by Faith: Realized Eschatology in Hebrews 3:7-4:11

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It is widely acknowledged that the eschatology of the New Testament cannot be viewed reductionistically as either totally future or totally realized. Neither the “thoroughgoing eschatology” of Albert Schweitzer nor the “realized eschatology” of C. H. Dodd accurately reflects the eschatological consciousness of Jesus or the early church. Rather, the more nuanced position developed by Oscar Cullmann, William Manson, Geerhardus Vos, Hermann Ridderbos, George Eldon Ladd, Andrew Lincoln, and a host of others, more adequately captures the precise balance of the now and the not-yet that virtually every page of the New Testament seems to presuppose. The great in-breaking of the day of the Lord has already occurred in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, ushering in “the last days” (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Jas. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3). Indeed, “the ends of the ages have come upon” the New Israel, standing as it does on the verge of entrance to the promised eternal inheritance of light and glory (1 Cor. 10:11). Yet this emphatically realized dimension of New Testament eschatology in no way detracts from or diminishes the future hope that remains as-yet unfulfilled – the return of Christ in glory, the resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, and the restoration of all things in the new heavens and new earth.

At first it may seem that these two dimensions – the now and the not-yet – exist in irreconcilable tension with one another, creating an incoherent eschatological consciousness that must resolve itself in either one direction or the other. Yet the more one studies the New Testament, the more one finds that the early Christians not only recognized this tension but relished it as a central and fundamental element of their identity and calling. They knew themselves to be those who had been called out of darkness into light and yet who must still give heed to the prophetic word, “as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in [their] hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19). Cullmann concluded that “the whole theology

of the New Testament ... is qualified by this tension” between “the decisive ‘already fulfilled’ and the ‘not yet completed,’ between the present and the future.”¹

The fact that the epistle to the Hebrews reflects the same eschatological pattern found throughout the New Testament is recognized by many commentators. C. K. Barrett, for example, is convinced that “the characteristically Christian conviction ... that eschatological events have already taken place (though others remain in the future as objects of hope), is found as clearly in Hebrews as in any part of the N. T.”² Nearly all commentators see the realized dimension of the eschatology of Hebrews in the first two verses of the epistle: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.”³ William Lane, for example, makes the following comment:

The characterization of the present time as “this final age” is qualitative and indicative of the dominant eschatological orientation of the writer’s thought. He is persuaded that certain decisive events have already taken place marking the fulfillment of the promise and foreshadowing of the OT Scriptures, and that certain other decisive and final events will yet occur.⁴

Many other citations could be adduced to show that the eschatology of Hebrews is generally regarded as conforming to the general pattern of New Testament eschatology.⁵

However, this apparent consensus conceals hidden disagreements. The precious oil of unity may be dripping down the collective beard of New Testament scholarship but not down to the very edges of the robe of Hebrews. Discord, dissension, and dispute erupt over questions regarding the way the author of Hebrews develops and paraenetically employs that eschatological

¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. Sidney G. Sowers (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 172.

² C. K. Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, edited by W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 364.

³ Translation mine, and so for the rest of the paper, except where otherwise noted.

⁴ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), p. 10.

⁵ “In classical Judaism the present age and the age to come were successive, but in the New Testament there is a decided overlap between them. Believers now take part in the age to come (6:4-5), but the fulness of this experience will be realized only after the second coming of Christ. On this point the teaching of the epistle [to the Hebrews] is completely consistent with that of the Pauline Epistles.” William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), p. 323.

tension in the course of his homily. In particular, there is debate over the proper interpretation and paraenetic significance of the wilderness-motif in the epistle. As Attridge points out, “one of the most controverted questions in the study of the Epistle to the Hebrews is the nature of the eschatological perspective which it represents, and a focal point of the debate about this issue is the passage on the ‘rest’ which awaits the addressees (4:1-11).”⁶

The debate began in 1938 when Ernst Käsemann argued that “the principal motif” of Hebrews is “the wandering of the people of God.”⁷ He argued that the author draws heavily upon the experience of the people of God in previous eras of redemptive history in order to instruct and exhort his hearers in their similar situation of pilgrimage and testing. This theme receives its primary exposition in Hebrews 3:7–4:11, where the author’s hearers are likened to Israel in the wilderness. This section concludes with a paraenetic exhortation: “Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same pattern of unbelief” (4:11). In subsequent chapters, the author picks up this theme and continues to explore the paraenetic implications of the church’s eschatological hope.⁸ It is clear that the author not only has a theological interest but a hortatory urgency as well. Käsemann’s work in drawing attention to this fact “has been so influential that for many modern interpreters the center [of Hebrews] is now to be found in the epistle’s paraenesis and not its theological expositions.”⁹

However, other aspects of Käsemann’s thesis have not been so influential. Most have offered constructive criticism. For example, recent proponents of Käsemann’s fundamental thesis have replaced the “wandering motif” (which seems to imply aimless futility) with “the pilgrimage motif”¹⁰ or “the wilderness-motif.”¹¹ In addition, Käsemann has not been followed in

⁶ Harold W. Attridge, “‘Let Us Strive to Enter That Rest’: The Logic of Hebrews 4:1-11,” *HTR* 73 (1980) 279.

⁷ Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 17.

⁸ “The motif of the wandering people of God is unfolded clearly and with emphasis in the closing section of the letter, beginning with 10:19.” Käsemann, p. 22.

⁹ David J. MacLeod, “The Doctrinal Center of the Book of Hebrews,” *BSac* 146 (1989) 296.

¹⁰ William G. Johnsson, “The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews,” *JBL* 97 (1978) 239-51.

his suggestion that Hebrews was influenced by the Gnostic myth of the redeemed redeemer.¹² Today the hypothesis of a Gnostic background is no longer regarded as plausible by most scholars.¹³

But there has also been more substantial criticism. While welcoming Käsemann's observation of the importance, if not the centrality, of the wilderness-wandering motif in the epistle, along with the paraenetic focus that results when it is viewed from this perspective, several scholars have raised serious questions about Käsemann's conclusion that "one possesses the εὐαγγέλιον on earth *only* as ἐπαγγελία," and therefore "the attitude of faith *can only* be described as wandering."¹⁴ These scholars argue that the pilgrimage model (which they acknowledge to be of importance for Hebrews) must not be interpreted on the assumption that the church is simply waiting for a rest that is *entirely* future and that *only* begins with the conclusion of the pilgrimage. They question Käsemann's use of the word "only." Is it not reductionistic and one-sided to say that the gospel is possessed *only* as promise? Is there not also a sense in which the people of God already begin to enter God's Sabbath rest by faith even in the midst of their pilgrimage? Have Käsemann and his followers misunderstood "the logic of the typological exhortation" of Hebrews?¹⁵

¹¹ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, edited by Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), p. 45.

¹² It should be noted that Käsemann qualified his thesis by stating, "The appropriation of the mythical tradition [by the author of Hebrews] does not occur naively, but critically. The gospel makes use of it only insofar as it retains mastery of the myth, construes it as a question put to Christ by the one in need of redemption, and interprets Christ as the answer to this question." Käsemann, p. 182.

¹³ MacLeod, p. 297 n29. Lincoln argues that "it is ... to the Septuagint usage that we should look for the background of this term [κατάπαυσις] rather than to gnostic sources." A. T. Lincoln, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, edited by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 208 (cf. p. 219, footnote 32). According to Lincoln, "Hofius has convincingly refuted Käsemann's thesis [regarding the gnostic background of Hebrews] and shown that the roots of this concept lie in Jewish apocalyptic literature" (p. 210). Otfried Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970).

¹⁴ Käsemann, pp. 19, 37 (emphasis mine).

¹⁵ Attridge, p. 284.

I believe that the affirmative answers to these questions given by these scholars are fundamentally correct. Lincoln states this position (and that of this paper) well:

The model of the church as a company of wanderers on a journey to a distant heavenly resting place reflected in the title of Käsemann's study of Hebrews, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*, has misled too many commentators to suppose that the rest is entirely future.... The time for entry into rest is "today," not after death or at the parousia. On this new day the rest has become a reality for those who believe but remains a promise that some may fail to achieve through disobedience, so that all are exhorted to strive to enter it.¹⁶

Although Lincoln's position is basically correct, his remarks are motivated by another discussion – whether the fourth commandment remains in force for new covenant believers. As a result, he does not bring out the positive paraenetic implications of his results. I do not wish to imply that Hebrews 4 is irrelevant to the debate over Sabbath observance in the new covenant age. But the precise purpose of this paper is to defend and expand Lincoln's exegesis with the goal of arriving at a better understanding of the manner in which the author homiletically employs his realized eschatological typology in this λόγος παρακλήσεως (13:22).¹⁷

Before we move on, it is important to have a correct understanding of the *status quaestionis*. The question is not whether the eschatology of Hebrews is entirely future – as if Käsemann denied that there was any realized dimension at all in the epistle. Most parties in this debate agree that Hebrews shares the eschatological outlook of the rest of the New Testament. For example, Richard Gaffin (whom I will use in the remainder of this paper as the chief representative of Käsemann's position) freely admits that

"Realized eschatology" ... undoubtedly has an integral place in the message of Hebrews.... Undoubtedly, in keeping with his eschatology as a whole, the writer *could* have spoken of rest as present. But *does* he, in this passage [chs. 3-4] or elsewhere, either expressly or by implication? That he has a realized eschatology does not mean that the rest in chapters 3-

¹⁶ Lincoln, p. 211.

¹⁷ For evidence that Hebrews is an early Christian homily see Harold W. Attridge, "Paraenesis in a Homily (λόγος παρακλήσεως): The Possible Location of, and Socialization In, the 'Epistle to the Hebrews,'" *Semeia* 50 (1990) 211-26.

4 must somehow be present, no more than Jesus' statements that the kingdom is present mean that he cannot also, in other places, only speak of it as future.¹⁸

Gaffin does not deny that Hebrews emphasizes the realized aspect of eschatology. He simply denies that the author employs the concept of "God's rest" to allude to that realized dimension. Thus, the question is this: What is the precise nature of the analogy between the wilderness generation and the church before the parousia? Which element of this analogy points to the realized dimension and which to the future dimension? And, further, what is the logic of the author's paraenetic use of this analogy?

A look at the two contending interpretations of Heb. 3:7–4:11 will help frame the discussion. I want to use the exchange between Andrew Lincoln and Richard Gaffin to structure my comments. I will use these two scholars as representatives of each camp, supplementing their arguments as I go. In this debate, we will focus on the two main options with respect to the time, means, and nature of entering God's rest.

Lincoln's position, as we have already seen, is that the time of entering God's rest is coincident with the "today" of Ps. 95:7 (cited 3:7, 15; 4:7). Although the future dimension cannot be totally eliminated, Lincoln argues that God's rest is not *entirely* future. The addressees of Hebrews are being exhorted to enter God's rest *now* through the exercise of eschatological faith, that is, the faith defined later in the epistle. "According to Hebrews 11:1 faith makes real in the present that which is future, unseen, or heavenly. This is why those who have believed can be said to enter the rest already" (p. 211).¹⁹ Given Lincoln's position regarding the time and means of entering, it follows that the nature of God's rest is primarily a "salvation rest" (p. 213). Although it is closely related to God's rest after the hexaemeron of creation, and although it will

¹⁸ Gaffin, "A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God," pp. 34, 44. See footnote 11. Käsemann also acknowledges that Hebrews "is no stranger to the idea that the eschatological event already took place in the past" (p. 26). He adds that the concept of "promise" in Hebrews implies an "eschatological tension ... between the act of promise and completion, between the already fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled reality of the promise" (p. 37).

¹⁹ All parenthetical page references appended to quotes by Lincoln are to his "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament." See footnote 13.

find its ultimate fulfillment in the consummation of all things when God's original intentions for creation are realized, *katapausis* is equivalent to ceasing from "dead works" (6:1; 9:14) and thus enjoying the salvation-rest already achieved by Christ in his role as the "originator/founder" (ἀρχηγός, 2:10) and "forerunner" (πρόδρομος, 6:20) of our salvation.

In support of this interpretation, Lincoln marshals five pieces of evidence. As we examine his arguments, we will also take the time to evaluate and respond to Gaffin's counterarguments. It should be understood that my arguments defending Lincoln against Gaffin's replies go beyond what Lincoln himself has written, though I believe they are consistent with his general viewpoint.

(1) A prima facie argument

The term *κατάπαυσις* ("rest") has a spatial or local reference to the heavenly dimension so prominent in Hebrews as a whole. Lincoln writes, "One of the themes of Hebrews is that through Christ the heavenly realities have become accessible to believers, and rest is one of those realities" (p. 211). Several other images are employed in Hebrews to express this same truth, such as the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22) and the heavenly tabernacle (9:11, 23-25). "In Hebrews such spatial concepts do not stand for the eternal in the sense of that which is ideal and timeless but rather signify that the future is already present in heaven and therefore available now" (p. 211).

That the concept of "rest" belongs in the category of spatial eschatology is supported by several observations. The term *κατάπαυσις* employed by the author in this context is taken from the LXX translation of Ps. 95:11. The Hebrew word that lies behind this Greek gloss is מְנוּחָה, which is "used both for God's resting place in the promised land (Deut. 12:9) and for the temple as His resting place (Ps. 132:8)" (p. 208).²⁰ Although the word can also refer to a state of rest, a

²⁰ C. E. Hill pursues this evidence in greater detail in "Let Us Therefore Strive to Enter That Rest: An Exposition of Hebrews 4:11," an unpublished paper submitted to Dr. Dennis Johnson of Westminster Theological Seminary in California (November 15, 1984). Judith Hoch Wray disputes the connection between the concepts of "rest" and "promised land/heavenly

local meaning is probable, since Ps. 95 draws a comparison between the present liturgical call to enter the temple for worship and the prior invitation to enter the land of Canaan. Thus, a local denotation for *κατάπαυσις* in Hebrews is confirmed by the local sense in its original context (Ps. 95).

Of further interest is the eschatological interpretation of Ps. 95:11 in the Jewish exegetical tradition of the Second Temple period. A search of Steve Delamarter's *A Scripture Index to Charlesworth's The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* yielded two relevant texts.

The first one is from the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, which O. S. Wintermute dates from the first to the fourth century A.D. Although several Christian interpolations occur in the text as we have it, Wintermute argues for an early Jewish stratum within the text. The following passage is a description of reign of a righteous king from the Egyptian city of the sun (Heliopolis), four years prior to the advent of the son of lawlessness:

Even the remnant, who did not die under the afflictions, will say, "The Lord has sent us a righteous king so that *the land* will not become a desert." He will command that no royal matter be presented for three years and six months. *The land* will be full of good in an abundant well-being. Those who are alive will go to those who are dead, saying, "Rise up and be with us in *this rest*" (Ap. Elijah 2:51-53).²¹

Notice that the remnant's well-being in the land is referred to as "this rest." There even appears to be an eschatological implication, since the dead are exhorted to "rise up" and join the remnant in the rest in the land. Although the land is Egypt, the terms in which it is described are allusive to the promised land.

city" in Hebrews, but offers little argument. *Rest as a Theological Metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Gospel of Truth: Early Christian Homiletics of Rest* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 91, 93.

²¹ *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, edited by James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 743-4. The translation of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is by O. S. Wintermute. In a footnote on this passage, Wintermute argues that this passage is probably independent of Hebrews, since the land is Egypt and the king is not the Messiah. "A writer who was in any way dependent on Heb. would probably not have made that sort of adjustment. It is our opinion that this discussion of 'rest' goes back to the early Jewish stratum within the text" (p. 744, footnote t3).

The second text is from *Joseph and Asenath*, which is clearly a Jewish document. It occurs in the passage where Asenath is converted and Joseph places his hand upon her to pray for her:

Lord God of my father Israel, the Most High, the Powerful One of Jacob ... you, Lord, bless this virgin, and renew her by your spirit, and form her anew by your hidden hand ... and number her among your people that you have chosen before all things came into being, and *let her enter your rest which you have prepared for your chosen ones*, and live in your eternal life forever and ever (Joseph and Asenath 8:9).²²

C. Burchard, commenting on this passage, states that the term translated “rest” is *katapausis* (the same term in Hebrews), and that it refers not to a state of body or mind, but to a place in heaven prepared for the saved.²³ He cites two later passages in support:

And she herself [Repentance] is guardian of all virgins, and loves you very much, and is beseeching the Most High for you at all times and for all who repent she prepared *a place of rest in the heavens* (15:7).

And Asenath loved Levi exceedingly beyond all of Joseph's brethren, because he was one who attached himself to the Lord, and he was a prudent man and a prophet of the Most High and sharp-sighted with his eyes ... and he knew unspeakable (mysteries) of the Most High God and revealed them to Asenath in secret, because he himself, Levi, would love Asenath very much, and see her *place of rest in the highest* (22:13).²⁴

So we have at least two examples from the period where “rest” is used spatially or locally. It is very likely that the author of Hebrews was acquainted with this exegetical tradition.²⁵ The result is that “the writer of Hebrews views ‘rest’ as an eschatological resting place with associations with the heavenly promised land, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the heavenly sanctuary” (Lincoln, p. 209). Such heavenly places are not described in Hebrews as being enjoyed or inherited solely in the final consummation but, in keeping with their spatial or vertical character, are supernatural realities presently enjoyed by the people of God by faith.

²² *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, edited by James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 213. The translation of Joseph and Asenath is by C. Burchard. He dates the document from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D.

²³ *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, p. 213 footnote f2.

²⁴ *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, pp. 227, 239.

²⁵ Lincoln also cites the Tosefta, the Jerusalem Talmud, and other rabbinic writings (p. 209).

Gaffin does not attempt to answer Lincoln's first argument in any detail. Presumably Gaffin does not regard this argument as convincing because he thinks the "unmistakably local character" of God's rest in the Old Testament as well as in Hebrews supports *his* position, for he goes on to say, "[This rest] appears to be identical to the 'heavenly homeland' (11:16) and correlative with 'the city with foundations' (11:10), 'the lasting city to come' (13:14)" (Gaffin, pp. 38f).²⁶ Granted that God's rest has a local character in the OT and in Hebrews, Gaffin seems to think that we cannot draw the conclusion that it is therefore partially realized.

A case could be made, however. First, we can show that the Old Testament theology of rest makes a strong connection between the land and the tabernacle-temple.²⁷ Second, the author of Hebrews views the sanctuary, in keeping with his realized eschatological viewpoint, as a heavenly and thus present reality to which believers have access by faith (Heb. 10:19ff; 12:22ff). Eschatology thus takes on a vertical (and hence realized) dimension.²⁸ The conclusion that Lincoln wants to draw from these two observations is quite reasonable: if Hebrews verticalizes the sanctuary in the interests of realized eschatology, should we not expect the same with the concept of the land, which we have already seen to be theologically connected in the OT with the tabernacle-temple?

Although Gaffin does not respond to this argument, it may be useful for us to ponder what his options might be. Could Gaffin question the second premise? This does not seem to be a likely option, since he has elsewhere affirmed that "the New Testament contains no more

²⁶ All parenthetical page references appended to quotes by Gaffin are to his "A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God." See footnote 11.

²⁷ Craig R. Koester connects land, sanctuary, and sabbath day (pp. 257-8) and sees the concept of "rest" in Hebrews as having both a temporal and a spatial (heavenly) significance (p. 268). *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2001). See also David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 162-3.

²⁸ George W. MacRae argues this point in "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 12 (1978) 179-99. Although I cannot follow him in his view that the author's realized eschatology has Hellenistic-Philonic-Alexandrian origins, he correctly contends that the heavenly temple imagery in Hebrews reflects his "vertical" and hence "realized" eschatological perspective.

impressive presentation of the realized eschatological dimension of [Christ's] person and work than" Hebrews' description of his heavenly priesthood in the heavenly sanctuary.²⁹ What about the first premise then? Could Gaffin question the biblical-theological connection between the land and the tabernacle? Possibly. But my hunch is that even if he were tempted in that direction, he would back away from such a tack. His use of the phrase "the heavenly city-sanctuary" could indicate that he sees the two aspects (land and sanctuary) as indissolubly connected.³⁰

Ultimately, I think we must grant Gaffin the right to argue that Lincoln's argument is not decisive and that at most it only creates a presumption in favor of Lincoln's view. The manner in which Hebrews handles a theme such as the sanctuary would lead one to expect a similar treatment of a related theme like the land. If the one is verticalized in the interests of realized eschatology, then we should be prepared to find evidence of a similar verticalization of the other. Gaffin can admit this. But he would simply argue that a careful investigation of the manner in which Hebrews handles the theme of rest in 3:7–4:11 has not confirmed our expectations. He states this forcefully:

That "the eschatological benefits of salvation are already present" is beyond question. Certainly that is not the issue here; I myself have already drawn attention to the realized side of the writer's eschatology above.... The sole issue here is whether in fact 3:7ff. teach, either expressly or by implication, that God's rest is already present for the church. How does the notion of rest function *in these verses*? The fact that realized eschatological elements are undeniable elsewhere in Hebrews has no decisive bearing on answering that question (p. 42).

²⁹ Gaffin, "Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 222f. We have no reason to doubt that Gaffin would accept MacRae's thesis (his speculation regarding its Philonic origin aside) that the heavenly sanctuary motif in Hebrews functions as part of a realized, vertical eschatology.

³⁰ "In the mode of this union with Christ, the exalted high priest, [believers] while still on earth, have already entered *the heavenly city-sanctuary*, where he, their 'author-leader' (*archegos*, 2:10; cf. 12:2) and 'forerunner' (6:20), has gone before them; they are there, and already share in attendant eschatological benefits, because he is there" ("A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits," pp. 34f).

For this reason, I am willing to admit that this first argument is inconclusive. We must, as Gaffin says, examine how the notion of rest functions in the text itself. However, as we shall see, I believe Lincoln's argument still holds. I am not convinced that an objective examination of how "the notion of rest functions in these verses" forces us, contrary to our *prima facie* expectations, to conclude that God's rest is totally future. The text itself provides several clues that would naturally confirm our expectation of finding a realized eschatological element in the notion of rest, were it not for a pre-commitment to Käsemann's wandering-people-of-God motif. In what follows, notice that all of Gaffin's counterarguments ultimately reduce to an appeal to that single presupposition.

(2) The dictum of Heb. 4:3

We turn then to Lincoln's second argument. He posits that we have objective textual confirmation of his thesis in the present tense employed in Heb. 4:3: "It is we who have believed who *are entering* that rest" (Εἰσερχόμεθα γὰρ εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν οἱ πιστεύσαντες). Although it is true that the present tense can have a future force to indicate the certainty of the action, Lincoln's translation seems more natural. Several other scholars besides Lincoln support this translation.³¹ Attridge, for example, asserts that "this verb should not be taken simply as a futuristic present, referring only to the eschaton or to the individual's entry to the divine realm at death, but as a reference to the complex process on which 'believers' (οἱ πιστεύσαντες) are even now engaged, although this process will certainly have an eschatological consummation."³²

³¹ Barrett, p. 372; deSilva, p. 155; Lane, p. 99. Although he denies the presence of realized eschatology in Hebrews, Hugh Montefiore nevertheless acknowledges the grammatical point: "Contrary to some commentators, the Greek text [of Heb. 4:3] means neither that they are certain to enter, nor that they will enter, but that they are already in process of entering." Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 83. Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 95.

³² Harold W. Attridge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 126. Similarly Donald Hagner: "While the rest in its fullest sense remains a future expectation, there is also a sense in which we are already entering into that rest now, and therefore it is already ours." Hagner, *Hebrews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), p. 69.

While admitting that the present tense may sometimes be used with a future reference, the seventeenth-century puritan divine John Owen argued that “whenever there is such an enallage³³ of tenses, the instant accomplishment of the thing supposed future is intended; which cannot be said with respect unto eternal rest in heaven.” Furthermore, he offered the following rule of exegesis: we should not resort to this rare use of the present unless “the nature of the thing spoken of doth necessarily require it.”³⁴

However, Gaffin and those following in Käsemann’s footsteps argue that the context requires that εἰσερχόμεθα be translated “we will enter,” otherwise (N.B.) “*it would violate the way the wilderness-model is being used*” (p. 43). According to that model, the land of Canaan functions as a type of our enjoyment of the inheritance in the *future* consummation. We shall examine the validity of Käsemann’s “wilderness-model” in greater detail below, but for now it is illuminating to observe that Gaffin resorts to a rare use of the present in spite of his assertion that “the writer *could* have spoken of eschatological rest as already present for believers; a statement like that of Jesus in Matt 11:28-30 (‘Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.’) is thoroughly in harmony with the eschatology of Hebrews” (p. 42). Gaffin virtually admits that he has chosen this rare use of the present even though the nature of the thing does not absolutely require it.

To reinforce his argument, Gaffin appeals to a parallel text: “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). He asserts (and I think correctly) that “these tribulations are not the conditions under which the kingdom is now being realized, but through which believers must presently pass to reach the kingdom beyond” (p. 44). But there is a

³³ Enallage (“interchange”) is a figure of speech involving the substitution of one grammatical form for another. Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, revised by Gordon M. Messing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 678.

³⁴ John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), pp. 256f. “This tense is not to be imposed on the places where the proper signification of a word so timed is natural and genuine, as it is in this place. It is here, then, plainly affirmed that believers do here, in this world, enter into rest in their gospel-state.”

significant problem with Gaffin's appeal to this text as a theological parallel.³⁵ The context of Heb. 4:3 makes no reference to tribulations and the necessity of perseverance in the midst of trials. Only faith is mentioned in the text as the means by which we enter God's rest. In fact, Heb. 4:3 uses the aorist participle in a way that suggests a very simple translation: It is believers (οἱ πιστεύσαντες) – as opposed to unbelievers – who are entering God's rest. Gaffin brings in the concept of perseverance through tribulation even though it is not present in the immediate context. It is true that Israel in the wilderness experienced tribulation. It is also true that in other passages in Hebrews our pilgrimage in this world is viewed as a time of trial, testing, and tribulation (11:37f). But Heb. 3:7–4:11 does not contain any reference to such ideas that would support the use of Acts 14:22 as a valid parallel.

Thus, Gaffin's response is compelling only if Käsemann's thesis is accepted as already established. We'll examine that thesis in a moment, but for now it appears that Hebrews 4:3 is fairly explicit support for Lincoln's thesis.

(3) "Today"

Lincoln adduces further textual support for a realized interpretation of God's rest in the refrain, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (3:7, 15; 4:7; cf. 3:13). The author of Hebrews applies the exhortation of Ps. 95:7 directly to the new covenant people of God. His basis for doing so is simple: if the old covenant people of God had already entered God's rest under the leadership of Joshua, then God would not have renewed the offer in David's day (4:7-9). Therefore, the "promise of entering still stands" (v 1), since those who were

³⁵ Gaffin attempts to use Acts 14:22 as a *grammatical* parallel as well: the same verb is used in the present tense with a future meaning. However, the present *infinitive* is normally expected in constructions with δεῖ. But in Heb. 4:3 we have a different construction: the author (purposely it seems) chooses the present *indicative*, which – unlike the infinitive – is normally employed to express, if not to emphasize, the progressive aspect. Cf. Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), p. 29. In addition, the present infinitive has an inherently future meaning anyway, which probably explains why the future infinitive is so rare (5x in the NT).

formerly offered that rest failed to enter it because of unbelief (v 6). Lincoln is therefore correct when he argues:

The writer can apply the “today” of Psalm 95:11 [sic] to the present situation of his readers (3:13-15), and the next chapter indicates why. God, through the psalmist, was setting a future date for making His rest available (cf. 4:7,8). That time has now come: “Today, when you hear his voice.” The readers had now heard God’s voice as it spoke through Christ in these last days (1:1,2) and received the promise of entering the rest. “Today” brackets the period of “already” and “not yet” as regards God’s rest for those who live during the period when the ages overlap. *The time for entry into rest is “today,” not after death or at the parousia.* On this new day the rest has become a reality for those who believe but remains a promise that some may fail to achieve through disobedience, so that all are exhorted to strive to enter it (p. 212, emphasis mine).

The author’s paraenetic exhortation finds its inspiration in David’s (Ps. 95:7ff). This is evident from the way the author of Hebrews weaves several words from Ps. 95:7ff into his own paraenesis: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving *heart* that turns away from the living God, but encourage one another daily, as long as it is called *Today*, so that none of you may be *hardened* by the deceitfulness of sin” (3:12f). Not only the language but especially the sense of urgency finds its point of departure in Ps. 95. In fact, the urgency is heightened by the fact that Hebrews does not view Ps. 95:7ff as being addressed primarily to the people of God of David’s day, but as a proleptic offer of salvation-rest that would be definitively achieved in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He introduces the quotation from Ps. 95 in a startling manner, showing that he regards it as the direct voice of God speaking to the new covenant people of God: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit *says*, ‘Today ...’” (3:7).³⁶ This reading is confirmed by what he says later on: “Since therefore it remains for some to enter [God’s rest], and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not enter because of unbelief, he

³⁶ If Ps. 95 was used in the worship of the primitive church, the absence of any explanation on the author’s part for his (to our minds) anachronistic use of this psalm will seem less puzzling. It was presumably no occasion of puzzlement for his original audience, steeped as they were in Jewish modes of interpretation. “The liturgical use of the psalm at this day by Jews (for whom it is one of the special psalms appointed for the inauguration of the sabbath) and Christians (for whom it has been from very early times an integral part of the service of morning prayer) no doubt perpetuates earlier practice, in which it was sung as part of the temple service for the sabbath day.” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, revised ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 97f.

again defines a certain day, 'Today,' saying in David after such a long time, as has already been said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts'" (4:6-7). Lane rightly explains that the author views

Ps 95:7b-8a [as] a prophetic announcement that God was determining a future date for making his rest available.... That time has come. It is the final period of redemptive history, which has begun with the speaking of God through his Son (1:1-2a). It is the present time of salvation for the Christian community, for whom the issue of entrance into God's rest remains alive.³⁷

Thus, the concluding exhortation of this paragraph has an eschatological urgency to it: "Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest!" (4:11). Respond "today" to God's gospel promise! "Therefore, we must pay even more careful attention to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels was firm and every transgression and refusal to hear received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation which began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him?" (2:1-3). Don't refuse the voice of God calling to you now in the gospel by hardening your heart and thereby failing to enter the rest he offers!

Lincoln's refusal to allow any separation of the "today" from "God's rest" reflects exegetical sensitivity to the nature of the paraenesis of Hebrews 3:7-4:11. It is not that two are to be identified. But Lincoln's perception that they involve one another in the closest possible way is well-grounded in the logic of the author's exhortation. Today in the preaching of the gospel God offers a promise of entering his rest which if "mixed with faith" issues in a present enjoyment of the eschatological Sabbath.

Gaffin, however, asserts that "today" and "God's rest" have two distinct time-references and should not be viewed as overlapping. He agrees with Lincoln that "today" refers to the present time when the gospel is being proclaimed. But then he adds,

It is the time of summons to faith and obedience.... In short, "today" is the time of wilderness sojourn, when God's people "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7; cf. the entirety of Hebrews 11). "My rest," as *rest*, stands in pointed contrast to the believer's

³⁷ Lane, pp. 100f.

present circumstances; it is the antithesis of exposure to hardship and temptation, to the *toil* which the present involves (p. 38).

For Gaffin, the two phrases almost stand as titles for the two phases of the Christian life: the post-regeneration but pre-glorification phase of struggle and temptation (= “today”) and the glorification phase when all our trials are ended (= “God’s rest”). Such a rigid definition allows absolutely no room for viewing “God’s rest” as being partly experienced “today,” since by definition “rest” begins when “today” ends. “To argue that eschatological rest is in some sense present in the Hebrews passage is akin to arguing that Paul views the believer’s *bodily* resurrection, and the eschatological ‘sight’ inseparable from it (cf. Rom. 8:18-25), as somehow already present” (p. 48).

It is telling that once again Gaffin’s reasoning is not based on the text of Heb. 3:7–4:11 itself. Nowhere does the text say that entering God’s rest is “the antithesis of exposure to hardship and temptation.” Gaffin conjures this antithesis by a logical analysis of the word “rest.” He seems to be reasoning as follows: we know that rest means the exact opposite of toil, trouble, and testing; we also know that this pre-glorification phase of the Christian life experience *is* characterized by toil, trouble, and testing; therefore, our entering God’s rest must be a totally future event.

But is this not to beg the question? The very point at issue here is whether or not this text conceives of the believer’s entering God’s rest as an experience that is absolutely incompatible with the believer’s present pre-glorification experience. If it does, then Gaffin is correct. But one cannot appeal to the term “rest” itself, subject it to an a priori logical analysis (“the concept of rest [is] determined *univocally* ... by its contrast to the wilderness” (p. 46)), and then conclude that one has proved one’s thesis. If Gaffin had been able to adduce exegetical considerations showing that the author conceives of God’s rest as totally future, then he would be right to conclude that entering God’s rest is the antithesis of exposure to hardship and temptation. But if there is a realized dimension to God’s rest in this passage – if it is true that “we who have believed are entering that rest” – then this entering must be compatible with continued exposure

to temptation. Ultimately, Gaffin's reasoning here – as before – is not based on any evidence in the immediate context of Hebrews 3:7-4:11, but as he admits, “flows out of the basic thrust of [the author's] argument, controlled by the notion of the church as wilderness-community” (p. 39).

(4) The “works” of Heb. 4:10

Before we address this fundamental presupposition that keeps appearing in Gaffin's responses to Lincoln's (I think persuasive) exegetical arguments, we must deal with a *crux interpretum*: “There remains, therefore, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God, for he who has entered into his [sc. God's] rest has *himself also* rested from his works, just as God did from his own [sc. works]” (Heb. 4:9-10). In Gaffin's judgment, “a proper understanding of 3:7ff as a whole pivots on rightly understanding 4:10” (p. 44). I would agree with Gaffin's assessment of the importance of this verse.

In keeping with the thesis of the book of which his article is an important contribution (*From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. D. A. Carson) Lincoln argues that in v 9 the author asserts that “the New Covenant people of God discharge their duty of Sabbath observance ... by exercising faith” (p. 213). Christians need not keep the fourth commandment by a literal observance of a day of rest but by resting from their own works (v 10), “which here have not a physical reference but as elsewhere in New Testament a salvation connotation, that which this writer in 6:1 (μετανοίας ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων) and 9:14 (ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων) calls dead works.” Lincoln does not spell out exactly how he takes these references to “dead works.” Presumably, it does not matter much for Lincoln's purposes whether these are actual sins that lead to death (so F. F. Bruce), or adherence to the external regulations associated with the earthly sanctuary (so William Lane). Either of these possibilities would suit his interpretation, since they all have “a salvation connotation.” A few pages later Lincoln makes one laconic remark that may well indicate his preference for the second option: “The Sabbath keeping now demanded is the cessation from

reliance on one's own works (Heb. 4:9,10)" (p. 215).³⁸ It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the question of Sabbath observance in the new covenant. However, I do find Lincoln's interpretation of v 10 basically acceptable, though it needs refinement as we shall see.

Let us begin with Gaffin's criticisms of Lincoln's view that v 10 defines entering into God's rest as "the cessation from reliance on one's own works." First, "it loses sight of the local character of 'my rest' (as a resting-place) throughout the passage" (p. 45). On Lincoln's view, a person ceases from relying on his works when by faith he rests in Christ for justification. Thus, on this view, the believer's enjoyment of God's rest would be a *state* of rest rather than an actual resting-*place*. Gaffin argues that the original context in which this rest is spoken of demands that we interpret $\eta\epsilon\beta\epsilon\iota\omega\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\pi\alpha\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ as having a local sense, since in Ps. 95 the land of Canaan is in view. We have already examined the question whether the local character of God's rest is a point in Lincoln's favor or Gaffin's, and we concluded that on balance it favored Lincoln's view but only by giving it a *prima facie* plausibility that would have to be confirmed by an exegesis of Heb. 3:7ff. Strangely, Gaffin thinks it is a point *against* Lincoln. It would seem that he does not appreciate the fact that the heavenly dimension where Christ presently rests (and, on Lincoln's view, where believers have entered by faith) is just as much a real locality as the future heavens and earth will be. In fact, it could be argued that one of the overriding themes of Hebrews is that the heavenly dimension is more real than any other, and that the new heavens and earth will be nothing less than the manifestation of that unseen but no less real dimension (Heb. 2:8-9; 12:27). Thus Lincoln's view does not lose sight of the local character of God's rest.

Gaffin's next response is more weighty. In fact, he has put his finger on the greatest weakness of Lincoln's (and hence my) view. The problem, he observes acutely, is that this view involves

³⁸ deSilva is critical of this interpretation on the ground that it "is a blatant introjection of the old 'faith' versus 'works' dichotomy (one that is itself in need of nuancing in light of the recognition that Paul opposes not 'good works' but 'works of Torah' in the sense of ethnic-boundary-maintaining marks) into Hebrews" (p. 157 footnote 45). Setting aside the debate over the meaning of Paul's terminology, I agree that a Pauline context should not be introduced here. As will appear below (p. 20), I see the $\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ of Heb. 4:10 as unbelief.

the jarring incongruity of drawing a direct (and therefore positive) parallel between man's sinful works and God's works. Where elsewhere does the New Testament even remotely approach the notion that "repentance from dead works" is analogous to God's resting from his labors at creation? Does it really overstate to say that such a synthetic association is a glaring impossibility for any New Testament writer? (p. 45).

This is a valid objection. Indeed, at one time I was persuaded by it and felt compelled to follow John Owen in interpreting "the one who has entered his rest" as a reference to Christ himself. I now believe that the Christological interpretation of v 10 is unlikely since it makes for a rather abrupt transition to the appeal in v 11.³⁹ Nevertheless, Owen helpfully underscores the incongruity of the correspondence between God's rest at creation and believers' rest from their sinful works. Owen writes:

[God] so rested from them as that he rested in them, and blessed them, and blessed and sanctified the time wherein they were finished. Indeed God's rest from and upon his works, besides a mere cessation of working, consisted principally in the satisfaction and complacency that he had in them. But now, if those mentioned be the works here intended, men cannot so rest from them as God did from his; but they cease from them with a detestation of them as far as they are sinful, and joy for their deliverance from them as far as they sorrowful. Now, this is not to rest as God rested.⁴⁰

How shall we respond to this argument? First, Owen's argument applies with equal force against Gaffin's interpretation. On Gaffin's view, the works we rest from are "desert-works, the works of believers in the present wilderness, that is, the non-rest situation" (p. 45), the "love and good works" mentioned at 10:24 and 6:10. But isn't it a bit hyperbolic to say that we rest from and in those works with complacency and delight just as God did in his work of creation? Gaffin would probably reply that every analogy breaks down at a certain point, and that v 10 need not be interpreted as positing an exact correspondence between God's rest at creation and the believer's

³⁹ For a detailed summary and critique of the main arguments presented by modern scholars for the Christological view, see Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 255-57. Ellingworth observes that the connecting particle οὖν (v 11) makes no sense on the Christological interpretation of v 10.

⁴⁰ Owen, p. 332. Owen goes on to argue that just as God rested from the work of the first creation and then rested on the seventh day, so Christ rested from the work of the new creation (his suffering and humiliation) and thus entered into his rest on the first day of the week (his resurrection). Cf., pp. 331-36.

rest. But this is a useful concession. Lincoln simply draws the point of dissimilarity at a different point.

Second, it is going too far to say that the author is drawing a “positive” comparison here. It does not seem impossible that the author is using the comparison rather ironically. The audience he is addressing stands in need of exhortation to the exercise of a lively faith in the gospel promises, rather than a carnal security that rests on external privilege and membership in the covenant community. Apparently, they felt that entrance into God’s promised rest was already a guaranteed fact. In response, the author says, “It is we who have believed who are entering that rest ... *even though the works were finished from the creation of the world*” (4:3). In other words, entrance into God’s rest is conditional – it is only a reality for those who have faith – and this is true, the author reasons, *even though* (καίτοι) the ultimate condition of that rest has already been met, even though God has already finished his works, thus making that rest an objective reality. But this fact should not be taken as any indication that no conditions need be met on our part. The one who would enter God’s rest must *himself also* (καὶ αὐτός) rest from his own works, just as God rested the seventh day from all his works. A correct understanding of the meaning of the human ἔργα in 4:10 depends on the observation that it is an anaphoric reference to the divine ἔργα of 4:3 (καίτοι τῶν ἔργων ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου γενηθέντων). The parallel between man’s work and God’s was not made first of all by the author himself but by his audience. They reasoned that *God’s* finishing the works makes entrance into that rest a *fait accompli*. There is no need, then, to be afraid lest a promise being left of entering any of them should seem to have fallen short of it (4:1). The author responds by arguing that if they want to make this argument, they should be consistent. If they are going to enter God’s rest then they must do so in God’s way. And how did God enter his rest? By ceasing from his works. “Therefore,” he draws the conclusion in the next verse, “let us make every effort to enter that rest, lest any of you should fall after the same pattern of *unbelief*” (4:11). The unstated premise is that the works from which we are to cease are the works of unbelief. The author could just as easily have said, “It is we who have ceased from unbelief who are entering God’s rest.”

Admittedly, Gaffin has a point: Lincoln must reckon with “the jarring incongruity of drawing a direct (and therefore positive) parallel between man’s sinful works and God’s works.” But perhaps the suggestion offered above (which is my own and not Lincoln’s) helps to soften the incongruity by noting the rhetorical exigency in which the author finds himself. It is not a positive comparison but an ironic assault on the Goliath of spiritual lethargy with the giant’s own sword.

(5) The rebellion at Kadesh

We come, finally, to the last and conclusive consideration that leads Lincoln to see a present, realized dimension to God’s rest in 3:7–4:11. It is also the consideration that will ultimately be decisive in determining whether or not Käsemann’s pilgrimage motif is in fact the controlling model governing the author’s paraenetic use of typology (as Gaffin asserts).

Lincoln points out that the primary historical setting to which the author appeals as a basis for comparison with his hearers is the incident at Kadesh (Numbers 13-14). William Lane (following Hofius⁴¹) summarizes the evidence of the “pervasive” influence of Numbers 14 (LXX) on Ps. 95 (Ps. 94 - LXX) as follows:

a. The initial exhortation, “Today, if ye will hear his voice” (σήμερον ἐὰν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ ἀκούσητε, Ps. 94:7), echoes the language of God’s complaint against his people that they “have not hearkened to my voice” (οὐκ εἰσήκουσάν μου τῆς φωνῆς, Num. 14:22).⁴²

b. The LXX translators did not transliterate “Meribah” or translate it with a Greek word meaning “quarreling” (which is the meaning of Meribah in Hebrew) but rather used the hapax παραπικρασμός (“rebellion,” Ps. 94:8). This suggests that the translators were interpreting Ps. 94 in the light of Num. 14. Although the term is not used, Num. 14 certainly *describes* a rebellion.

⁴¹ Lane, pp. 85f. Otfried Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), pp. 118-31. See also deSilva, p. 143.

⁴² All English translations of LXX texts are from Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986). The LXX text itself is that of Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart, 1979).

The incident described at Exod. 17:1-7 (cp. Num. 20:2-13) may be in view in the original Hebrew text of this Psalm. But “the LXX presents Ps. 95:7b-11 as a meditation on Num 14, and this perspective is basic to the interpretation in Hebrews.”⁴³

c. The “day of testing in the wilderness” (τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ πειρασμοῦ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, Ps. 94:8) picks up on the language of God’s oath sealing their doom: “All the men who see my glory, and the signs which I wrought in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and have tempted me (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ταύτη καὶ ἐπείρασάν με) this tenth time, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land, which I swore to their fathers” (Num. 14:22-23).

d. Lane suggests that the complaint, “They do *always* err in their heart” (ἀεὶ πλανῶνται τῇ καρδίᾳ, Ps. 94:10), is possibly an allusion to the statement that they “have tempted me this *tenth time*” (Num. 14:22). “It indicates that God’s anger was not aroused by a single incident but by a persistent tendency to refuse his direction.”

e. “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall never enter my rest’” (ὡς ὄμοσα ἐν τῇ ὀργῇ μου· εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου, Ps. 94:11) is clearly based on, “As I live, saith the Lord ... ye shall not enter into the land” (ζῶ ἐγὼ λέγει κύριος ... εἰ ὑμεῖς εἰσελεύσεσθε εἰς τὴν γῆν, Num. 14:28, 30).⁴⁴ The reference to God’s wrath comes from Num. 14:34 (καὶ γνώσεσθε τὸν θυμὸν τῆς ὀργῆς μου).

In addition, there are several indicators that the author of Hebrews is following the LXX’s lead in linking Psalm 94 with the Kadesh incident.⁴⁵ Several echoes of Num. 14 (LXX) occur in Heb. 3:12ff:

⁴³ Lane, p. 85.

⁴⁴ This confirms what both Gaffin and Lincoln have pointed out: the term *κατάπαυσις* in Ps. 95:11 and Heb. 3:11ff has a local reference to the land.

⁴⁵ “A virtual consensus has been reached that the writer read his Bible in Greek.” Lane, p. cxviii. As a result, the language and thought of Hebrews is shaped by the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text. Ellingworth, p. 37.

a. His exhortation to make sure that none of his hearers has “an evil heart of unbelief in falling away from the living God” (καρδία ποιηρὰ ἀπιστίας ἐν τῷ ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζῶντος, Heb. 3:12) can be taken as a collage of echoes from Num. 14:

- “An evil heart” echoes “this wicked congregation” (τὴν συναγωγὴν τὴν ποιηρὰν ταύτην, Num. 14:27).
- “Unbelief” echoes “how long do they refuse to believe me?” (ἕως τίνος οὐ πιστεύουσίν μοι, Num. 14:11)
- “In apostasizing from the living God” echoes “only depart not from the Lord” (ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου μὴ ἀποστάται γίνεσθε, Num. 14:9).

b. “Whose corpses fell in the wilderness” (ὧν τὰ κῶλα ἔπεσεν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, Heb. 3:17) is a virtual citation of “and your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness” (καὶ τὰ κῶλα ὑμῶν πεσεῖται ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ταύτῃ, Num. 14:32).

c. The usage of ἀπειθέω and ἀπειθεία (“unbelief/disobedience”) throughout this section (Heb. 3:18; 4:6, 11) seems inspired by the precedent set in the LXX: “Ye have disobeyed the Lord and turned aside” (ἀπεστράφητε ἀπειθοῦντες κυρίῳ, Num. 14:43).

Without denying that other incidents of Israelite unbelief form part of the background, the above parallels indicate that the rebellion at Kadesh is the primary historical incident being recalled in Heb. 3:7–4:11. The author of Hebrews is appropriating a previous moment in the history of redemption to exhort a new generation of God’s people not to harden their hearts in unbelief as Israel did. Moses had instructed the Israelites to send an exploratory expedition to spy out the land – to find out who the inhabitants were, to see whether the land was fertile, and to bring back some of its fruit. Although Joshua and Caleb were for going on and taking possession of the land, the rest of the spies gave a discouraging report: “The land which we passed by to survey it, is a land that eats up its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of extraordinary stature. And there we saw the giants; and we were before them as locusts, yea even so were we before them” (Nus. 13:33-34, LXX). So the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron: “Would we had died in the land of Egypt! or in this wilderness” they cried (14:3, LXX).

They apparently didn't believe that God could give them victory against such awesome enemies. "Refusal to believe is, in this case, clearly refusal to trust that the Lord would be with them in their takeover of the promised land."⁴⁶ Because of their refusal to trust his mighty power – the same power God had so recently exercised against Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea – the Lord cries out, "How long does this people provoke me? and how long do they refuse to believe me?" (14:11, LXX) and swears in his anger: "But as I live and my name is living, so the glory of the Lord shall fill all the earth. For all the men who see my glory, and the signs which I wrought in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and have tempted me this tenth time, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land, which I swore to their fathers" (14:21-23, LXX). The point is clear: God's people must respond in faith in order to possess the land. Unbelief is judged by forfeiture of the inheritance, whereas faith is the means by which God's promised rest is entered. And why faith? Because it was not by their own strength that Israel would cast out the giants in the land or by their own military prowess would possess Canaan, but by Yahweh's mighty arm. They could only go forth in confident trust that the angel of the Lord would go before them as their conquering hero.

Why is it so important to keep the Kadesh incident in mind in our interpretation of Heb. 3:7ff? Because "in Numbers 14 the wilderness generation are not in the midst of their wanderings but stand on the verge of entry into the promised land, having arrived at the goal of their pilgrimage" (Lincoln, p. 211). If the people had received the good report of Joshua and Caleb with faith and confidence in God's promise, then they would have been *immediately* ushered into the promised land. The author of Hebrews is drawing a parallel between Israel then and his audience now: both stand on the verge of entrance into the promised inheritance; the outcome is determined by the presence or absence of faith in God's promise. In fact, the author clearly teaches that if his hearers respond in faith to his message, then they will enter God's rest. Hence the urgency of the author's warnings: "Therefore, since the promise of entering God's rest

⁴⁶ Dennis Hamm, "Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Jesus Factor," *CBQ* 52 (1990) 271.

remains, let us be afraid lest any one of you should be found to have come short of it" (4:1); "Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, lest any of you should fall after the same pattern of unbelief" (4:11). This unmistakable sense of immediacy, this sermonic pathos calling for an existential response that must occur *now*, makes little sense on the hypothesis that the author is merely exhorting the people of God to persevere through this earthly pilgrimage of trial and temptation until their wanderings are ended at death or at the parousia.

Lincoln suggests that Käsemann's book, *The Wandering People of God*, has created the unwarranted assumption that the land of Canaan functions as a type of the consummation phase of the inheritance, while the wilderness wandering of Israel stands for the church militant *en route* to the heavenly city. As we have seen, this is also Gaffin's underlying assumption. Repeatedly, he argues against Lincoln's thesis by saying, for example, that "Lincoln's interpretation of Heb. 3:7ff is faulty because he does not recognize that virtually every detail is determined by the model of the church as a pilgrim people or wilderness community" (p. 46). But this assumption on Gaffin's part has only a slim exegetical basis. While it is true that Hebrews makes use of the pilgrimage motif later in the epistle (as Käsemann says, from 10:19 on), it is by no means clear that such is the model being employed here in Heb. 3:7–4:11.

William Johnsson, an advocate of Käsemann's thesis, admits as much:

We should note ... that at best we have no more than an implied pilgrimage motif: there is no actual reference to the people of Israel as wanderers, nor to the Christians (chap. 4) in such terms.... Thus, while not one specific term which directly bears on the idea of pilgrimage ... is to be located in the passage, the setting and overall thrust of the passage ... support at least the idea of movement toward a goal.

He goes on to add that it is not until chapter 11 that we meet with explicit pilgrimage terminology.⁴⁷ Is it possible that this later pilgrimage motif has been read without warrant into the earlier portions of Hebrews?

⁴⁷ "It is obvious that ideas implied and inchoate in 3:6b–4:11 reach explicit expression in chap. 11. We here meet definite terminology which bears on the discussion of pilgrimage: παροικέω, ἀλλότριος, πόρρωθεν, ξένος, παρεπίδημος, πατρίς, κρείττων, πόλις, μισθαποδοσία, περιέρχομαι, πλανάω, and ἐπαγγελία." Johnsson, pp. 240f.

Gaffin professes puzzlement over Lincoln's argument that Numbers 14 is the proper background to our text, since "Israel at Kadesh is not Israel in Canaan; the people 'on the verge of entry into the promised land' are not the people in any sense entered into the land. Close proximity is not arrival" (p. 42). It seems that Gaffin has misunderstood Lincoln's argument. The argument is not that Israel's being on the verge of entering the land is a type of the *invisible* church's actual present enjoyment of heavenly rest. Rather, the argument is that Israel's being on the verge of entering the land is a type of the *visible* church's being called in the gospel to enjoy heavenly rest now by faith. This distinction is crucial. In fact, Gaffin's fundamental mistake can be isolated and identified at just this point: he assumes that Israel in the wilderness functions as a type of the true, redeemed people of God rather than a type of the visible covenant community (which is not coterminous with God's hidden election according to grace). For example, Gaffin writes: "Believers have already experienced deliverance from the power of sin, pictured by the Exodus from bondage in Egypt" (p. 38); "It is worth noting here that 3:16 is also a clear indication that deliverance from Egyptian bondage, *not* present rest, provides the element of realized eschatology in this passage" (p. 43). For Gaffin, the Exodus deliverance constitutes Israel in the wilderness as a type of the redeemed who have been called and justified but not yet glorified.

But typology does not function so simplistically and uni-dimensionally. It is questionable to argue that, since the Exodus functions in biblical theology as a type of redemption, the object of that redemption (Israel) necessarily functions as a type of the redeemed. And even if such a typological use of Israel were demonstrated in other passages of the New Testament, our text clearly employs Israel as a type – not of the redeemed – but of the evangelized: "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just at they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith" (4:2). That Israel functions in this passage as a type of those who have heard the gospel message – a larger set than those who are in fact redeemed – is reinforced by the fact that most of the Exodus generation "were disobedient" and "were not able to enter [God's rest] because of unbelief" (3:18-19).

It is not surprising, then, that Gaffin's view leads to a conclusion that is in tension with his Calvinistic theology. According to his own understanding of the typological structure of this passage, the wilderness generation's apostasy and failure to enter the land (so emphatically underscored here) can only signify the loss of genuine salvific blessings (i.e., regeneration and justification). If "believers have already experienced *deliverance from the power of sin*, pictured by the Exodus from bondage in Egypt" (p. 38), and if the Exodus "here in this passage [3:16], and in terms of the controlling model, *is justification by faith*" (p. 45) then who are those "who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness" (3:17)? Gaffin faces a dilemma: either this passage teaches that salvation (i.e., justification and deliverance from the power of sin) can be lost, or Käsemann's wilderness-motif is not in fact the controlling model determining "virtually every detail" of the argument.⁴⁸

Thus we have weighed Gaffin's counterarguments in the balance and found them wanting. Lincoln's original arguments still stand. The believer's entrance into God's rest is nothing less than the enjoyment, by faith, of the heavenly dimension that has been opened up and realized in the ascension of Christ. Although Gaffin claims that his conclusions were objectively grounded in the text of Heb. 3:7ff itself and not influenced by alien factors of "a realized eschatological sort," a careful analysis of his arguments show that they all ultimately reduce to a single *idée fixe* – the "controlling significance" of the wilderness motif which allegedly informs "virtually every detail" of the author's paraenetic typology. Gaffin has imposed a paradigm on the text that is not adequately supported by the internal structure of the author's argument.

The paraenetic function of the Kadesh incident

We have seen that Käsemann and Gaffin have not taken sufficient account of the fact that the particular historical incident that forms the background of Heb. 3:7ff is the rebellion at Kadesh. By focusing on Israel in the wilderness in general – the whole period after the Exodus

⁴⁸ Surprisingly, Gaffin seems to embrace the implication that salvation can be lost when he writes: "The presupposition of temptation to apostasy (3:12), is salvation" (p. 46).

and prior to the conquest – they have been led astray and thus have misunderstood the paraenetic function of the Kadesh account in the author's homily. At this point we will now examine the impact that this misunderstanding has on their analysis of the nature of the paraenesis. That there is a relationship is admitted. Gaffin says that "the still future, unrealized side of the writer's eschatology provides the scope for his considerable paraenesis (exhortation)" (p. 35). And how does he view this exhortation? It is a summons to perseverance in faith and good works, in the midst of trial, temptation and suffering. The people of God are being exhorted not to lose heart in the midst of opposition and temptation to unbelief, but to go on in the faith until they reach their desired haven of eternal rest, finally delivered from the struggles that characterize their present pilgrimage. Since Käsemann and Gaffin assume that the wilderness wandering is a type of pre-glorification, post-regeneration Christian life, the paraenesis of Hebrews becomes a call to persevering faith and forward-looking hope rather than a call to upward-looking, realized eschatological faith. Their analysis of God's rest as totally future ignores or downplays this vertical dimension in Hebrews' conception of faith. For Käsemann, for example, "the obedience of faith is fulfilled when, in trusting the divine promise, one is willing to be led patiently through the present time of suffering into the heavenly future.... Here πίστις is in essence also ἐλπίς, and to that extent also μακροθυμία and ὑπομονή" (p. 39). Faith is tantamount to perseverance. "Faith thus becomes a confident wandering" (p. 44). Käsemann even speaks of "the wandering of faith" (p. 52). This is a de-verticalized conception of faith.

By contrast, a scholar like C. K. Barrett, who emphasizes the realized dimension of the eschatology of Hebrews, defines faith in Hebrews as "not merely a waiting for the fulfilment of the promise; it means through the promise a present grasp upon invisible truth."⁴⁹ This thought is expanded by Robert Brawley, who appeals to 2:8 and 11:1 to argue that though we do not yet

⁴⁹ Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," p. 381. deSilva takes issue with Barrett for turning this present grasp into "present enjoyment." Although the promised rest "already exists in the heavenly realm," for deSilva, it ultimately "remains a 'future' experience." *Perseverance in Gratitude*, pp. 156, 167. His is an interesting mediating position between the two views explored in this essay.

see all things in subjection to Christ, yet “the eyes of faith look into the unseen reality of heaven vertically and spatially to see the risen Christ seated at the right hand of God.”⁵⁰ MacRae states that “faith provides the assurance gained from insight into the realm of true reality where Christ has already entered.”⁵¹ According to this conception, faith is more a vertical access than a horizontal pilgrimage.

When we take the realized dimension of eschatology as our starting point, the author's word of *paraclesis* is suddenly heightened by a surge of existential immediacy, for it is nothing less than a call to the people of God to avail themselves of the vertical access to the heavenly realm that has been established via the ascension of “the Son perfected forever” (7:28). It becomes a call to enter into that dimension with “the full assurance of faith” (πληροφορία πίστεως, 10:22). According to the thesis of this paper, the precise point of similarity between Israel at Kadesh, on the verge of entering the land, and the addressees of Hebrews is this: they have both received the good news (the good report of Joshua and Caleb = the word of Christ) and must now respond to that message either in unbelief, in which case they will forfeit the inheritance offered, or in faith, which will *immediately* secure their possession of the heavenly inheritance. “In each case God addressed himself to his people with a word of promise and called for the response of an acceptance of this word of promise. Such a response is viewed in terms of faith.”⁵² The author's primary paraenetic purpose in alluding to the rebellion at Kadesh is to exhort the members of the visible church (“those who have been once enlightened,” 6:4) to respond in faith to the message that Christ has already entered the heavenly sanctuary and heavenly inheritance, thus making it incumbent upon them simply to rest upon his finished work by faith alone. “Today” the word of salvation has been announced. “Today” the incarnate Son has fulfilled all the shadows of the old covenant. “Today” Christ has achieved the long-awaited

⁵⁰ Robert L. Brawley, “Discursive Structure and the Unseen in Hebrews 2:8 and 11:1: A Neglected Aspect of the Context,” *CBQ* 55 (1993) 97.

⁵¹ MacRae, “Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews,” p. 194.

⁵² R. E. Clements, “The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews,” *SWJT* 28 (1985) 42.

consummation and perfection of the house of God. How will the author's audience respond? Will they respond in unbelief – an unbelief that expresses itself in a continued attachment to the external rituals of the old covenant? Or will they respond in faith – a faith by which these unseen heavenly benefits become hypostatically realized for those who believe (11:1)?⁵³

Conclusions

This study has attempted to deepen our grasp of the role of realized eschatology in understanding the *katapausis* concept in Hebrews 3:7-4:11 and how it functions homiletically. Several conclusions have been reached:

(1) The eschatological tension between the already and the not-yet must not be viewed as a balancing act between two equally valid forces. Rather, the already receives a pronounced emphasis, while the not-yet remains uncompromised, by means of the spatialization or verticalization of eschatology. The future consummation has taken on a present dimension by virtue of the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

(2) Heaven is a present locale – characterized in Hebrews as the heavenly sanctuary – where Christ now reigns over the future realm. That future realm is not yet manifest visibly but it is no less real. Soon, the things which can be seen will be shaken that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

(3) Accordingly, the concept of rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11 is developed within the framework of this realized, spatial eschatology. The author's exhortation to his audience to make every effort to enter God's rest, is a call to faith. By faith we apprehend and enjoy the present heavenly rest that was originally established at creation and which Christ has now consummated in his role as "the Son perfected forever," the founder and forerunner of our salvation. Thus,

⁵³ Let it not be thought that the thesis here presented involves a denial of the necessity of *continuance* in faith. Quite the contrary. A critical text in our passage is Heb. 3:14: "We have become partakers of Christ, *if we hold fast the beginning of our certainty firm to the end.*"

katapausis is essentially a salvation-rest within the framework of the already/not-yet tension of New Testament eschatology.

(4) The New Testament's use of Old Testament people and events (e.g., Israel at Kadesh) to provide analogies for the new covenant people of God must be interpreted eschatologically rather than allegorically. Allegory finds one-to-one correspondences between the details of the type and specific events in the *ordo salutis* (regeneration, justification, glorification, etc.). Eschatological typology, however, allows for a more flexible approach in terms of the covenantal and corporate dimension of the visible church between the already and the not-yet. In the not-yet (i.e., after the parousia), the church will be identical with the whole number of the elect, no more and no less. But in the time of the already, there may be members of the visible church who fall short of the promise of entering God's rest by faith and "whose corpses will fall in the wilderness." Nevertheless, membership in the household of Christ is no mere external association but an eschatological reality that can be appropriated by any member of the covenant community through the immediate exercise of faith, just like Israel on the verge of Canaan.

(5) The nature of realized eschatology not only determines the author of Hebrews' ecclesiology, but also his homiletic method – to which contemporary preachers would do well to take heed. Hebrews provides a model of the kind of paraenesis that flows out of a firm conviction that the heavenly dimension where Christ sits at the right hand of God is a present reality available to all by faith. The faith of the people of God is then stimulated, encouraged, and strengthened by a homiletical approach that, like Hebrews, strives to make the heavenly dimension real to the eye of faith. At the same time, preaching ought to include the same warnings against unbelief and apostasy that we find in Hebrews.

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