

# Hebrews

## Chapter Four

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**Heb 4:1-2 Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup>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.**

Of course the “therefore” refers to the previous material regarding the failure of the Israelites to enter in the rest signified by Canaan. Millions of Jews were condemned for their lack of belief (Jude 1:5) but God did not forsake Israel. Many Jews rejected Jesus but still God did not forsake Israel. But the Jews of 68 AD should recognize from their failures that they should have a great fear of not trusting God: *Matt 10:28 "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

The writer is urging the recipients of this letter to be afraid for the souls of some in their midst who may not have received the salvation earned by Jesus Christ. When he says “while a promise remains”, he is stating that the promise of entering His rest is only available while the people are alive or before Jesus returns. Entering His rest always means receiving the salvation earned by Jesus Christ for His people. Throughout this section it is clear that just entering Canaan is not equivalent to receiving salvation. In verse two he warns the readers that they have heard the good news of this salvation preached, but so had the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness. Throughout the thousands of years many people have heard the good news of salvation but just hearing the good news is not sufficient to receive this salvation. The hearing of the Word must be united by faith given from God so that the people are able to enter the rest. Caleb and Joshua demonstrated that their hearing of the message was combined with real faith. Of course this faith must produce works and only true faith given by God will result in works. *James 2:14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?*  
*James 2:17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*  
*James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?*  
*James 2:26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*

Millions of people in the United States hear the good news every weekend but certainly not many of those people are saved or this would be a very different country than we currently observe. Perhaps a similar ratio of saved to lost people exists now as existed when God destroyed the Israelites who did not believe ( $1 \times 10^{-6}$ )? If so, and if 30% of people in the US attend

church every Sunday then there would be  $1 \times 10^6 \times .30 \times 350,000,000 = 105$  truly saved people. Perhaps that is too small! Or not! Obviously we cannot put a number on how many people in the US are really saved but the state of the country certainly reveals that they are in the vast minority. We should obey the author of Hebrews and be fearful of the souls of people in our congregations.

**Heb 4:3-5 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. <sup>4</sup>For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; <sup>5</sup>and again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest."**

The word "believed" is the verb form of the word for "faith" (pisteuo) and so might be interpreted as "faithed" or "exercised faith". He is stating that the only ones to whom he is referring are those who have exercised the given faith by works and certainly that is not everyone in the congregation. What does he mean by "enter the rest"? People have wondered if he is referring to after death or before death. However it seems to me that the meaning is the same as our understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven for it began with the rule of Jesus Christ, continues now, and will be totally fulfilled at His second coming. Therefore I would say that he means that those who have exercised a received faith have already entered the Kingdom of Heaven and they will be completely in it later. The earthly rest in Canaan was a symbol or shadow of the final rest that all of God's family will enter later. Jesus told us to not expect relief from tribulation: *John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."* So obviously this rest is a spiritual rest while we are alive and then followed by an eternal rest. This spiritual rest affords us much peace, as He promised and as elaborated by Paul: *Phil 4:19 And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

He next contrasts those who exercised faith with those who did not. He quotes from:

*Psa 95:6-11 Come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. <sup>7</sup>For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice, <sup>8</sup>Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness; <sup>9</sup>"When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. <sup>10</sup>"For forty years I loathed that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. <sup>11</sup>"Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest."*

He is not just reiterating the failure of the previous people when he says that they shall not enter my rest but he is emphasizing the reality of the rest. The Hebrews' author then quotes from: *Gen 2:2 And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.* He is stating here that the rest promised by God is no less than that He also has enjoyed since the completion of creation. The phrase about the completion of each day is not repeated for the seventh day since His rest continues forever. Of course this rest is not one of idleness but it is a time of the absolute sovereignty of God over all of His creation that was completed, including the plan for the work of

Jesus Christ. When we think of His rest we should then think of His absolute sovereign rule over every created thing. Thus in thinking of our rest or entrance into the Kingdom of God, we should think of the absolute peace and comfort we have as a child of God. There is no work for us to do so we just rest in the knowledge that God brought us into His rest and it is an eternal rest.

**Heb 4:6-7 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup>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."**

The author is focusing on the two generations of people. The first was the group which disobeyed God and was rejected. Psalm 95 had been written many years after the condemnation of this first group and the author is quoting it to show God's judgment that had been passed on that group. The second group consists of the people contemporary with the author. The example has been set by God by His dealing with the first group. Those who disobey Him will be rejected. But now (today) there is still time to respond positively to God's invitation. But they must not harden their hearts to the message. Although there is no work required of people to respond to God's call, if one does not feel a burning desire to obey God totally and devote the remaining years to His service it is not likely that God has given the necessary faith to enter the rest. When we received that effective call 40 years ago we knew that we would either have Jesus as our total Lord or we should quit playing church. We decided that God had called us and our response would be yes. The author is telling his contemporaries that God is still accepting people into His rest because Jesus has removed all barriers to that rest.

**Heb 4:8-10 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. <sup>9</sup>There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. <sup>10</sup>For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.**

The name Joshua is the Hebrew form of the Greek name Jesus so we see that even though Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan that was not the ultimate site of the rest promised to them. It was required that Jesus would lead His people into the final rest. Thus for all of God's people of all ages there is a final rest that is called a Sabbath rest in analogy with the rest of God. The argument of whether the fourth commandment is still valid seems rather mute but it is important that we understand what that Sabbath rest is for God's people. Just as God rested from all of His creation work but still remains active in keeping the universe and all of His people going toward His goals, we rest from any work to please God but still remain active in our assignment of personal sanctification and obeying the command to teach and disciple His people. Sunday is the Lord's Day and we will read later how the author of Hebrews tells people to not abandon this day of worshipping collectively. But the Saturday rest was just a shadow of the promise of total spiritual rest and that should be done by every Christian every day. People can easily become very legalistic about such a day if the concept is not properly understood and Paul warned us of such a danger:

*Col 2:16-17 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- <sup>17</sup>things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.*

Jesus rested from His works after the resurrection but He still rules from the right hand of God the Father who also rested from His works of creation. So we should all rest every second of every day from any salvation work that might tempt us. John also told of this rest (by the way, notice that we do take something with us: our deeds!): *Rev 14:13 And I 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."*

**Heb 4:11-13 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience. <sup>12</sup>For 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. <sup>13</sup>And 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.**

The author urges all readers of this letter to be diligent to enter that rest. There are many Biblical examples of people who were rejected by God because of their disobedience. Paul gave examples of such failures in:

*1Cor 10:1-12 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food; <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup>Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. <sup>7</sup>Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." <sup>8</sup>Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. <sup>9</sup>Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. <sup>10</sup>Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*

Even apparent obedience without faith is also disobedience and those people also will be rejected from entrance to that rest: **Matt 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup>"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup>"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'**

Verses 12 and 13 relate to the final judgment that all will face. We may be able to fool some people but we cannot hide our true thoughts and actions from God for His word will reveal our inmost thoughts and desires. The word of God does not refer to Jesus but to anything said by God and His word is indeed unique for it opens the mind and soul of people so that all is revealed. The use of the word translated “judge” moves into legality and God is the perfect judge as all thoughts and actions of people will be judged against His standards. Nothing or nobody can hide from God as a study of El Roi shows. The Greek word translated “open” in verse 13 was also used when prisoners were being examined in court. A knife was tied to their throat with the point toward the chin so that the prisoner could not bow his head and thus was forced to look into the eyes of the accuser. So will be the time when people face judgment in that they will be face to face with the accuser who will be God. Praise the Lord that we will not have to face that judgment seat as all of our sins have already received the just wrath of God when our sins were placed into the account of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Heb 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.**

Our High Priest is Jesus the Son of God. The Jews thought of three heavens: the air we breathe and in which the birds fly, the space in which we see the stars, and the dwelling place of God. Jesus came from heaven to earth and so He passed through the heavens is a way of saying that indeed He is God. The Jewish high priest was allowed into the Holy of Holies only once a year on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. He had to purify himself to go there to offer a sacrifice for the people (Lev 16). He had to go through three areas in the Temple. He had to go through the door into the outer court, then through another door into the Holy Place, and finally through the veil into the Holy of Holies. Jesus also went through three areas as He reversed the process of His entrance into the world to take on a physical body. The Jewish high priest had to go through the process every year in a non-ending process of sacrifice offerings for the sins of the people. But Jesus made the one and final offering of His life for the perfect sacrifice for the sins of His people. The appeal to the Jews here is that if they have accepted Jesus as their High Priest then they should demonstrate this process by permanently holding fast to that confession. Since AD 70 there has been no Temple and therefore no place for the Jews to offer their sacrifice although they still celebrate Yom Kippur as just the holiest of holy days but with no priests and no sacrifices. This is an empty day for them but we collectively celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins every Sunday and we should do so every day individually.

Only those who have been given faith will be able to hold fast their confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. He was tempted in ways that would break us if we were not in Christ.

*1Co 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

We yield to temptation before it reaches its ultimate thrust but Jesus faced all temptations throughout their assault and did not sin. Since He did not sin He cannot know the feeling of sinning but He did endure the wrath that was due us for our sin so He knows well the judgment of our sin. Our high priest knows exactly what we face in our walk here and He knows our weaknesses. So as we are tempted we are to get close to the throne of grace to receive that grace from Him. Since He is our High Priest there is no need for any other priests to receive our confession. We will read more about Jesus as the High Priest in chapters 7-9. He knows the temptations we face and He knows our weaknesses so there is nothing for us to fear as we go to the throne of grace to receive the help that we need daily. This receiving of mercy and grace is an important component of salvation for such not only saves us from the wrath of God it also gives us mercy and grace for our daily living.