

Hebrews 4 • God's Rest

Introduction

At the time Hebrews is written, it's been quite awhile since the death and resurrection of Christ. In fact, Believers are now undergoing tremendous persecution that began first from non-believing Jews but now from Rome itself. It's a time of questions regarding the faith when even Apostles are being martyred: "Why is this happening?" "If Jesus has given the second covenant, why is there now great persecution?"

God provides the answer through the writer of Hebrews in the illustration of the nation Israel and its circuitous route out of Egypt to the Promised Land. This parallels our having left the old life, refined and tested, and obtaining a new life in Christ. And like the nation Israel, the current persecution of the church is explained as a test of faith and whether one maintains focus on God or self. For just like that Old Testament generation, the promise of God's final rest has to do with the next life, and how it's obtained in the course of **this** life.

¹Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. ²For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,

“AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,”

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: “AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS”; ⁵and again in this passage, “THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.”

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What is the author of Hebrews summarizing to this point? What has been his illustration of failure to enter God's rest?

A: Hebrews' author has used the example of the generation of Israel coming out of Egypt who, because of their disobedience, were not allowed to enter Canaan. God provided a promise of rest in the new land, but that generation “came short of it” by being disobedient – unfaithful – to God's Word.

Q: What is another way to translate “good news” in v.2?

A: The Gospel.

Q: Is the author stating that the Old Testament “gospel” Israel received through Moses was rendered ineffective because it wasn't the New Testament gospel we've received through Christ?

A: Not at all. The author is stating that whenever and whatever God speaks, those hearing His words are not saved by simply hearing the message, but that it must be “united by faith in those who heard.” If we, hearing the New Testament gospel are disobedient, we will bear the same consequences as the Old Testament generation.

Q: What is the basic principle of Christian living that is being taught here?

A: Promises are not guarantees but the end result of our choices of whether or not to live our life according to God's direction. We can believe in God, believe in His promises, but if our walk and behavior don't conform to God's Word then “belief” never grows into “faith” and we fall short.

NOTE: In the Greek and Hebrew languages, there really is no distinction between “faith” and “faithfulness”. The same word is used for each. Whenever you see the word “faith”, try replacing it with “faithfulness” and you begin to understand that biblical faith is more about maintaining a faithful relationship with God by not straying from His Word.

⁶Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. ⁹So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

¹¹Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

[Read v.6-11]

Q: What is the earthly example of rest given per v.8?

A: It's the example of Joshua leading Israel to take possession of the land of Canaan. The illustration is the nation Israel (representing our own life), tried and tested to the point of being spiritually ready to take possession of Canaan (representing the rest following the time of testing/refinement).

Q: But what is given as the example of God's ultimate, final rest?

A: In v.10 it's the example of God Himself, having completed all the earthly work of the creation, resting on the seventh day. His works – or labor – is completely finished and He's entered into permanent rest.

Q: Although the example of Joshua leading Israel into Canaan is an example of one type of rest, why isn't it the example of God's final rest?

A: There are 2 types of rest being described. Although Israel entered Canaan and therefore obtained “rest” from the trials and tests of the wilderness, their work was to continue in the Promised Land by living in obedience to God's Word. The “final” rest is our ultimate, eternal, heavenly rest in our coming, eternal life with Him. A foretaste of this permanent rest is provided in the present inward rest each Believer experiences in obedience to Christ. The final rest is coming in eternity.

Q: What is being taught in the quotation of Psalm 95:7 about hearing God's voice “today”?

A: God's rest is attained through our daily obedience to His Word. The ultimate, eternal rest – although it may seem like a far distance in the future – is obtained in the here and now based on our decision whether or not to live in obedience in the present. This is clearly explained in v.11.

Hint: v.12 is one of the most quoted in all the Bible, most often used to reinforce the value of Bible study and the power of God's Word. This is not a wrong application of this verse, but consider it within the context of the entire message to this point.

¹²For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[Read v.12]

Q: Within the context of this teaching, what does this verse mean?

A: Faithfulness comes from inside our self. Obedience to God's Word means that we change our behavior. In the example of Israel, it was not enough to follow the leader through whom God's Word was given, nor was it enough to follow along with the crowd who might have been externally obedient; it all comes down to personal faithfulness.

¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

[Read v.13]

Observation: When using v.12 in its proper context, it should probably never be used without including v.13. (Remember, originally there were no chapter and verse markings.) It's one continuous thought. In fact, v.11-13 should be memorized and studied as a whole in order to place v.12 in its proper context.

¹¹Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

[Read v.11-13]

- *Are you a “selective” listener? Are you equally faithful to **every** teaching, **every** Word of God? Or do you place more or less value on each? (Hint: Would you drink a glass of fresh water if it has a single drop of poison in it?)*
- *Do you see your daily walk – daily “faithfulness” – leading to God’s ultimate rest?*
- *How sensitive are you to the fact that if we will eventually enter into a permanent rest from our works, that this means we have **PRESENT** works for which we’re responsible in the course of our calling and faithfulness to His Word?*
- *Is there anything that you actually believe you’re keeping hidden from His sight? Things that require a change in behavior/faithfulness?*