

Can Isaiah 66:23 and Hebrews 4:9 Be Used In Defense  
of the Seventh-day Sabbath In Evangelism?  
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In February, 2009, I received a call from Chris Donato, Editor of *Tabletalk*, the monthly magazine of Ligonier Ministries, which their website describes as the Teaching Fellowship of Reformed scholar, R. C. Sproul. In that brief conversation Chris described a book that Ligonier Ministries was putting together for Broadman and Holman, a publisher associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. The proposed title of the book was, *Prospectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*. They already had three authors and were looking for a fourth. The three they already had were:

- Joseph Pipa, President and Professor of Historical & Systematic Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. He was defending the “Christian Sabbath,” i.e., Sunday sacredness.
- Charles Arand, Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology, Concordia Seminary. He was defending the Lutheran view of the Sabbath, that in the “new covenant” era the Sabbath Commandment is fulfilled by the hearing of the Word.
- Craig Blomberg, distinguished professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary. He was defending the view that the Sabbath commandment was fulfilled in Christ and is to be applied in the “new covenant” era by living for God 24/7.

Chris Donato explained that Samuele Bacchiocchi had been asked to defend the seventh-day view of the Sabbath, but he had passed away before he could fulfill that assignment. Chris said that Ligoniers had gotten a copy of my book, *In Granite or Ingrained: What the Old and New Covenants Reveal About the Gospel, the Law and the Sabbath*, and they had heard that it had been well received in the theological community. He asked if I be willing to represent the seventh-day view of the Sabbath, defending the position that the old covenant Sabbath is still God’s will for His new covenant church. I took a couple of weeks to consult with some friends, some seminary professors, the BRI, my senior pastor Dwight Nelson and the Michigan Conference before accepting this assignment.

As part of my research, I went on a week-end retreat with only my Bible, a notepad and a concordance. I began with Genesis and worked my way through to Revelation, prayerfully reflecting on every text that referred to the Sabbath. Two of the major impressions that were made on me that week end involved the importance of the two texts that are the theme of this paper: Isa 66:22-23 which states that in the new heavens and the new earth all flesh will gather to worship God monthly and from one Sabbath to another, and Heb 4:9 which says a Sabbath rest (Gk., *sabbatismos*) remains for the people of God.

But in subsequent research on what our scholars were saying about these texts, I found uncertainty and conflicting interpretations. While the SDA Bible commentary acknowledges that Isa 66:23 testifies to the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath in the new earth, I found that some of our scholars that I consulted disagree. When I presented the first draft of my initial essay for the Sabbath book to the larger BRI committee in April, 2009, one member of the committee suggested that I delete any discussion of Isaiah 66 as it does not address life in the new earth. I received this same counsel from a seminary professor who was a great help to me in other areas of this study. The SDA Bible Commentary argues against Heb 4:9 being a reference to the seventh-day Sabbath. Many of our scholars agree. I don’t mean to suggest that our scholars who do not believe

that Isa 66:23 and Heb 4:9 refer to Sabbath observance in the NT era or the new earth thereby do not believe that the seventh-day Sabbath is God's present will for His people, but simply that Isa 66:23 and Heb 4:9 cannot be used in support of this position. It appears to me that on the whole our scholars take one position on these texts and our evangelists take another. This paper discusses why I believe these texts can be used to support that it is God's will that His people observe the seventh-day Sabbath throughout the NT era and in the new earth.

### Isaiah 66:22-23

*As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will endure before me,' declares the LORD, 'so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon [or better, 'month,' see footnote 4] to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the LORD.*"<sup>1</sup>

On my retreat, as I read every reference to the Sabbath chronologically from Genesis to Revelation, Isa 65-66 struck me as an emotionally-charged expression of a pent-up divine longing for return to Edenic conditions. Throughout his book, Isaiah calls God's people to repentance for their severe backsliding, and prophecies concerning a new beginning which would follow a period of divine discipline. Isaiah 65-66 concludes the prophet's long series of divine warnings and prophecies of restoration with a description of the ultimate restoration in the new earth. In this passage God seems weary of the struggle with His people. He seems to be openly grieving the loss of what once was, while at the same time promising and eagerly anticipating its ultimate restoration. This is the first place in the Bible where God formally announces and begins to describe the new heavens and the new earth which are yet to come. And He does so with descriptions that parallel Genesis 1-2's description of conditions in Eden. Note the following paralleling descriptions, even following the same chronological order:

<b>Eden at Creation – Genesis 1-2</b>	<b>New Heavens and Earth – Isa 65-66</b>
Humankind to "rule . . . over all the earth . . . and subdue it. . . to work it and take care of it" (1:26,28; 2:15).	Humankind "will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit" (65:21).
To "all the beasts of the earth . . . I give every green plant for food" (1:30).	"The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox" (65:25).
God "blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (2:3; cf. Exod 20:11).	" . . . from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the LORD" (66:23).

There are two primary objections to this view. The first is the numerous references in the text that seem to indicate that a temporal state is in view: references to Jerusalem, destruction by fire, the slain being outside the holy city, monthly cycle, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> The New International Version is used unless otherwise noted.

But notice the following parallels with the description of the new heavens and the new earth given in Revelation 21-22<sup>2</sup>:

<b>New Heavens and New Earth Isa 65-66</b>	<b>New Heavens and New Earth Rev 21-22</b>
“The former things will not be remembered” (65:17).	“The old order of things has passed away” (21:4).
“The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it [the holy city, Jerusalem] no more” (65:19).	God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more . . . mourning or crying or pain” (21:3-4).
Refers to Jerusalem by name (65:18-19; 66:10, 13, 20).	Refers to “new Jerusalem” and “Holy City, Jerusalem” by name (21:2, 10).
Refers to “a tree” and “a river” (65:22; 66:12).	Refers to the “river of the water of life” and “the tree of life” (22:1-2).
“All nations,” “all mankind” are among the redeemed who will worship God (66:18, 23).	“The nations . . . and the kings of the earth” are among the redeemed who will worship God (21:24-26).
Monthly cycle of worship (66:23)	Monthly cycle of the tree of life (22:1-2)
God destroys the wicked by “fire” (65:14-16).	God destroys the wicked by “fire” (21:8).
The wicked slain are depicted as outside the holy city (66:24).	The wicked slain are depicted as outside the holy city (22:14-15).

Clearly, John’s description of the new heavens and new earth borrows the very language and description used for the new heavens and new earth described in Isa 65-66.

Not as easily explained is this description of Isaiah’s “new heavens and new earth: “Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed” (65:20).

When I asked Dick Davidson about his understanding of Isa 65-66, he went on his own weekend retreat to restudy and pray about this passage. Previously he had considered this passage to have a “within-history” fulfillment, applying to the post-exilic period. But he came back from his retreat believing that it does indeed describe the eternal state. Some of the reasons he gave me for his revised position were:

- “Isaiah is the only OT prophet to use the term “new heavens and earth”—a term harking back to creation (Gen 1:1), and picked up in the NT by Peter (2 Pet 3:13) and John (Rev 21:1). Peter, in referring to the ‘new heavens and new earth’ seems to explicitly link this reference to Isa 66 (‘according to His promise. . .’ and Isa 66 is the only earlier scripture where this phrase is used). John also clearly alludes to Isa 66 in his description of the ‘new heavens and new earth.’ By linking his eschatology with a new

<sup>2</sup> Nestle-Aland Greek Text cross references Rev 21:1 with Isa 65:17; 66:22. The only places the term “new heavens and new earth” occurs in Scripture are Isa 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13; and Rev 21:1, and all describe a return to Edenic conditions. The references to the wicked being slain (Isa 65:14-16; 66:24; Rev 21:8; 22:14-15) is another way of communicating that sin will no longer exist.

creation, parallel to the first creation described in Gen 1:1, Isaiah, in his final chapters especially, seems to go beyond the description of Israel's last days within history to the final universal in-breaking of God to make a totally renewed creation. This is universalization on a scale that far exceeds what other classical prophets do."

- "The universalization explicitly includes the Gentiles as full members of God's people, even incorporating them as priests (66:18–21). This universalization in re-created 'new heavens and new earth' now involves 'all flesh'—everyone, not just Israel and a few Gentiles who have joined them! This goes beyond, e.g., Zech 14, where there are still possibilities of some nations not worshipping (and being punished), and where these nations are not fully integrated into the people of God. Here in Isaiah we have the 'all flesh' of the 'primeval history' of Gen 1-11 (see the term used throughout the Flood account for all humanity, and perhaps even the animals!). The term 'all flesh' throughout Scripture is always a universal term for all humankind, not just Israel."
- "Already in Isa 56 the sabbath has become universalized to be kept by non-Israelites who link up with the people of God. This Sabbath universalization continues to the end of Isa 66, where now 'all flesh' will worship "from Sabbath to Sabbath." In this universal new-creation setting, as in the first creation setting of the Garden of Eden, humanity will keep the Sabbath."
- Davidson agrees with J. Alec Motyer that Isa 65:20's reference to "dies at a hundred" uses temporal language to convey an eternal theme."<sup>3</sup>

Isaiah 65-66 may also find a parallel expression in the NT. In Matt 24 Jesus blends His description of the signs of the impending destruction of Jerusalem with the signs of the end of the world. Some of the signs appear to apply primarily if not exclusively to the coming destruction of Jerusalem (e.g., "when you see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation, v. 15), some to exclusively to the end (e.g., "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light," v. 29), and some to both (e.g., "false prophets," vs. 11, 24). Just so, Isa 65-66 may contain some characteristics that apply exclusively to post-exilic conditions (e.g., "die at a hundred," 65:20), some exclusively to the new earth (e.g., "the lion will eat straw like the ox," 65:25), and some presumably to both (e.g., worship "from one month to the next and

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<sup>3</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isa: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 530: "Throughout this passage Isaiah uses aspects of present life to create impressions of the life that is yet to come. . . . Things we have no real capacity to understand can be expressed only through things we know and experience. So it is that in this present order of things death cuts life off before it has well begun or before it has fully matured. But it will not be so then. No infant will fail to enjoy life nor an elderly person come short of total fulfillment. Indeed, one would be but a youth were one to die aged a hundred! This does not imply that death will still be present (contradicting 25:7–8) but rather affirms that over the whole of life, as we should now say from infancy to old age, the power of death will be destroyed." Isaiah 25:7-8 says: "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth."

from one Sabbath to the next,” 66:23, New English Translation). That Isa 66:23 applies Sabbath observance equally to both eras is suggested by Isaiah’s other references to the Sabbath for his present and post-exilic generations (e.g., 56:5-7; 58:13-14) on the one hand, and his contextual association of Sabbath worship with “the new heavens and the new earth” in the preceding verse (66:22).

Another objection to the eternal application of the Sabbath in Isa 66:23 is the reference to New Moons: “‘From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the LORD.” However, Davidson’s research discovered that in this context the more reliable translation of the Hebrew term *chodesh* is not New Moon, but “month.”<sup>4</sup> The Greek term *mēn* (“month”) used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew *chodesh* (“month” or “new moon”) in Isa 66:23 is the very same Greek term Revelation 22:2 uses for the monthly cycle of the tree of life in the new earth.

Of the other three authors in the Sabbath book, only Blomberg and Pipa discuss the Biblical issues involved in the Sabbath debate. And interestingly, both Blomberg and Pipa understand Isa 66:23 to be referring to a period after Jesus comes. In Blomberg’s critique of my essay, he suggests that this text may refer to Jewish practice during the millennium. Pipa acknowledges that the eternal state is in view, but contends that “Sabbath” in this text refers to the “Christian Sabbath,” i.e., Sunday. Evangelicals in general use Isa 66:24 as a key text to purportedly establish the eternal punishment of the lost – “their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched”; there is no doubt in their minds that the entire context describes the eternal state.

The Andrews Study Bible is ambivalent on Isa 66:23, in my opinion, while the SDA Bible commentary affirms Ellen White’s use of this text as a reference to the observance of the Sabbath in the new earth (cf. DA 283).

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<sup>4</sup> The noun *chodesh* in the Hebrew Bible “occurs 283 times, its most common meaning being ‘month.’ . . . . A second meaning . . . is new moon” (*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. W. A. VanGemeren, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997], 5:38). Although many English versions translate the Hebrew word *chodesh* in Isa 66:23 as “New Moon,” the standard Hebrew lexicons agree that in connection with the special grammatical construction of this verse, the preferred translation for *chodesh* here is “month,” not “New Moon.” So, F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 191: “as often as month (comes) in its month”; cf. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 219: “from month to month.” (See also the NLT modern English version.) A virtually identical grammatical construction, using the word *shanah* “year” in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 7:16; 2 Chron 24:5; and Zech 14:6), clearly means “year by year” or “every year.” The LXX (Old Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) apparently understood that Isa 66:23 referred to months, rather than to the “New Moon [festivals]” mentioned earlier in Isaiah (1:13, 14). In Isa 1:13, 14 the LXX employs the Greek term *noumēnia* “new moon [festival]” (a contraction of *neomēnia*), but in 66:23 it uses the Greek term *mēn*—the normal Greek word for “month” (see *Theological Dictionary of the OT*, ed. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980], 4:229). In the NT, Col 2:16 uses the word *neomēnia* “new moon [festival],” which is identified as a “shadow” pointing to Christ, but Rev 22:2, in describing the monthly cycle of the tree of life (which, presumably, all would come to experience), uses the same word *mēn* “month” as found in Isa 66:23 (LXX). It appears that Isa is referring to the same monthly cycle of worship for the new earth that is implied in Rev 22:2, which is not necessarily linked to any specific New Moon festival.

### Hebrews 4:4, 9

“For somewhere [God] has spoken of the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ . . . There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest [Gk., *sabbatismos*] for the people of God.”

The context for these verses is Heb 3:17-4:13 which builds on David’s appeal in Ps 95 for the people in his generation not to harden their hearts in unbelief and disobedience as their ancestors did when they disobeyed God’s command to cross Jordan and take Canaan (a reference to the rebellion recorded in Numbers 14). Joshua had given the post-Numbers 14 generation physical rest from their enemies and appealed to them to be faithful to God (Josh 22:4-5), but because of their continued unbelief and disobedience they failed to obtain the spiritual rest in God, the rest of faith and grace, that was offered to them (Heb 3:17-19; 4:8). In Ps 95 David appealed to his own generation not to “harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion,” and thus fail again to enter/experience the spiritual rest God offered them (Heb 3:7-11). But on the whole, his appeal fell on deaf ears and the people of his and subsequent generations failed to enter/experience God’s rest. Heb 3:17-4:13 appeals to those in the NT era not to follow the example of those in previous generations who had the gospel preached to them, but through unbelief and disobedience failed to enter/experience the deep spiritual rest in God that had been offered to them throughout their history.

Throughout the OT period the proclamation of the gospel inviting people to enter/experience God’s rest existed side by side with the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Indeed, the Sabbath functioned as a divinely-appointed sign of that rest—“that you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy” (Exod 31:12). Thus, as the Sabbath signified the rest of grace which God promised and provided to those who put their trust in Him as their Creator and Redeemer/Sanctifier, true Sabbath observance could only be experienced by those who thus trusted and obeyed.

It should not be unexpected, therefore, to find the author of Hebrews reminding Hebrew Christians that God’s promised rest still remains, especially now that Christ has made that present rest in Him, and the eternal rest it signified of the restored new earth to come, even more assured by His sacrifice of atonement. Equally expected should be his reminder to Jewish Christians that true observance of the Sabbath, the sign of this rest, can be experienced only by those who strive in faith and the obedience of faith to rest completely in God for their salvation. Apart from such an experience, the Sabbath is merely physical rest from labor, not the deep spiritual rest in God that God offers—the assurance of salvation and ultimate rest in the kingdom of God.

The term “rest” occurs nine times in Heb 3:7-4:13. In eight of those occurrences it is a translation of the Greek word *katapausis*. But in Heb 4:9 the author deliberately used the Greek word *sabbatismos*, a word not used elsewhere in the NT, but used consistently in its cognate verbal form in the Septuagint to mean Sabbath observance, and in extrabiblical sources, often pejoratively, to mean the seventh-day Sabbath observed by the Jews.<sup>5</sup> Origen, the neo-Platonic allegorizer, is the sole exception I am aware of; he spiritualized *sabbatismos* to mean living the Christian life.

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<sup>5</sup> A. T. Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 213: “The term [*σαββατισμός* (*sabbatismos*)] denotes the observance or celebration of the Sabbath. This usage corresponds to the Septuagint usage of the cognate verb *σαββατίζω* [*sabbatizo*] (cf. Exod. 16:30; Lev. 23:32; 26:34f.; 2 Chron. 36:21) which also has

The SDA Commentary on this passage holds that the author used *katapausis* and *sabbatismos* synonymously, and that the author of Hebrews intended no direct reference to the seventh-day Sabbath in Heb 4:9. It bases its conclusion partly on the Septuagint's use of *katapausis* in Genesis 1:2-3 and Exodus 20:11 for God's rest on the seventh-day of creation. It also contends that since Jewish and Gentile Christians were already observing the seventh-day Sabbath throughout apostolic times, there would have been no need for the author to prove that the seventh-day Sabbath "remains." The commentary also quotes two Ellen White references identifying the "rest" of Heb 4:9 as "the rest of grace" (MS 42, 1901) and "the true rest of faith" (MB 1). But in relation to these arguments consider the following points:

- In the February, 1981 issue of *Ministry* magazine, the Biblical Research Institute published points 1 and 17 of the Seventh-day Adventists fundamental beliefs on "The Holy Scriptures" and "The Gift of Prophecy" respectively followed by ten "Affirmations" and ten "Denials" concerning "the inspiration and authority of the Ellen White writings and their relation to the Bible." The article stated that these "Affirmations" and "Denials" represented "the worldwide . . . views of the church." Points 6 & 7 of the "Denials" state: "We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White. . . We do not believe the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture."<sup>6</sup> So, just because Ellen White did not use Heb 4:9 in direct reference to the Sabbath does not rule out the possibility of such an application. I believe that her comments on Heb 4:9 are indeed complementary to its affirmation of the true meaning of the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath in the New Testament era.
- It seems odd that in this passage the author used *katapausis* eight times, but specifically used *sabbatismos* in this one instance (4:9) if he had meant exactly the same meaning for both words. Both Drs. Pipa and Blomberg in the aforementioned Sabbath book point to the author's choice of *sabbatismos* in Heb 4:9 as intentional to send a message to the readers related to the Sabbath specifically.
- The fact that in Heb 4:4 the author specifically mentions the seventh-day on which God rested at creation signals that his sole use of *sabbatismos* in 4:9 has the seventh-day Sabbath in view. What Jewish Christian reading this passage would not have naturally made that association?
- Once sin entered our world, the Sabbath not only continued as a memorial of creation, but also signified that God is the one who sanctifies His people: "You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the

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reference to Sabbath observance." Cf. S. Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998), 124: "*Sabbatismos* . . . was used by pagans and Christians as a technical term for Sabbathkeeping. Examples can be found in the writings of Plutarch, Justin, Epiphanius, the Apostolic Constitutions, and the Martyrdom of Peter and Paul." Bacchiocchi references Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 3 (Moralia 1660); Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 23, 3; Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 30, 2, 2; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Also quoted in Jud Lake. *Ellen White Under Fire: Identifying the Mistakes of her Critics* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho, 2010), 170.

generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD who makes you holy” (Ex 31:13; cf. Ezek 20:12). The Sabbath was never to be *merely* a rest from physical labor, but always to be also a “rest of grace,” “the true rest of faith.” Hebrews 3:7-4:13 calls NT believers to enter this very rest of God of which the Sabbath was a sign. Joshua gave Israel physical rest from their enemies, but because of their unbelief and disobedience, he could not give them the deeper spiritual rest in God signified by the Sabbath (4:5-8). The specific references to the Sabbath in 4:4 and 4:9 within the extended passage points away from merely outward “rest” that comes from simply not working on the Sabbath—to say nothing of the meticulous, burdensome rules that the Jewish leaders had added to the Sabbath—and extends the invitation to enter/experience the deeper spiritual rest in God signified by the Sabbath as resting in “the LORD who makes you holy.”

- Note the logical flow and progression of the extended passage. It begins with the invitation extended to the OT believer to enter this true rest of God’s grace through faith in God (3:7-11). On the whole Israel of old failed to experience this rest due to their persistent unbelief and disobedience (3:12-19). So NT believers are urged to strive to enter the true spiritual rest in God that so many in the OT failed to experience, even though they were often very meticulous about their observance of the cultic ritual, including the multitudinous pharisaical rules regarding the Sabbath (4:1-11). New Testament believers are urged to enter and experience by faith God’s rest which previous generations by and large failed to experience. The true rest of faith and grace is signified by the seventh-day Sabbath on which God Himself rested (4:4). While Joshua gave Israel of old physical rest from their enemies, he couldn’t provide the deeper spiritual rest that God wanted to provide for them because they lacked faith and obedience (4:8). The observance of the Sabbath still remains for God’s people as a sign that they can rest from their own meticulous and burdensome labors to be holy, and can rest completely in Him who can and will make them a holy, obedient people in response to their faith (4:9-10). This true rest of grace will be experienced only by those who strive by faith to enter/experience it (4:11). God knows the heart and discerns the difference between mere ritual compliance of the Sabbath and true rest in Him (4:13). Anyone who wants to truly know the condition of their own heart in these matters will be granted such discernment through their meditation on His word (4:12). Once again the focus shifts back to Jesus (cf. 3:1-6), our High Priest, who has lived a holy life free from sin, and who can and will provide everything that is needed in the Christian life to all who prayerfully seek Him at His throne of grace (4:14-16).
- I agree with the SDA Bible Commentary that the author needed not to *prove* to his dominantly Jewish Christian audience that the seventh-day Sabbath remains for the people of God. However, in light of the legalistic and burdensome experience that Sabbath observance had become for many first century Jews, they did need to be reminded about the true *meaning* and *observance* of the Sabbath, and that’s what I understand Heb 4:9, and the extended passage in which it occurs, to be providing.
- William Johnsson, whose doctoral dissertation was on Hebrews, agrees with the SDA Bible Commentary that in Heb 4:9 the author is not attempting to *prove* the



continuing observance of the seventh-day Sabbath in the NT era. However, based on the author’s specific use of *sabbatismos* in this text, Johnsson believes that he has the seventh-day Sabbath in view. Thus he writes: “In my judgment, Heb 4:1-11 gives us the strongest evidence in favor of the seventh-day Sabbath in the entire New Testament. . . . Our rest in Christ, says the author, has the *quality* of the Sabbath. It is *like* the Sabbath. . . . Two conclusions seem inescapable. First, for him and his readers, the Sabbath had a positive connotation. If they had considered it a burden, the last remains of a religion of bondage, the author would have lost his audience at this critical moment. Second, both he and his audience were keeping the Sabbath. They had no thought about any other day. Certainly they weren’t debating the merits of Sabbath versus Sunday. Only in such a context could he call rest in Christ a *sabbatismos*.”<sup>7</sup>

- In Heb 7-10 the author goes to great lengths to explain that the OT priesthood and animal sacrifices, those functions associated directly with the earthly temple, functioned as types and met their antitype in the heavenly priesthood and once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, and are thus “obsolete” (Heb 8:13). In Heb 3-4 he goes to equal lengths to affirm that “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest [*sabbatismos*, Sabbath observance] for the people of God” (4:9).
- Note the following parallels between the way the NT treats the creation ordinances of marriage and the Sabbath—affirming both their permanency and their deeper meaning in light of the expanded gospel revelation made in Christ:

<b>Eph 5:31-33 – Marriage</b>	<b>Heb 4:4-9 – Sabbath</b>
Reference to creation ordinance of marriage: “A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife” (5:31, quoting Gen 2:24).	Reference to creation ordinance of Sabbath: “On the seventh day God rested from all his work” (4:4, quoting Gen 2:2).
Deeper spiritual meaning and application of marriage: “I am talking about Christ and the church” (5:32).	Deeper spiritual meaning and application of the Sabbath as the rest of grace: “Some will enter that rest . . . the gospel preached to them” (4:6).
Reaffirmation of the permanence of the creation ordinance of marriage: “Each one of you also must love his wife , . . . and the wife must respect her husband” (5:33).	Reaffirmation of the permanence of the creation ordinance of the Sabbath: “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest [Sabbath observance] for the people of God” (4:9).

While the NT gives the creation ordinance of marriage an even deeper meaning now that Christ has come, it does not thereby consider the marriage institution as a type to be replaced by Christ and the Church. If anything, it invests the marriage institution with an even greater significance. The same is true of the Sabbath.

I mentioned earlier how I had been impressed during my retreat with only my Bible that Heb 4:9 is a key text in defense of the Sabbath. What I did not know at the

<sup>7</sup> W. G. Johnsson, *Hebrews* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1994), 96:

time was that both Drs. Pipa and Blomberg would consider it such for their positions. Both call attention to the author's switch from *katapausis* to *sabbatismos* at this critical point in his discussion, and make the point that in their view the author is redefining, rather than affirming, the OT Sabbath and investing it with a new and different "new-covenant" application. Both Pipa and Blomberg redefine *sabbatismos* to mean something other than it means anywhere else in Scripture or in early Christian literature, with the sole exception of third century Origen who is reputed for his allegorical hermeneutic.

Pipa presented Heb 4:9-10 as his chief textual evidence in support of Sunday as the "new covenant" Sabbath. He, and his Reformed colleagues, hold that Colossians 2:16 removes the "seventh-day ceremonial element" of the Sabbath while leaving the Sabbath commandment otherwise intact. He claims that Heb 4:10 does not apply to a believer ceasing from his own works and resting in the finished work of Christ, but applies to Jesus resting from His work of redemption on the first day of the week. Pipa then uses this interpretation of Heb 4:10 to define the new "Christian Sabbath" as Sunday, the day on which Jesus rested from His redemptive work. But Hebrew's 4:9's use of *sabbatismos* much more logically refers to the seventh-day on which God rested, explicitly identified in 4:4, rather than to Sunday which occurs nowhere, explicitly or by implication, in this entire extended passage.

Blomberg calls Heb 3:7-4:13 a "convoluted argument," but nonetheless sees in Heb 4:9's use of *sabbatismos* a "new-covenant" reinterpretation of the OT Sabbath to mean "remaining faithful to Jesus rather than committing apostasy." But to reach this definition of *sabbatismos* Blomberg has to overlook all other uses of the term in the Septuagint (where its verbal cognate always means observance of the seventh-day Sabbath or other Sabbaths) and extrabiblical literature (where it means observing the "Jewish Sabbath") except in the writings of Origen.

While the SDA Bible Commentary does not support the position represented in this paper on Heb 4:9, the more recent Andrews Study Bible's associated references include the Sabbath, and its comments include true Sabbath observance. Note its back to back comments on Heb 4:4 and 4:9:

- **“4:4 God rested on the seventh day.** God's rest was established at the SABBATH of creation and it has been available to believers since then. See Gen. 2:1-3.
- **“4:9 a rest.** Literally, a 'Sabbath rest.' The SABBATH rest symbolizes and celebrated God's goodness and salvation (Ex. 20:11; Deut. 5:15). As we observe it, SABBATH rest expresses our faith in two ways. First, it testifies that we have received God's goodness and salvation. Second, it demonstrates that we are waiting for the consummation of those gifts at the Second Coming. For more on the SABBATH rest, see Ex. 20:8-11.”

In conclusion, for the reasons stated above I believe that Isa 66:23-23 and Heb 4:9 can legitimately and with exegetical integrity be used evangelistically in defense of the position that the true observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a rest of grace and faith remains God's will for His people, and will continue as such in the new earth.