

‘A Sabbath Rest for the People of God’ (Heb 4.9): Hebrews and Philo on the Seventh Day of Creation*

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This article examines the background of the concept of Sabbath rest (*σαββατισμός*) in Heb 4.1–11. Special attention is given to the relation between God’s rest and God’s activity, which seemingly are in tension with each other: on the one hand, the author’s argument is based on the assumption that God entered his rest at the seventh day of creation and stopped working forever (4.10); on the other hand, there is a clear reference to God’s works *after* creation (3.9–10). A comparison with Philo’s explanations of the seventh day of creation, however, reveals that for a Jewish Middle Platonist this tension does not appear to be a problem because rest and activity in God are two sides of the same coin. It is argued that this background helps to explain Hebrews’ concept of Sabbath rest. A concluding outlook shows that the suggested Middle Platonic understanding of Hebrews 4 fits well the context of the epistle as a whole, as the same coexistence of rest and activity can also be found in Hebrews 7 in relation to Jesus’ intercession in the heavenly tabernacle.

Keywords: Hebrews, Philo, Sabbath rest, creation, eschatology, Middle Platonism

1. Introduction

In the context of his paraenetic exhortation in Heb 3.7–4.11, the author of Hebrews introduces the notion of *σαββατισμός* (4.9): what awaits the people of God if they remain steadfast in their faith is a ‘celebration of Sabbath’. While it is clear that Hebrews transfers this term from a weekly festival to an eschatological good, the background of this concept needs further elaboration. A short look at the research history, however, reveals fundamental dissents as it mirrors the intensive scholarly debate on Hebrews’ religious historical background in

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Oxford-Leiden-Bonn colloquium in biblical studies 2014. I am much obliged to Nicholas N. Moore for his insightful remarks as well as for his proofreading.

general. On the one hand, scholars like E. Käsemann and G. Theißen contended that the closest parallel to Hebrews 4 is the gnostic concept of rest.¹ O. Hofius, on the other hand, argued that there are parallels in apocalyptic literature which serve much better to set the stage for Hebrews 4.² Although nowadays it is clear that a gnostic background is not a serious option for understanding Hebrews, the debate is still ongoing.³ The candidate which replaces Gnosticism is Middle Platonism in general, and Philo in particular, whose connection to Hebrews is, to the present day, one of the most controversial points in the scholarship on this epistle. And this question is, of course, not limited to chapter 4: among the more recent studies on Hebrews those of W. Eisele and S. N. Svendsen ought particularly to be mentioned, both stressing the high relevance of Philo for the understanding of Hebrews.⁴ Svendsen even argues for direct influence. Of course, there is also a mediating position that speaks of a ‘deliberate amalgamation of Middle Platonism and Jewish eschatology’.⁵

Other scholars, however, assume that the search for parallels to Hebrews’ concept of an eschatological Sabbath rest has been overdone. J. Laansma in his 1997 monograph, for example, contends that ‘Heb 3–4 should be placed *alongside* the other intertestamental Jewish developments of the rest idea as an independent and creative use of the OT by a thinker with his own unique outlook and agenda’,⁶ and suggests that the passage in question ‘is not Philonic, not gnostic,

1 E. Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk: Eine Untersuchung zum Hebräerbrief* (FRLANT 55/N.F. 37; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961⁴); G. Theißen, *Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief* (SNT 2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1969); H. Braun, *An die Hebräer* (HNT 14; Tübingen: Mohr, 1984) 93.

2 O. Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief* (WUNT 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970).

3 Two recent studies arguing for an apocalyptic background are D. M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (NovTSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2011); J. A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 11/331; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

4 W. Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich: Die mittelplatonische Umformung des Parusiegedankens im Hebräerbrief* (BZNW 116; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003); S. N. Svendsen, *Allegory Transformed: The Appropriation of Philonic Hermeneutics in the Letter to the Hebrews* (WUNT 11/269; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

5 S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 11/223; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 114; cf. G. E. Sterling, ‘Ontology versus Eschatology: Tensions between Author and Community in Hebrews’, *SPhiloA* (2001) 190–211. For an insightful discussion of the problem see also the contributions of J. W. Thompson, ‘What Has Middle Platonism to Do with Hebrews?’ and E. F. Mason, ‘Cosmology, Messianism, and Melchizedek: Apocalyptic Jewish Traditions and Hebrews’, in *Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students* (ed. E. F. Mason and K. B. McCrudden; SBLRBS 66; Atlanta: SBL, 2011) 31–52 and 53–76, respectively.

6 J. Laansma, *‘I Will Give You Rest’: The Rest Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3–4* (WUNT 11/98; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 354.

not simply apocalyptic'.⁷ While it is certainly true that the author of Hebrews is a quite unique thinker, I shall argue in this paper that there is still some work to do in the quest for the background of the σαββατισμός concept. This contention is based on the fact that there are some significant details in Hebrews 4 which cannot be sufficiently explained without considering extra-biblical texts and traditions. This is the first point to be elaborated. The second step will be to examine in particular Philo's concept of creation. I will argue that his discussion of rest and Sabbath illuminates and resolves the tensions in Hebrews' use of the notions of σαββατισμός and rest.

2. Hebrews 4: Some Questions the Author Does not Answer

I shall start with an overview of the text.⁸ As is commonly known, the author's elaboration of the σαββατισμός concept is part of the longer passage Heb 3.7–4.11, which contains a quotation of Ps 94.7b–11 LXX⁹ and a subsequent interpretation of this text. The pragmatic function of this passage is easy to figure out: the addressees are in danger of neglecting their faith (cf. 3.12), and therefore the author encourages them to be steadfast by applying the admonition of the

7 Laansma, *Rest*, 356; similarly D. L. Allen, *Hebrews* (NAC 35; Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010) 298. See also K. L. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice* (SNTSMS 143; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 6, who comes to the same conclusion for Hebrews as a whole: 'Even if it [sc. Hebrews] has motifs reminiscent of certain background traditions, the author surely was capable of putting such imagery to new and unique uses in the light of his own particular situation and theology. The identification of a general background and common language does not necessarily imply how an individual author has used that imagery in a specific context.'

8 For the structure and argumentation of Heb 3.7–4.11 see, besides the commentaries, H. W. Attridge, "'Let Us Strive to Enter that Rest": The Logic of Hebrews 4:1–11', *HTR* 73 (1980) 279–88; H. Löhr, "'Heute, wenn ihr seine Stimme hört ...": Zur Kunst der Schriftenwendung im Hebräerbrief und in 1 Kor 10', *Schriftauslegung im antiken Judentum und im Urchristentum* (ed. M. Hengel and H. Löhr; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994) 226–48; P. Enns, 'The Interpretation of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3.1–4.13', *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (ed. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 352–63; D. A. DeSilva, 'Entering God's Rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews', *TJ* 21 (2000) 25–43; W. Kraus, 'Heb 3,7–4,11 as a Midrash on Ps 94 (LXX)', *Florilegium Lovaniense: Studies in Septuagint and Textual Criticism. FS F. García Martínez* (ed. H. Ausloos, B. Lemmelijn and M. Vervenne; Leuven: Peeters, 2008) 275–90; G. J. Steyn, 'The Reception of Psalm 95 (94):7–11 in Hebrews 3–4', *Psalms and Hebrews: Studies in Reception* (ed. D. J. Human and G. J. Steyn; New York: T & T Clark, 2010) 194–228.

9 The author quotes the text with a number of variants, of which only one is important for the present study: the insertion of δὶό in 3.10 that will be discussed below. For a detailed discussion of the *Vorlage* and its adaptations by the author of Hebrews, see G. J. Steyn, *A Quest for the Assumed LXX Vorlage of the Explicit Quotations in Hebrews* (FRLANT 235; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011) 172–96.

psalm to the current situation. The argumentation advances in two steps. The first (3.12–4.1) is a warning (ending with φοβηθῶμεν οὖν ...) of the fact that persisting in unbelief has the severe consequence of losing the opportunity to enter God's rest. The psalmist's warning not to harden the hearts is directly applied to the addressees (3.12–15),¹⁰ and Israel's destiny in the desert as described in the psalm is taken as a deterring example (3.16–19).¹¹ In the second step (4.2–11), the author turns the warning into an exhortation (ending with σπουδάσωμεν οὖν ...) by illuminating the reward the addressees can expect in case they keep their faith. This reward which remains for the people of God is our concept in question: σαββατισμός (4.9).

The author's starting point for elaborating this concept is the last verse of the quoted psalm text (Ps 94.11 LXX) which is re-quoted in 4.3 and (in abbreviated form) again in 4.5:

As I swore in my anger,
‘They shall not enter my rest!’

What the author wants to demonstrate is that the same rest which was denied to the Israelites in the wilderness is still available for the faithful followers of Christ. This is, however, a conclusion which requires further explanation for those familiar with biblical history: as the rest sought by the Israelites in the desert was the entry into the Promised Land Canaan, one might assume that this desire was fulfilled by Joshua and so the topic of God's rest is a closed chapter of history.¹² Our author thus must show that this is not the case, and he does so by a sophisticated argument from chronology (cf. 4.6–8). As he regards King David as the writer of the psalm,¹³ he argues that David lived a long time after Israel's conquest of Canaan (cf. 4.7) and concludes logically that the notion of ‘rest’ in the psalm text must be something other than the rest provided by Joshua.¹⁴ He can thus

10 Cf. Ps 94.8 LXX/Heb 3.8: μὴ σκληρύνητε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ... From the psalm text itself it is not precisely clear if we hear the psalmist's or God's voice, since God is first referred to in the third person (v. 8: αὐτοῦ), but then from v. 9 on in the first person. The author of Hebrews, however, regards the whole quotation as words of the Holy Spirit (4.7).

11 Additionally, the author uses aspects of Num 14 in order to dramatise the destiny of the unfaithful, as has been pointed out by A. Vanhoye, ‘Longue marche ou accès toute proche? Le contexte biblique de Hébreux 3,7–4,11’, *Bib* 49 (1968) 9–26 and Hofius, *Katapausis*, 134–7.

12 In 1 Kings 8.56 Solomon explicitly states that the promise of rest has been fulfilled.

13 David is the writer, but not the author: for the author of Hebrews, the words of the psalm are those of the Holy Spirit (3.7) who speaks through David (ἐν Δαυιδ λέγων, 4.7). The precedence of speech to writing in Hebrews' use of Scripture has been elaborated by M. Theobald, ‘Vom Text zum “lebendigen Wort” (Hebr 4,12)’, *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift: Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums. FS O. Hofius* (ed. C. Landmesser; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997) 751–90.

14 The figure of Joshua in Hebrews has attracted much attention in recent scholarship as two monographs claim that there is a ‘Joshua typology’ in Hebrews: see R. Ounsworth, *Joshua*

contend that the promise of rest has not yet been fulfilled (cf. 4.8), and consequently that it is still available. Additionally, the author brings forward an argument which is derived from the literal meaning of ‘rest’ in the psalm, which does not speak about the rest of human beings, but about an entry of human beings into *God’s rest* (εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου). The author of Hebrews thus feels entitled to fill the gap of the precise meaning of *κατάπαυσις* in the psalm by referring to the most important Old Testament text which speaks about God’s rest,¹⁵ that is to say Gen 2.2b, ‘and God rested on the seventh day from all his works’.¹⁶ The rest mentioned in the psalm is thus declared to be identical with God’s rest after creation. This serves to support the author’s point that the rest is still available ‘today’; it has been in existence since the seventh day of creation and those who have so far been invited to enter failed to take the chance (4.6).

This leads the author to a statement that requires further explanation: ὁ γὰρ εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς κατέπαυσεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ ὡςπερ ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων ὁ θεός (4.10). Most scholars take ὁ εἰσελθὼν as a generalisation and *κατέπαυσεν* as a gnomic aorist and thus believe that this sentence relates to all who will enter God’s rest. This view has recently been challenged by N. J. Moore, who argues with good reasons that ὁ εἰσελθὼν refers to Jesus.¹⁷ His

Typology in the New Testament (WUNT 11/328; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) and B. J. Whitfield, *Joshua Traditions and the Argument of Hebrews 3 and 4* (BZNW 194; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013). This may be supported by the fact that the author calls Joshua by his Greek name Ἰησοῦς without explicitly stating that he does not mean Jesus. I am, however, rather hesitant as to whether it is appropriate to speak of a typology, since both monographs must base their arguments on what is *not* said in Hebrews, but I can agree that the puzzling mention of a ‘Jesus’ in connection to Canaan may serve to prepare the reader for interpreting v. 10 as a reference to ‘the other Jesus’.

15 Most scholars connect this exegetical procedure to the rabbinic rule of *gezerah shawah*. However, the method of elucidating an unclear term by consulting other instances where the meaning of this term is more obvious is a scholarly method of interpretation often practised in antiquity: cf. D. Lanzinger, ‘Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefs als antiker Philologe: Zur Methodik der innerbiblischen Begriffsklärung in Hebr 4’, *PZB* (2011) 81–94. The link between the two texts is possible only in Greek but not in Hebrew, where different terms are used (מנוחה vs נפש).

16 The author quotes this verse in 4.4 with two variants from our LXX text: he amends the subject ὁ θεός and inserts the preposition ἐν before τῆ ἡμέρᾳ. These variants are also found in Philo, *Post.* 64, which may be explained by ‘either a common *Vorlage* that was used by both, or dependence on Philo by Hebrews’: Steyn, *Vorlage*, 204.

17 Cf. N. J. Moore, ‘Jesus as “The One who Entered his Rest”’: The Christological Reading of Hebrews 4.10’, *JSNT* 36 (2014) 383–400. He argues from a comparison of the use of tenses in Hebrews that both verb forms in 4.10 are more likely to refer to the past. Accordingly, he suggests the translation: ‘For the one who entered God’s rest has himself also rested from his works, just as God did from his’ (ibid., 393). See also D. A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in*

entry into the rest would then give the reason (γάρ) why the people of God now has the chance to enter. I agree that this is from the grammatical point of view the most plausible explanation, although we should take into account that a text may have more than one meaning. In the case of Heb 4.10, as both readings are possible and either of them makes good sense within the context, we may suppose that the author intentionally created an equivocal sentence in order to draw the readers' attention to the parallelism between Jesus' and their own entry into the rest, which, in turn, are both parallel to God's beginning rest.

This leads us to a point which requires further explanation *beyond* the biblical backdrop quoted by the author: his argument seemingly presupposes that on the seventh day of creation God stopped working forever. This, however, must be puzzling for every Bible reader: the creation narrative speaks about only *one day* of God's rest, and in addition, the Old Testament is full of stories about divine activity *after* creation. We must therefore ask how the author of Hebrews could have considered his assertion to be convincing without any further explanation. What is more, this question must be particularly puzzling for the reader of Hebrews: the psalm quoted in 3.9–10 explicitly speaks about God's *works* which the fathers in the desert saw for forty years. How is that possible if God has been resting from all his works since the end of creation? This seems at first glance to be an inconsistency which is not solved within the text of Hebrews.

Finally, how are we to understand the term σαββατισμός (4.9)? The author of Hebrews is the first author known to have used this expression, which makes it difficult to figure out how he came to this idea. A comparison with other early instances of this term suggests that σαββατισμός signifies an active celebration of Sabbath,¹⁸ which is supported by Greek morphology as the suffix -ισμός marks a *nomen actionis*.¹⁹ The author thus equates a cyclic action with a once-only entry into an eternal rest. This reinforces the question of how he imagines the connection between rest and activity.

3. How to Conceptualise 'Rest' as a Middle Platonist: Some Insights from Philo

I shall now argue that these questions may be best answered when we consider Philo's concept of Sabbath. Comparing Hebrews to Philo is, of course, not a

Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle 'to the Hebrews' (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 167–8.

18 Cf. Hofius, *Katapausis*, 102–6, who refers to Plutarch, *Superst.* 3 (166 A); Justin, *Dial.* 23.3; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.2.2; *Mart. Pet. Paul* 1; *Apos. Con.* 2.36.2.

19 Cf. E. Bornemann and E. Risch, *Griechische Grammatik* (Frankfurt am Main: Diesterweg, 1978²) 312.

new idea.²⁰ As already mentioned, the question of a Philonic influence on Hebrews is the subject of quite controversial debate. In his 2002 'state of research' article, K. Schenck states that the question of whether the author of Hebrews knew Philo's writings is still undecided.²¹ However, M. Niehoff's latest research might prepare the ground for a renewal of this discussion. She argues that Philo's embassy to Rome was more than a short political intermezzo for him as it provided the chance for an intellectual activity in the capital which took at least three years (38–41 CE).²² As it is generally assumed, with good reasons, that Hebrews is related to the city of Rome as well,²³ there is a geographic link between both authors that should encourage us to renew the search for Philonic parallels to Hebrews. When engaging in such a comparison, however, we should avoid the notion that the author of Hebrews, like a modern exegete, had all of Philo's works in his library and read them intensively. As R. Williamson has shown, the assumption of a direct influence eventually leads to the disappointing observation that there are at least as many differences between the two authors as there are parallels.²⁴ Probably the most appropriate

20 See especially J. W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (CBQMS 13; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982) 81–102, who provides a useful collection of the relevant Philo parallels, but does not exhaust their potential for understanding Hebrews 4.

21 K. Schenck, 'Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews: Ronald Williamson's Study after Thirty Years', *SPhiloA* 14 (2002) 112–35. The commonalities between Philo and Hebrews allow him at least to conclude that 'it is not unlikely that both had significant connections to the Egyptian city of Alexandria' (126). Cf. also D. T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (CRINT 3.3; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993) 74–8.

22 M. R. Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 170–7, with reference to A. Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt: The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 10–21. See also M. R. Niehoff, 'Philo's *Exposition* in a Roman Context', *SPhiloA* 23 (2011) 1–21. Given the fact that the embassy led by Philo had only two encounters with the emperor, we can assume that Philo had a lot of time for writing, but also for introducing himself to the Jewish communities in Rome and for sharing his ideas with them.

23 A short summary of the arguments (cf. K. Backhaus, *Der Hebräerbrief* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 2009) 25–6): (a) the greetings by οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας in 13.24; (b) the earliest reception of Hebrews by 1 *Clem.* and *Herm.*; (c) the placement of Hebrews directly after Romans in the earliest manuscript (P⁴⁶); (d) the existence of ἡγοούμενοι (13.7, 17 and 24), a function only attested in Rome in first-century Christianity; (e) a Roman context fitting some aspects of Hebrews well, see especially the probable reference to the Neronian persecution in 10.33–4, 12.4 and 13.3.

24 See R. Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ALGHJ 4; Leiden: Brill, 1970), arguing against the assumption of a direct dependency made in the influential commentary of C. Spicq, *L'épître aux Hébreux* (EtB; Paris: Gabalda, 1952/53²), who regards the author of Hebrews as a Christian Philonist. See also L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* (SNTSMS 65; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 7–42; C. K. Barrett, 'The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *The Background of the New*

approach is thus to work with a model of indirect connection between the two authors:²⁵ Philo's works, and even more his thoughts, circulated in Rome's Jewish (and later also in its Christian) community,²⁶ where the author of Hebrews may have become acquainted with some of Philo's philosophical and exegetical ideas which he in turn freely applied to his own purposes.

I shall thus apply the questions arising from my examination of Hebrews to the works of Philo, beginning with the following: what has God, according to Philo, been doing since the seventh day of creation? Philo gives a twofold answer to this question: first, that God always rests, and second, that God never rests.²⁷ How does that fit together? Philo explains the first aspect as follows:²⁸

And therefore Moses often in his laws calls the sabbath, which means 'rest' (ἀνάπαυσις),²⁹ God's sabbath, not man's, and thus he lays his finger on an essential fact in the nature of things. For in all truth there is but one thing in the universe which rests, that is God ... Since then weariness is the natural cause of change in things that turn and vary, and since God turns not and changes not, He must be by nature unwearying. But a being that is free from weakness, even though he be making all things, will cease not to all eternity

Testament and Its Eschatology (ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964) 363–93, at 396, on Philo's eschatology: 'Nothing could be more remote from Hebrews.'

25 This has also been suggested by G. E. Sterling, 'The Place of Philo of Alexandria in the Study of Christian Origins', *Philo und das Neue Testament: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen. 1. Internationales Symposium zum Corpus Judaico-Hellenisticum, 1.–4. Mai 2003, Eisenach/Jena* (ed. R. Deines and K.-W. Niebuhr; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) 21–52, at 25; he doubts that a direct connection to any NT author can be proven, but at the same time believes 'that there is a very strong indirect connection between Philo's treatises and documents in the NT'. G. Holtz has recently suggested a similar model for grasping Philo's influence on Paul. She argues that the Hellenistic synagogues in Jerusalem may have been the place where Paul got acquainted with Philo's mindset, probably without having direct access to his writings: see G. Holtz, 'Von Alexandrien nach Jerusalem: Überlegungen zur Vermittlung philonisch-alexandrinischer Tradition an Paulus', *ZNW* 105 (2014) 228–63.

26 Cf. G. E. Sterling, "'A Man of the Highest Repute": Did Josephus Know the Writings of Philo?', *SPhiloA* 25 (2013) 101–13; M. Goodman, 'Philo as Philosopher in Rome', *Philon d'Alexandrie: un penseur à l'intersection des cultures gréco-romaine, orientale, juive et chrétienne* (ed. B. Decharneux and S. Inowlocki; Turnhout: Brepols, 2011) 37–45.

27 On the following, see F. Calabi, 'Le repos de Dieu chez Philon d'Alexandrie', *Philon d'Alexandrie*, 185–204. See also M. H. Burer, *Divine Sabbath Work* (BBRS 5; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012) 27–102, who offers an overview of ancient Jewish understandings of Sabbath.

28 All translations are taken from the Loeb Classical Library volumes of Philo's works.

29 Philo prefers ἀνάπαυσις to κατάπαυσις; sometimes he also uses ἡρεμία (see the quotation of *Post.* 28 below). However, this difference in terminology between Philo and Hebrews should not be overstated as it can easily be explained by the fact that Hebrews draws on a text that explicitly uses κατάπαυσις, which is not the case with Philo.

to be at rest, and thus rest belongs in the fullest sense to God and to him alone. (*Cher.* 87–90)³⁰

What we find here is an explanation of a biblical motif in terms of Platonic philosophy: following the Platonic principle that God does not change,³¹ Philo argues that weakness and weariness are a consequence of change and therefore cannot be attributed to God. He is the one who is always at rest. This is, however, just one side of the coin. The other is that Philo must somehow cope with the fact that the biblical God is essentially a God of creation. In Philo's own words: 'as it is the property of fire to burn and of snow to chill, so it is the property of God to make' (*Leg.* 1.5). This concept of continuous creation is now harmonised with the concept of continuous rest as follows:

But Moses does not give the name of rest to mere inactivity. The cause of all things is by its nature active; it never ceases to work all that is best and most beautiful. God's rest is rather a working with absolute ease, without toil and without suffering. (*Cher.* 87)

As God's works are not connected to any kind of toil, rest and works can coexist in God. God's rest is thus an *active rest*. This also includes feasts: as God is the only one who exists without any toil, Philo can state that 'God alone in the true sense keeps festival' (*Cher.* 86). This brings us back to our starting point, the Sabbath celebration in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews shares with Philo the idea that God's rest is an active rest, which he calls σαββατισμός – a celebration of Sabbath. Moreover, reading Philo helps us to understand why the author of Hebrews can assume that God has been in a permanent condition of rest since the seventh day of creation. We should, however, not overlook the differences: Philo would not have agreed with the statement that God *began* to rest as this

30 A very similar statement is made by Aristobulus, fragment 5a (Carl R. Holladay, ed. *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. III: *Aristobulus* (SBLTT 39; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 183): 'Thus God's resting does not imply, as some suppose, that God ceased from activity; for, being good, if he should ever cease from doing good, then he would cease being God, which is sacrilege even to say. His having "ceased" is, therefore, that he had arranged to preserve intact for all time the original arrangement of the created order, and that each of the things created had "ceased" being part of the primordial chaos.' In Philo's times, this was probably a quite common idea in Alexandrian Judaism. On Aristobulus' concept of Sabbath, see the insightful comments by J. C. de Vos, 'Aristobulus and the Universal Sabbath', *Goochem in Mokum, Wisdom in Amsterdam: Papers on Biblical and Related Wisdom Read at the Fifteenth Joint Meeting of the Society of Old Testament Study and the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap, Amsterdam, July 2012* (ed. G. J. Brooke and P. Van Hecke; Leiden: Brill, 2016) 138–54.

31 See also *Opif.* 100, where the same idea is expressed in connection with the seventh day of creation.

would have implied a change. God's rest is for him eternal.³² In this respect Hebrews adheres much more closely to biblical language. And this is a necessity which derives from the author's aims: in contrast to Philo, he is interested not in harmonising Bible and philosophy, but in expressing an exhortation, and for this purpose he needs the sharp distinction between works and rest.

There seems to be yet another difference between Philo and Hebrews, at least at first glance: while Hebrews contends that God's rest is open to be entered by human beings, Philo stresses that God's rest (including feasts and Sabbath which belong to this rest) is for him alone. This problem requires a look at some of Philo's other writings. Although only God can be at rest in the true sense of the word, achieving rest is nevertheless possible also for human beings. This can be seen in the following paragraph from *De Abrahamo*, which gives an etymological explanation of the name Noah. Philo derives it from Hebrew נח ('rest') and interprets it as follows:

But 'rest' (ἀνάπαυσις) is appropriate also,³³ since its opposite, unnatural movement, proves to be the cause of turmoil and confusion and factions and wars. Such movement is sought by the worthless, while a life which is calm, serene, tranquil and peaceful to boot is the object of those who have valued nobility of conduct. He [sc. Moses] shews consistency, too, when he gives to the seventh day, which the Hebrews call sabbath, the name of rest; not, as some think, because the multitude abstained after six days from their usual tasks, but because in truth the number seven, both in the world and in ourselves, is always free from factions and war and quarrelling and is of all numbers the most peaceful. (*Abr.* 27–8)

Philo clearly states here that rest is also available to human beings. 'Rest' is explained as being the opposite of unnatural movement, which implies that it is not the opposite of movement in general. A human being's rest is thus an active rest³⁴ – which fits in with Philo's aforementioned perception of God's rest, as well as Hebrews' σαββατισμός. The connection between God's rest and man's rest in Philo becomes even clearer from another instance, this time in *De posteritate Caini*. Philo quotes Deut 5.31, where God requests Moses to stand by him, and concludes from this that

this oracle proves two things, one that the Existent Being who moves and turns all else is himself exempt from movement and turning; and secondly that he

32 In some of his writings Philo even suggests that creation is eternal: see G. E. Sterling, 'Creatio temporalis, aeterna, vel continua? An Analysis of the Thought of Philo of Alexandria', *SPhiloA* 4 (1992) 15–41; D. Winston, 'Philo's Theory of Eternal Creation: *De Prov.* 1.6–9', *PAAJR* 46/7 (1980) 593–606.

33 Philo has discussed first Noah's epithet 'just'/δίκαιος (Gen 6.9) before proceeding to 'rest'.

34 Cf. H. Weiss, 'Philo on the Sabbath', *SPhiloA* 3 (1991) 83–105, at 102: 'Sabbath observance means the change from practical to contemplative activity.'

makes the worthy man sharer of his own nature, which is repose (ἡρεμίας). (*Post.* 27–8; cf. also *Cher.* 19–20)

We have here a clear statement that the rest which can be reached by man is not just any rest, but God's rest, in which human beings can participate. How can this rest be connected to eschatology, as it is in Hebrews? It has been contended by several scholars that the lack of eschatology in Philo's concept of rest is a strong reason why Philo should not be regarded as a possible background for Hebrews 4.³⁵ It is indeed true that eschatology plays a minor role in Philo's works, and the few instances never connect it to the term 'rest'.³⁶ What we do have, however, is a connection of Sabbath to eternity. Philo expresses this idea within his interpretation of the Sabbath sacrifices. He explains that the doubling of the victims on Sabbath (cf. Num 28.9) was ordered by Moses 'because he considers the seventh day, called also in his records the birthday of the whole world, to be of equal value to eternity' (*Spec.* 1.170). A strong connection between the number seven, eternity and rest is also suggested by Philo's understanding of 1 Sam 2.5, a verse which speaks about seven children born by a barren woman, although the text is otherwise about Hannah's single child Samuel. Philo explains this by contending that one and seven are equal on a symbolical level, and concludes:

For Samuel who is appointed to God alone and holds no company with any other has his being ordered in accordance with the One and the Monad, the truly existent. But this condition of his implies the Seven, that is a soul which rests (ἀναπαυομένης) in God and toils no more at any mortal task (θητηῶν ἔργων), and has thus left behind the Six, which God has assigned to those who could not win the first place, but must needs limit their claims to the second. (*Deus* 11–12)

Reading the last three quotations together leads to an understanding of rest which is strikingly similar to that of Hebrews: (1) man's rest means ceasing from works; (2) man's rest is partaking in God's rest; (3) this rest is connected to the seventh day of creation and to Sabbath;³⁷ (4) it is connected to eternity as this is the nature of God.

35 Cf. e.g. Barrett, 'Eschatology'; J. R. Sharp, 'Philonism and the Eschatology of Hebrews: Another Look', *EAJT* 2 (1984) 289–98.

36 The instances are discussed in L. L. Grabbe, 'Eschatology in Philo and Josephus', *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, part 4: *Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 163–88.

37 The author of Hebrews, however, does not engage with speculations on seven as a number. This is a difference not in the concept of rest but in the method of elaborating it: the author of Hebrews prefers to argue from the literal meaning of Scripture, while Philo additionally draws on arithmology.

Although Philo insists on the necessity of keeping the Sabbath rules, in which the author of Hebrews shows no interest, both authors agree that the meaning of Sabbath rest goes beyond the cyclic repetition of ceasing from works: it is an eternal realm which human beings are invited to join. Both Philo and Hebrews operate with a strong division between the eternal, heavenly realm and the changeable, earthly realm. The author of Hebrews, however, redefines the transitional point between them: the 'entrance ticket' to rest is no longer wisdom and virtue, as in Philo,³⁸ but faith in Christ.³⁹

4. Rest and Activity in Hebrews

Having established the importance of Philo's Platonic concept of rest for the understanding of Hebrews, we can now address the question of how the author's assumption that God has been resting from all of his works since the seventh day of creation (4.9) fits in with the statement in the psalm text that the Israelites saw God's works in the desert for forty years (3.9–10). Basically three solutions are possible. The first option is that it may simply be an inconsistency. One might assume that the author quotes the psalm only for the purpose of elaborating a biblical concept of rest and an exhortation connected to it, without paying much attention to the rest of the text. There is, however, a reason why this is improbable. The author quotes the psalm with an intentional variant from the LXX manuscripts,⁴⁰ inserting a $\delta\iota\acute{o}$ in 3.10 and thus changing the structure of the sentences. In contrast to the LXX version, where the forty years are clearly related to God's anger, the author of Hebrews connects them to God's works. This means, as P. Enns puts it, that '[t]he insertion of $\delta\iota\acute{o}$ serves to make the clear distinction between the forty-year period of God's activity, and the subsequent period of his anger'.⁴¹ God's works are thus works of grace and not of anger. This intentional change in the sense of the quoted text points to the fact that the 'works' in the psalm text must have had a specific meaning for the author and that the tension with 4.3–4 is more than an inconsistency. This brings us to the second possibility: reading the psalm quotation in light of the Genesis quotation could mean that God created the world, entered his rest – and the wilderness generation saw his works of creation which had been in

38 Eisele, *Reich*, 237, describes Philo's approach accurately as '[e]ine Eschatologie als Aretalogie'.

39 This is also pointed out as the most significant difference by H. Weiss, 'Sabbatismos in the Epistle to the Hebrews', *CBQ* 58 (1996) 674–89, at 689.

40 Cf. Steyn, *Vorlage*, 182–3. He ranks this variant among the '[c]ontextual adaptations for the readers of Hebrews'. The assumption that it is an intentional insertion by the author of Hebrews is supported by the fact that he shows awareness of the original reading in 3.17.

41 Enns, 'Interpretation,' 355; similarly J. W. Thompson, *Hebrews* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 84, and many other commentaries.

existence since the seventh day of creation (cf. 4.3).⁴² What at first glance seems like a convincing solution is, however, at second glance, not so obvious. First, God's works of creation can be seen always and everywhere, so why stress that the Israelites saw these works in a certain area (in the desert), and for a certain time (forty years)? This specification implies that the works they saw were somehow special. Second, if we assume that the author believed his audience to be educated in biblical matters – which he obviously does as he expects his readers to understand complex arguments from Scripture – we can expect that they knew that the works the Israelites saw were more than just those of nature. They were works of keeping God's people alive by providing them with food and water. This leads me to the third solution which, I want to suggest, is the most plausible one: when Hebrews is read against the background of a Middle Platonist theory of creation, the problem disappears. As we have seen, for a Middle Platonist such as Philo, rest and creation, from God's point of view, are two sides of the same coin. God's rest is identical with his activity of *sustaining* his creation. And this is precisely what the fathers in the desert experienced: God kept them alive for forty years. This kind of activity does not contradict the fact that he rests,⁴³ just as the active celebration of Sabbath does not contradict the fact that God's people rests.

Finally, a word must be said about the place of Hebrews' concept of rest within the whole of the epistle. While an older generation of scholars heavily debated whether *κατάπαυσις* designates a state,⁴⁴ a metaphor of qualified time which is more or less unrelated to the rest of the letter,⁴⁵ or a category of space that can be equated with the heavenly sanctuary,⁴⁶ more recent scholarship tends to agree that it is both: a 'mental time-space landscape'⁴⁷ which comprises the

42 This solution is suggested by Weiss, 'Sabbatismos', 683. M. Karrer, *Der Brief an die Hebräer: Kapitel 1–5,10* (ÖTK 20/1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002) 216 goes even further in suggesting reading τῶν ἔργων in 4.3 predominantly as a back-reference to τὰ ἔργα in 3.9. The 'works' would then be a second keyword which connects the two quotations.

43 L. T. Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (NLT; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 127 concludes for the interpretation of 4.3 that 'we must take the aorist passive participle *genēthentōn* not as "done and finished" at the beginning, but as "still done and being done" from the time of the world's foundation'.

44 Cf. Attridge, 'Rest', 283.

45 Cf. J. H. Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Gospel of Truth: Early Christian Homiletics of Rest* (SBLDS 166; Atlanta: Scholars, 1998).

46 Cf. Hofius, *Katapausis*, who insists that *κατάπαυσις* is a 'Ruheort'; see also A. T. Lincoln, 'Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament', *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983²) 197–220. More recently, the spatial interpretation has been renewed by Laansma, *Rest*, 277–83.

47 J. C. de Vos, 'Hebrews 3:7–4:11 and the Pragmatic Function of Mental Time-Space Landscapes', *Constructions of Space III: Biblical Spatiality and the Sacred* (ed. J. Økland, J. C. de Vos and K. Wenell; New York: Bloomsbury, 2016) 176–90.

motif complexes of both ‘Sabbath rest’ and ‘sanctuary’.⁴⁸ Both of them are open to be entered by the faithful (cf. 4.9/10.19). And in both cases, the person who entered first is Jesus: as he went into the inner part of the heavenly sanctuary as a ‘forerunner for us’ (πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσήλθεν, 6.20), he is the first who went into God’s rest (εἰσελθὼν, 4.10) in order to rest himself and, as we may conclude, to provide entrance for others. Taking these parallels into account, the suggested understanding of σαββατισμός helps to resolve another tension within Hebrews:⁴⁹ although the author highlights several times that Christ’s salvific work happened ‘once for all’ (ὄπαξ/ἐφάπαξ, 7.27; 9.12, 26, 28; 10.10), he states at the same time that Jesus ‘always lives to make intercession’ for those who approach God through him (πάντοτε ζῶν εἰς τὸ ἐντυγχάνειν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν, 7.25). What at first glance looks like a contradiction can easily be explained by comparison to the concept of rest in Hebrews 4. The apparent tension between Christ’s ongoing intercession and his finished salvific work is parallel to that between God’s ongoing work and his ongoing rest, and has a similar solution: Christ rests from his work in the same way that God rests, that is to say, by actively sustaining what he has accomplished.

48 Cf. J. C. Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary: Access to God in the Letter to the Hebrews and its Priestly Context* (WUNT 11/349; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), who points out that a connection of both topics exists not only in Hebrews, but already within the Old Testament.

49 My considerations follow Moore, ‘Jesus’, 393–4.