

## Hebrews 4:1-13

### ENTER INTO GOD'S REST

The author of the book of Hebrews has a pastor's heart. He is burdened for the spiritual well-being of his church. He is a true shepherd of his flock. He admonishes all of his congregation, "let us fear" with a Godly fear to enter into God's rest. He is concerned that there may be members who are drifting from trusting in God's word and fellowship with other believers. How tragic when a pastor or members of a congregation are unconcerned for others who are in danger of drifting. There should be anxiety and concern when we see the state of the church today, just as this author and pastor did. The responsibility for other Christian's spiritual life is the obligation of every believer. There are no spiritual lone-rangers.

The writer of Hebrews' goal is to encourage the Hebrew Christians who are being persecuted. He reminds them they "have become sharers of Christ." All true believers in Christ become sharers of the very life of Christ when they were regenerated or born again. They "are partakers of a heavenly calling," and participate in the vital union with Christ. Therefore, a true partaker will continue in faith, and will not apostatize to Judaism. A true believer never ceases to believe in Christ. It is not something he believed in once, and does not need to continue to believe. His faith abides in Christ. The writer does not say we will become partakers of Christ if we hold fast to our confession, but he tells us how we can distinguish the true Christian.

The promise to the believer of entering rest still holds true because the fulfillment has not yet arrived. The door is still open and the writer pleads for his readers not to turn away. God is true to His Word, and His promises still stand true to this day. Remember, with the promise, and the privilege comes a penalty, also.

#### **Warning not to miss God's rest (Heb. 4:1-5)**

"Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1).

There is no break in the argument in Psalm 95 that the author began in chapter three. This a poor chapter division. Remember chapters and verses were not in the original manuscripts of the Scriptures. They were added many centuries later.

God offers a Sabbath rest that can be entered in some measure in this life. Faith in the Good News is necessary to enter into God's rest. Until Christ returns people can enter into this rest.

The word "fear" (*phobethomen*) is a godly fear that recognizes God's awesomeness. The warning of judgment of the gospel is against sinners for refusing the remedy provided. This is not the terror of the ungodly standing before a holy God, but the godly fear which causes the believer to see the overwhelming wonder of the glory of Lord God.

"His rest" (*katapausis*) in classical Greek denotes "a causing to cease" or "putting to rest." It is the act of giving rest including a state of final rest.

God's promise is still available for us today in spite of Israel's failures. It is the rest that believers have that Christ has provided. It is peace with God in the free and full justification of believers from all their sins by the blood of Christ. It is our freedom from a servile bondage of legalism. It is freedom from the Mosaic law. It is a freedom of spirit which believers have in obedience to the gospel.

God's rest designates when God ceased from His Creation activities (Gen. 2:2). There is Israel's rest in Canaan (Deut. 12:9; Josh. 21:43-45). The Sabbath rest is a picture of the believer's rest in Christ through salvation.

Some of the readers were thinking they had come up short by thinking that Christ alone apart from the Old Testament rituals would give them His rest. They were thinking about returning to Judaism because Christ was insufficient.

There is the sense in which the gospel was preached to those who were in the wilderness through the types demonstrated in the sacrifices, the tabernacle and prophecies. God pictures the gospel in those types. From Genesis 3:15 through Malachi there was a constant stream of presentations of the good news in the coming of Christ.

"For 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" (Hebrews 4:2).

Because men fail to put their trust in Christ does in no way cause the promise of God to fail or cease. God's word will not return unto Him void.

Those who mix the promises of God and faith shall enjoy the rest that God gives in all of its applications. Those who refuse to mix the promises of the gospel with faith shall utterly come short of entering into God's rest. "The just shall live by faith."

The "good news" here is probably news about their inheritance and the possibility of entering into their rest. The inheritance Moses and the writer of Hebrews meant all that God wanted to give to His people.

"Constantly fixing the mind by spiritual meditation on its proper object--the word of God--will be a principal means whereby faith mixes it with itself. This faith sets love at work upon the objects proposed to be believed" (John Owen).

The promise of physical rest in Canaan does not apply to Christians; it did not apply to the Jews in David's day either. However in its essential character the good news was proclaimed to both groups. Jesus continually gives rest. "Come unto Me . . . I will give you rest."

The promise of God's rest in the Old Testament did not find fulfillment in those who heard the word. Sadly, those who received the promise of rest in the Old Testament did not mix faith with the promise. The word that was heard by the children of Israel was not mixed with faith in the hearers.

"For 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" (Hebrews 4:3).

God has spoken in His word and that is enough for us. We can take Him at His word and rely on it.

It is important to stress that God's provision of providing rest is still in effect even though Israel did not enter God's rest. If this passage is referring to salvation then Moses is in hell. Moses failed to enter rest in the Promised Land because he failed to trust God at Meribah. "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them'" (Numbers 20:12). However, in Matthew 17:1-3 we see Jesus on the mountain side conversing with Moses and Elijah. Let's be very clear, Moses was saved even though he did not go into the land of Canaan.

Unbelief was what prevented Israel from enjoying rest. That does not negate God's promise of rest, however. Believers in Jesus Christ are the ones who have believed and are entering God's rest. All believers in Christ, both Jews and non-Jews, are entering it now.

"We who have believed enter that rest." The word "entering" (*eiserchomaetha*) is present indicative and informs us the action was going on at the present time. It is a statement of present experience in which believers presently enjoy God's rest. At the same time, we look forward to our glorification at the consummation in the future when Christ returns.

A person enters into that rest by simple faith in Christ. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). The privilege to enter into that rest belongs to believers. The finished work of redemption by Jesus Christ on the cross has to be appropriated by faith if a person is to receive its benefits. What will you do with Jesus Christ?

"We who have believed enter that rest" points back to the moment when the person believed on Christ and received eternal life. It is a moment of decision in the past if we are Christians, but we are not yet entered God's rest in its fullness. That day will come when we see Jesus face to face.

Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

The only true rest for the souls of men is found in Jesus Christ.

Israel failed to enter into God's rest so the promise was unfilled by Israel. We know this from Psalm 95:11. Does that mean God's promise of rest is no longer available? No, the writer of Hebrews says God's rest has been available since creation.

"For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'; and again in this passage, 'They shall not enter My rest'" (Hebrews 4:4-5).

Here is the evidence for the statement in verse three (cf. Gen. 2:2; Exo. 20:11; 31:17). God's works were finished from the foundation of the world.

What is God's rest? It is the rest that comes with achievement, completion of a task and satisfaction. God saw what He had done in the six days of creation and rested. It was a job well done. The creation of the universe had been accomplished. It brought great pleasure.

God's rest is still occurring and exemplified by His not resuming creating on the eighth day. What is this rest? When God completed creation He rested from His project and enjoyed His creative work. However, now God wants His believers to rest in the eternal blessedness and fulfillment in what He shares with His children. John Calvin said, "The highest happiness of man is to be united to his God." The believer in Jesus Christ enjoys that personal relationship with God.

## **God's Today (Heb. 4:6-7)**

"Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He 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'" (Hebrews 4:6-7).

Joshua and Caleb were the only two who entered the land of Canaan because they put their trust in the Lord. God did not break the promise of His Word (Heb. 4:3, 4, 7). He remains faithful and true to His Word. He is unchangeable. That is true in our day as well. God's Word is faithful today as when He first uttered it (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

The author's argument is that God's rest still exists even though the generation under Moses did not enter into it. The reason is because God's promises are sure, and one day they will ultimately be fulfilled. God is not through with mankind. It does not depend upon one generation. If one refuses to believe, another will believe.

In verse seven the author tells us David was the author of the Psalm. Speaking through David, God repeats His invitation to rest. God did not withdraw His promise, therefore it is still in force today. The good news was that God's rest was still available in David's time. There is no indication in the Scriptures that God has withdrawn that offer. It was good then, and it still is today.

People enter into God's rest by recognizing that Christ's work of redemption from sin has been completed. The invitation is for you to believe "Today." The word "today" places the emphasis on the timeliness, importance and newness. "Today" is the day of opportunity to enter into God's rest.

## **Sabbath Rest (Heb. 4:8-9)**

"For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:8-9).

There is no true rest for the souls of men but in the good news of Jesus Christ.

This promise was fulfilled literally when Joshua entered the land of Canaan. However, Joshua did not provide Israel with rest in the fullest sense of Psalm 95:11, even though they went in to the Promised Land. It was a limited, temporal, physical rest (Josh. 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). Centuries later God spoke of this rest through David. The rest God offers is an eternal spiritual rest which is far greater than living in the land of Canaan. It is an eternal rest that is offered through the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We can enter into the "Sabbath rest" now. God's rest for believers still remains. The word "rest" in verse nine, "Sabbath rest" (*sabbatismos*) occurs only here in the New Testament. It is different word for "rest" (*katapausin*) in the discussion thus far (3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10, 11) and (*katapausen*) in 4:8, 10 meaning a cessation from activity, therefore rest. The Sabbath rest is not Canaan rest. It is God's exclusive, personal rest in which He invites the believer to share. It is not the rest of creation. God invites us to share in His presence and blessedness. This Sabbath rest is the rest every believer enters into when he like God faithfully finishes his work here on the earth. That work involves walking by faith. We will receive that rest when we receive our inheritance from Jesus at His seat of judgment (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom 14:10).

"For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:10-11).

In verse ten the writer uses *katapausis* again for "rest." The believer who enters into God's rest has ceased from his works as God did.

Jesus our High Priest has entered heaven as the forerunner of our salvation. A "Sabbath rest" waits for the people of God. F. F. Bruce suggests: "It may be, then, that in resurrection they, 'in

company with us,' are to attain this perfection and enter into God's rest," but there is no express statement to that effect. "It is, indeed, perfectly conceivable that in this view the Old Testament believers entered into the rest of God as soon as Christ had accomplished His redemptive work, while believers of the New Testament age enter it at death. One way or the other, this blissful rest in unbroken fellowship with God is the goal to which his people are urged to press forward; this is the final perfection which has been prepared for them by the sacrifice of their heavenly high priest" (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 78-79).

Since Christ is said to enter into His rest, from what labor did He rest? John Owen says, "The 'works' from which Christ 'ceased' include all that He did and suffered from His incarnation to His resurrection, as the Mediator of the new covenant. Christ's rest consists in an entire cessation from all these works, and an entire satisfaction in them and their results. His entrance into this rest was upon His resurrection . . . "

There are three prominent interpretations on Hebrews 4:10.

(1) The believer who has experienced spiritual rest in salvation, and has ceased from his own works. Some make application by interpreting it as a deeper experience in which the believer rests his soul more fully in the Lord and ceases from his own efforts at greater sanctification. Works are considered bad. The problem with this interpretation is God ceased from His good works of creation, and the Christian ceases from his bad works. That is really not a good use of the author of Hebrews analogy. God never does bad works.

(2) The believer receives his final rest at death. The apostle John heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them" (Revelation 14:13). The believer's works are regarded as his Christian ministry on the earth and are good just as God's were good at creation.

(3) The verse refers to Christ who has finished His earthly work and has entered the rest of heaven. Christ is our example to follow as He is the believer's forerunner, opening the way for us to follow into heaven. Christ has been in view from 3:1 and in 4:14 He is the High Priest who has entered heaven. The true believer may have spiritual rest in this life as he looks forward to the eternal rest in heaven. God gives His rest to believers.

For the Christian this rest is an inheritance that God desires to bestow on us when we see Him. It is an eschatological rest, not present rest. We will enter into our "Sabbath rest" that follows our labor in this life time. This passage is not speaking of living a peaceful life here and now. We are in the middle of a spiritual warfare. It is not the time of peace; that comes later.

The "Sabbath rest" is to partake of the unending rest God gives to the believer in Jesus Christ. It is reserved for the people of God, true believers in Christ. To enter into that rest is to cease from one's labors, just as God did after creation. This does not imply that the Christian in heaven will

spend an eternity of idleness. The rest is a rest from trials, persecutions, temptations and labors of this earthly pilgrimage.

The apostle John in his vision of those who have come out of the great tribulation and now stand before the throne of God praising Him and serving Him in ceaseless wonder for all eternity. "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.' Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'" (Revelation 7:9-14).

It is the responsibility of the believer to make it his earnest effort to reach eternal rest at home in heaven.

The idea of rest in view in both chapters. The basic to the whole argument is God's rest.

1. God's creation rest (4:4)
2. Canaan rest (3:7-19)
3. Salvation rest (4:1, 3, 8-9)
4. Heaven rest (4:10-11)

"Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:11).

The writer of Hebrews is encouraging his readers to make sure they are right with God. The ultimate rest is with Christ in heaven. The author wants these believers to be faithful to Christ until they finish this earthly life. To revert back to Judaism would be in effect renouncing the Lord God because Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

John Owen suggested that this rest which believers enter into by Jesus Christ consists of five things:

1. "In peace with God, in the free and full justification of believers from all their sins by the blood of Christ."
2. "In our freedom from a servile bondage-frame of spirit in the worship of God."

3. "In our deliverance from the yoke and bondage of Mosaical institutions."
4. "In that gospel worship . . . the rest of liberty and freedom of spirit which believers have in obedience unto the gospel."
5. "In its being God's rest, and by entering into it believers enter into the rest of God."

The writer admonishes these believers to strive to enter the rest, "be diligent" to make haste, be in earnest, concentrate your whole being on entering that rest God offers freely by His grace. Exercise a godly zeal to reach the goal. Be serious, in dead earnest to enter your rest.

Israel set the bad example by not entering into the promised land because of "disobedience" to the good news of God's promise. Unbelief leads to willful "disobedience" (*apeitheias*). "Whatever we consider in sin, God principally considers the root and spring of it in unbelief. . . . No, unbeliever shall ever enter into the rest of God" wrote John Owen.

God's offer must be accepted today; we do not know what follows tomorrow. There is no assurance that we will have another offer. God's "today" still exists. Today is the day of salvation.

## **SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

1. God is still true to His promises. His Word abides forever. We enter into God's rest because His promise still stands.
2. God fulfills His promises only in those who accept His Word in faith. The message of the Bible must be mixed with faith. No one can enter into God's eternal rest unless he puts His faith in Jesus Christ.
3. We who have believed enter into God's perfect rest. God's promise has become a reality according to His eternal purpose for the believer.
4. Who enters into God's rest? Only those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. The threat remains true as well for everyone who does not accept God's Word in faith. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). The threatening of the gospel are against sinners for refusing the remedy God has provided for them. "The failing of men through their unbelief does not cause the promise of God to fail or cease. . . . Men by their unbelief . . . cannot rob God of His faithfulness," said John Owen.

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