

HEBREWS

3:1 – 4:13

Introduction

The Hebrew Christians in the first century were weary. Their worldly goods were being confiscated. They were not able to conduct business or maintain their trade. They were mocked, scourged, tormented, and imprisoned. They were made homeless and lived as pilgrims and strangers in caves and holes in the ground.

A weary person craves **rest**. The word “rest” occurs no less than eleven times in these verses. It would have encouraged these weary Hebrew Christians to hear about the possibility of entering God’s rest.

As you continue reading the verse you discover a potential danger to experiencing and enjoying rest:

Hebrews 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, **lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.**

The writer did not want his readers to fail... **And God does not want you and I to fail to enter and experience His rest!**

We’ll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 “Today” And Everyday You Can Refuse To Enter Into God’s Rest, or #2 “Today” And Everyday You Can Remain Empowered In God’s Rest.

#1 “Today” And Everyday You Can
Refuse To Enter Into God’s Rest
(3:1-4:8)

You are going to learn that “rest” is a spiritual quality of life that is available to Christians every moment of everyday. It is independent of circumstances and sufferings. It is a matter of walking by faith regardless your trials and tragedies.

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling...

These Hebrews were definitely saved. “Holy brethren” means they were *saints* with the same *spiritual origins* as the writer. “Partakers” is a word meaning *full participation* in salvation. “Heavenly calling” leaves no doubt: They were called *from* heaven and they were on their way *to* heaven.

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

To escape persecution the Hebrew Christians were considering a return to their former Jewish ritual religion. Instead, they should “consider... Jesus.” Their immaturity and insecurity in their trials was due to a preoccupation with themselves. Later in this letter they would be told to “consider one another” (Hebrews 10:24). Jesus... Others... Then you.

Two titles are given to Jesus - “Apostle” and “High Priest.” In the next few verses the writer will show that Jesus was and is a superior “Apostle” to Moses. Beginning in the middle of chapter four he will show that Jesus was and is superior to Aaron and all the priests of Israel.

“Apostle” means *sent one*. You see in verse two that both Moses and Jesus were sent by God to minister to the Jews:

Hebrews 3:2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house.

The word “house” is used six times in this and in the next four verses. It refers to the people of God, not a physical structure. “Household” might be a better way to understand what is meant. Moses ministered to God’s household; so did Jesus. Both were “faithful.”

The comparison stops and the contrasts begin:

Hebrews 3:3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house.

Hebrews 3:4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things *is* God.

Hebrews 3:5 And Moses indeed *was* faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*,

Hebrews 3:6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

Moses was a *servant* in God's household; Jesus was and is the *Son* over the household. Moses was a *member* of the household; Jesus *built* the household. Moses *spoke* of things to come; Jesus was the *substance* of the things Moses spoke about. Jesus was and is superior to Moses; the writer is telling Hebrew Christians "do not go back into Jewish ritual religion." Jesus is just as superior to anything **you** might desire to return to.

There is an "if" clause at the end of verse six: "whose house we are **if** we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." The word "if" has led some to conclude that you must do the things mentioned in order to maintain your salvation. "If" you don't, they say, you will forfeit eternal life and be lost.

I don't think so. These Hebrew Christians were definitely saved and would get to heaven in "the end." **But they could forfeit "confidence and rejoicing of the hope" along their way to heaven.**

The example puts this into perspective:

Hebrews 3:7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "*Today, if you will hear His voice,*
Hebrews 3:8 *Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness,*
Hebrews 3:9 *Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years.*
Hebrews 3:10 *Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.'*
Hebrews 3:11 *So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"*

God redeemed the Jews out of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. His desire was to bless them in the Promised Land of Canaan. When they were commanded to go into the Promised Land and claim their blessings, they **disobeyed** God due to **disbelief**. There were obstacles and enemies in the land and they did not believe God could overcome them; there were battles to be fought in the land and they did not believe God could win them. They refused to enter Canaan; then, even though they repented, God would not allow them to enter into Canaan. That disbelieving and disobedient generation remained in the wilderness for forty years until all the adults except Joshua and Caleb had died. **They thus forfeited the "confidence and rejoicing of the hope" that they could have experienced and enjoyed in their relationship with God.**

In the midst of their enemies... In their battles... Overcoming obstacles... They would find **spiritual rest** as they walked by faith trusting God in every situation.

Fast forward to the first century and beyond... What does this have to do with the Hebrew Christians and with us? It's an example to us of a failure we can still commit through disbelief and disobedience.

Hebrews 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

Hebrews 3:13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Hebrews 3:15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Hebrews 3:16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses?

Hebrews 3:17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?

Hebrews 3:18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?

Hebrews 3:19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

The Jews did not forfeit their *conversion*, but they did forfeit their "confidence." They did not forfeit their *relationship* with God, but they did forfeit their "rejoicing" in God on their way to heaven.

You, too, can disbelieve and therefore disobey God in the world. You do not forfeit your conversion or relationship, but you do forfeit your confidence and rejoicing on your way to heaven.

Canaan could be a place of obstacles or opportunities; enemies or empowering. So can Christianity. As you face your obstacles and enemies, you can walk by faith with confidence and rejoicing in your spiritual resources. Spiritual rest is "confidence" and "rejoicing" in your "hope" despite your circumstances as you walk by faith.

This is the rest that remains but which you may refuse.

A full-blown discussion of rest begins in chapter four. In the first five verses he shows the Hebrew Christians from Scripture and from their history that God always promised His people on earth a spiritual rest that can be received by faith or refused by disbelief.

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

Hebrews 4:2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*.

Hebrews 4:3 For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: “*So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’*” although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

The word “gospel” means *good news*. At the borders of the Promised Land the Jews heard *good news* from the spies about the abundance of blessings in the Promised Land. Disbelief and subsequent disobedience kept them out of blessings and in the wilderness for forty years until they died.

“We who have believed” (v3) means that these Hebrew Christians had believed God for their eternal salvation in the past. “Do enter that rest” is in the present tense; it was something they must decide. Like the Jews at the border of Canaan, it was a decision they must make.

The Hebrew Christians might have objected to this idea of a rest that remains to be entered. For one thing, wasn’t the weekly Sabbath their spiritual rest? No, it wasn’t, as you see in verses four and five:

Hebrews 4:4 For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh *day* in this way: “*And God rested on the seventh day from all His works*”;

Hebrews 4:5 and again in this place: “They shall not enter My rest.”

The weekly Sabbath was a kind of rest God desired and designed for the Jews. But even though they might keep the Sabbath, God still spoke in Scripture of another rest that they may or may not enter.

We are under no obligation to “keep” the Sabbath as a rule of life by setting aside Saturday or Sunday. The weekly keeping of the Sabbath was a covenant between God and Israel – never binding on anyone but Israel. And the truth is that *everyday* is now the Sabbath in a spiritual sense. Even if you did decide to “keep” the Sabbath, there still remains another rest – a daily, spiritual rest in God’s promises.

The Hebrew Christians might have a further objection to this idea of a rest that remains to be entered. Didn’t Joshua eventually lead the next generation of Jews into Canaan? Didn’t they enter the rest?
Nope!

Hebrews 4:6 Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience,
Hebrews 4:7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “*Today,*” after such a long time, as it has been said: “*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.*”
Hebrews 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.

Your Bible might say “Jesus” in verse eight. “Jesus” is the New Testament equivalent of *Joshua*. The person spoken of here is Joshua who led Israel into Canaan. The point the writer made was that Psalm 95 spoke of entering God’s rest centuries after Joshua led them in to Canaan (“after such a long time”). Spiritual rest is something different than the physical entrance into the Promised Land. It is a *spiritual* experience that remains to be entered and enjoyed. Four times at least in these verses you are told “today” is the time to enter into spiritual rest. Spiritual rest is a present possibility *today* and **everyday**.

The spiritual rest we are talking about is the daily experience of confidence and rejoicing as you walk by faith through this world on your way to heaven. In the world you face obstacles... enemies... and battles. God has provided spiritual resources for you by which you may rest in the midst of your struggles. Disbelief in God's spiritual resources leads to disobedience and forfeiting of rest.

How do you enter into this rest of confidence and rejoicing?

#2 “Today” And Everyday You Can Remain Empowered In God’s Rest (4:9-13)

Hebrews 4:9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

This is a promise of spiritual rest being immediately available to every believer. The present tense of “there remains” means that rest does not refer to something in the future, like heaven; it points to what you can have right now. We are not talking either about salvation itself. The people being addressed are *already* “the people of God.”

Hebrews 4:10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

God is your example. God's rest is described as His "ceas[ing] from... works." **You** therefore enter into spiritual rest by ceasing from your own works.

What does it mean to "cease from... works?" Rather than meeting your obstacles, enemies, and battles in your own effort and by your own energy, you are to be **empowered** by the resources God supplies.

Hebrews 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

"Diligent" stresses urgency in their decision making. They faced a decision similar to that of their forefathers at the borders of Canaan. Would they go forward in their walk of faith? Or backward and return to Jewish ritual religion? To return to the Temple sacrifices would be a decision they could not totally recover from. They should instead decide to trust God in their suffering, to enter and experience spiritual rest by faith despite their persecution.

How do you enter and experience God's rest?

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The "Word of God" in this context is the written Word, the Bible. It is "living." The word means *life-giving*. For example: In the parables the Word of God is often equated with seed which contains life within itself, able to germinate and produce fruit. If you will believe it and obey it, God's Word will bring forth life and fruit.

It is "powerful." The word literally means *work[s] within*. We might use the word *transform*. If you will believe it and obey it, God's life-giving Word will transform you from within.

It is "sharp." It's sharpness is described as a spiritual instrument, "sharper than any" physical "sword," "piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow." There are two levels of division. First, it divides "joints and marrow" from "soul and spirit." Joints and marrow refer to physical properties, appetites, and drives. This is a promise to you that God's life-giving, transforming Word can

lance your physical appetites and drives! It is a promise of victory over your sinful flesh.

God's Word can also "discern" the "soul" from the "spirit." Your soul is your mind, will, and emotions. You were born a sinner and were soul and body with a dead spirit. When you are born-again, your spirit is made alive and you are spirit, soul, and body. The Word is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The word "discern" means *critic* in the sense of making a realistic assessment or evaluation. God's life-giving, transforming Word gives you a realistic assessment and evaluation of your mind, will, and emotions so that you can be governed by your spirit and not by your own soulish feelings and desires.

By the way, God's Word is the **only** life-giving, transforming instrument that can discern between soul and spirit. Contemporary psychotherapies and so-called "Christian" psychology attempt to help you but, to the extent they mix human wisdom with God's Word, they weaken the life-giving, transforming ability inherent in God's Word.

You are to cease from your own efforts and energies and be empowered from within by God's life-giving, transforming Word. To put it into practical terms: You discover from God's Word how to think and live and then you believe God is able to empower you to apply it.

Conclusion

For those of you more *poetic* than *practical*, the writer says the same thing using a picture:

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

"Naked" means *naked*. "Open" is from the root word for *throat*. It is used of exposing the throat of a sacrificial animal just before the knife is used to cut its throat.

This isn't as bad as it sounds! Remember: The Hebrew Christians were considering a return to Jewish ritual religion and the sacrifice of animals in the Temple. Animal sacrifice ended once-for-all when Jesus offered Himself as the final "Lamb of God" on Calvary's Cross.

Instead of returning to the altar and having a priest sacrifice an animal on your behalf – **You are on the altar, your life a living sacrifice.**