

For today's devotion, I find it necessary to continue our studies in the General Letters. As mentioned in my previous reflections, I have become quite fond of the messages within these letters. The General Letters have provided me with an abundance of comfort because these letters were written during difficult times. Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude were designed to comfort persons in the midst of trials. These letters remind Christians of how to handle persecution and suffering. Circa the end of the first-century AD, which is when most of these letters were written, the Roman Empire was persecuting Christians because of their unwillingness to worship the emperor and the Roman gods. As a result, the General Letters were produced to provide comfort.

Although our suffering stems from a global pandemic, there are still insights that we can glean from these letters. Previously, I've discussed James and 1 Peter's content relative to suffering. I've also discussed James' message concerning the marginalized. For this reflection, I will discuss the Book of Hebrew's concept of "rest."

When we see the term "rest," we think of a period of time during which our minds, bodies, spirits, etc. can recover from tiring experiences. Such experiences include athletic events, manual labor, or mental exhaustion. For all of these experiences, rest cures the body/mind of its ailments. Many are ready for the time when we can rest—recover mentally and physically—from the ailments—again, the mental and physical ailments—occasioned by the pandemic. Many are looking forward to normalcy or at least experiencing the new normal. Our minds and bodies are in need of rest.

The Book of Hebrews provides a message of hope for an audience enduring persecution. As aforementioned, the Roman Empire persecuted Christians due to their unwillingness to worship the emperor and the Roman gods. Rome believed that the empire's stability and continued success depended on the subjects' habitual reverence of the deities. By appeasing the Roman deities through worship and sacrifice, the deities would continue to bless Rome. Christians' refusal to worship any other God but YHWH, therefore, was perceived as a threat to the Roman Empire.

Amid this historical background, the Book of Hebrews describes rest as salvation—the moment in time when persecution has ceased and Christians no longer have to fear imperial persecution. God offers salvation as a means of rest—as a means of living without persecution. Salvation offered hope to Christians amidst trials. However, according to the Book of Hebrews, rest is only achieved at the end of life—or, as Paul claims, at the end of the race (see [2 Timothy 4](#)). Moreover, rest and salvation occur as a result of perseverance.

Remaining steadfast amidst trials is a crucial message in this text, and the author exemplifies this point through the character of Jesus. The Book of Hebrews calls attention to Jesus' ability to endure trials. Jesus is described as a "pioneer," or a journeyer ([Hebrews 2:10](#), NRSV). Trials were not absent from Jesus' journey. Jesus endured trials and persecution throughout his life, especially on the cross. Hebrews 2:10 states: "It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Jesus became the recipient and administer of "glory...because of the suffering of death" ([Hebrews 2:9](#)). Suffering, therefore, is an intricate part of Jesus' messianic identity. Jesus endured suffering for the sake of humankind. Jesus did not abandon the faith or God's mission due to his suffering; rather, he persevered. The Book of Hebrews challenged the first-century Christian audience to replicate Jesus' behavior amidst trials and persecution.

Despite trials, the Book of Hebrews offers hope through "the promises of entering his rest" ([Hebrews 4:1](#)). Christians reach God's rest through endurance—remaining true and steadfast during the trials of life. God's rest is the conclusion to a lifelong expedition. The author offers a bold warning to those whom abandon the faith in the midst of trials, claiming that persons only receive rest as a result of perseverance (see Hebrews 6). Christians are challenged to replicate Jesus' behavior and remain steadfast amidst trials.

How does the Book of Hebrews' image of rest apply to our present circumstances? As stated above, rest implies security and restoration. Rest enables someone to heal after physical or mental hardships. The COVID-19 pandemic has created new problems in the world. We are longing for the return of normalcy. However, for the time being, we must endure the present trials. I am encouraged by this image of rest because I am excited for the moment when our minds and bodies can relax. In this case, I am using the term "rest" symbolically to envision our reality beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The author of the Book

of Hebrews used “rest” to envision a salvific future without persecution. In terms of the present, “rest” means the conclusion of this pandemic and its complications. The conclusion of the pandemic is approaching—“rest” is approaching. However, similar to how God’s rest only occurs through endurance, our rest from the COVID-19 pandemic will only arise through our perseverance—our willingness to relinquish certain rights or privileges.

We must remain patient. In the present context, perseverance includes practicing measures that will limit the transmission of the virus. Perseverance includes making sacrifices for the sake of our neighbors and our loved ones. The COVID-19 pandemic occasioned new issues; however, our calling remains the same—to replicate Jesus through sacrifice and endurance. God’s rest occurs at the conclusion of a lifelong journey which, as seen with Jesus, includes suffering. Our rest from the pandemic—our return to normalcy and the chance to properly cure our minds and bodies—will occur once the virus has been mitigated. However, this journey includes limitations. A restful reality depends on our sacrifices. Perseverance is of the utmost importance.

