

The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11

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Although the concept of rest has been important in the teaching of the church throughout the centuries,¹ it has received comparatively little attention by biblical scholars until recently.² The growing volume of literature on this theme over the past thirty years should be celebrated.³ This includes numerous articles devoted to the concept of rest in Hebrews 3–4.⁴ Unfor-

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tunately enthusiasm for the subject has not resulted in a general consensus regarding its meaning in Hebrews.⁵ The diversity of opinion is undoubtedly due in part to the pivotal role of the concept of rest in understanding the warning found in this passage. However, the difficulty is also due to neglect of the concept's Old Testament background. Although many have analyzed the Old Testament texts cited in Hebrews,⁶ few have examined the author's use of Old Testament narratives to warn his readers.⁷ The neglected

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Old Testament background of Hebrews 3:7–4:11 can help answer controversial questions regarding the spiritual condition of those warned, the nature of the "apostasy" (3:12), and the meaning of rest.

The Exposition of Old Testament Texts in Hebrews

Several characteristics of the use of the Old Testament by the author of Hebrews are important to this study. The first is the author's application of early Jewish exegetical principles in his treatment of Old Testament texts.⁸ For example the author utilized Hillel's exegetical rule known as *gezera shawa* ("verbal analogy") by appealing to rest in Genesis 2:2 in order to explain the meaning of rest in Psalm 95. Furthermore the author followed the midrashic practice of selective editing in his citation of Psalm 95:10. By changing the demonstrative pronoun from "that [ἐπειρή] generation," as found in the Septuagint, to "this [**You must have a subscription and be logged in to read the entire article.**

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