

Hebrews Chapter Four

In the fourth chapter of Hebrews the writer tells us we have a better rest than what Joshua provided the children of Israel in Canaan. Moses led the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, but died without crossing over into the promised land. It was up to Joshua to lead them into the land that flowed with milk and honey (Numbers 13:27). But, Jesus provides a greater rest than that. The writer uses the rest of God on the seventh day to illustrate our rest with God.

The promise of rest (verses 1-10)

This chapter begins with the word, “therefore”. The use of this word indicates that we must look back to what has previously been written. In this case we are pointed specifically back to Hebrews 3:19 where the writer tells us that the children of Israel could not enter into the promised land because of unbelief. This lack of faith was made manifest in their disobedience. The twin evils of unbelief and disobedience are things we must beware of.

We are instructed to fear (verse one). The fear of God is a theme in other passages of the New Testament (Luke 1:50 and Acts 10:35). Many people in our times do not want to fear God, but the writer instructs us that we must fear Him in order to avoid the mistakes of the children of Israel.

The first reason given for fearing God is so we will not come short of the rest of God (verse one). The rest that God provides is spoken of in various ways. David described it as being led beside the still waters (Psalm 23:2) while Jesus said that we would find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:29). In Revelation 14:13, John recorded that the dead in the Lord were blessed because they rest from their labors and their works

follow them. The rest that God provides is possible through our fear of Him. This is in stark contrast to the way of the world. David describes the characteristics of worldly people in Psalm 36:1-4.

In verse two we find that the gospel was preached to the children of Israel as well as to us. The difference being that they (the children of Israel) did not receive the “good news” through faith. Indeed, the good news that the children of Israel rejected was that God would bring them into the promised land. The word gospel simply means good news. The writer is not arguing that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was preached to the children of Israel as they came out of Egypt. What is being argued is that when God promises something we must acquire it by faith. In our case, when the message of Jesus is preached, it must be received through faith in Christ.

As the writer implies in verse three, if you believe you can enter the rest of God. The Old Testament quotation in verse three comes from Psalm 95:11. This passage is repeated again in verse seven. The writer also tells us that the works of God were finished from the foundation of the world (Genesis 2:1-3). In fact, the writer quotes from Genesis 2:2 in verse four. Everyone is familiar with the fact that God rested upon the seventh day. By using the rest of God which commenced upon that day, the writer implores us to enter into that rest through faith.

Verse six tells us that some must enter that rest and the ones who had the first opportunity (the children of Israel) did not enter in because of disobedience. A certain day is promised in verse seven, which is also a quotation from Psalm 95:7-8. That day is today! We are instructed not to harden our hearts as the children of Israel did. Their experience is given as a warning to us not to follow in their disobedience and unbelief.

Joshua did not give them the rest that God promises. While they did enter the land of Canaan in fulfillment of the promise of God, verse eight tells us that God's rest refers to something else. The writer shows that after Joshua led the children of Israel into the promised land that David promises another day of rest. David lived long after Joshua had died, so the rest that God promises us could not refer to the inheritance of Israel in Canaan. We should also pay attention to the fact that the writer of Hebrews ascribes the authorship of the Psalms to David. There are many in our time who do not believe in the inspiration of the scriptures, this is one proof that those who wrote the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Also, we must notice that the writer uses the word "remains" in verse nine. This word is in the present tense and indicates a continuing promise. The rest that God gives us is something, not in the past, but in the present and future.

Verse ten tells us that when we enter rest we cease from our own works in the same way that God ceased from His on the seventh day. This could possibly refer to the fact that once we accept Jesus through faith, our works are no longer ours, but His. Or, it could refer to a future entrance into rest, such as that spoken of by John in Revelation 14:13.

The Word of God reveals (verses 11-13)

We are instructed to be diligent to enter that rest and warned not to fall like Israel did. The reason given for the failure of Israel is their disobedience. The writer then tells us that the word of God is living and powerful. This description is also given in Jeremiah 23:29; Romans 1:16; Ephesians 6:17; and Revelation 19:15.

The word is described as sharp and powerful, as something that can pierce between the soul and spirit, in the same way that joints and marrow can be divided. The

word has the power to discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts. It can show us when we are disobedient to God. The writer of Hebrews shows that our thoughts and intents are in many ways more important than our actions, as Jesus also taught (Matthew 5:21-30). The word insures that nothing is hidden but that all things are known by God and we will give account of our deeds (Revelation 20:12).

Christ, our High Priest (verses 14-16)

This passage begins a discussion of Jesus as High Priest that continues into the next chapter. Jesus is described as having passed through the heavens and is affirmed as the Son of God.

We are warned to hold fast our confession (verse 14) which is also repeated in Hebrews 10:23. We are also told that Jesus can sympathize with us because He faced the same temptations we do (Matthew 4:1-11). The reason that Jesus is superior to any other High Priest is the fact that He withstood temptation without sin (verse 15).

We are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace (verse 16). This is similar to the teaching contained in Hebrews 10:19-22. Our purpose in coming to the throne of grace is to obtain mercy. There is a difference between mercy and justice. Justice is what we deserve; mercy is what we get instead of what we deserve.

To illustrate this, we are reminded of the lady who went to a photographer to have her picture made. When the photographer was finished and showed her the final product, the lady exclaimed, "I'm not going to pay for that! That picture doesn't do me justice". To which the photographer replied, "Lady, what you need is mercy, not justice!"

We are also encouraged to come to the throne of grace to find help in time of need. This is a clear indication to the Christian that prayer is effectual. Of course, we should not restrict our prayer life only to those times when we are in need.