

### The “Rest” of God

#### Hebrews 4:1-11

Hebrews 4:1-11 - *Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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”; <sup>5</sup> and again in this place: “They shall not enter My rest.” <sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. <sup>9</sup> There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. <sup>11</sup> Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”*

#### Background Notes

How many of you would admit that this not an easy chapter to interpret? Before we try to answer our questions about the “rest” mentioned in this chapter, we need to remember the audience to whom the author of Hebrews wrote this letter.

Remember - the recipients of this letter were primarily Jewish. They were all at least “professing” Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah - but the author was concerned that some of them may not have been *true* believers.

In fact, some of these professing Jewish believers were tempted to return to Judaism. The persecution of Christians was beginning, but there was safety in Judaism. The author was concerned that some of his readers might be falling short of God’s “rest.”

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. Unbelief, evidenced by disobedience, closes the door to God’s “rest.”

At the end of chapter 3, we see that the author illustrated the possible unbelief and disobedience of the readers of this

epistle with the failure of the children of the Israel to enter Canaan. Hebrews 3:18: “*And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*” Now skip down to Hebrews 4:11: “*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*”

Unbelief, evidenced by disobedience, closes the door to the “*rest*” of God. This was true in the Old Testament, it was true at the time that the author of Hebrews is writing, and it is applicable to all of us today.

What is this “*rest of God*”? And when is this “*rest of God*”? Several different “*rests*” are mentioned in Scripture:

- There is the *rest* of God at the end of Creation Week. Genesis 2:2 says, “*God rested on the seventh day from all His work,*” - a verse quoted in verse 4 of this chapter.
- There is the *rest* of Canaan, or the Promised Land, in Hebrews 3:18.
- There is the *rest* of salvation in Matthew 11:28-30. In this familiar passage the Lord Jesus said, “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” This is God’s “*rest*” of salvation. Everyone who has trusted Christ as Savior has this *rest* of salvation.
- There is the *rest* of surrender - the *rest of soul* that comes with submitting your whole life to the Lord. “*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:29-30).
- And of course there is the future *eternal rest* of Heaven.

So the Bible teaches about a number of different “*rests*.” Now the big question: of what *rest* was the author speaking in Hebrews 4, when he urged his readers not to fall short of that *rest* - and not to miss out on that *rest*? I believe the author of Hebrews was thinking primarily of the *future eternal rest of God* in which all true believers will share. This future *rest* probably includes the future Messianic *rest* of our Lord’s kingdom on this earth, which will in turn lead in to the *eternal rest* of the New Heavens and the New Earth. All believers will share in that future kingdom *rest*.

Some Bible expositors or teachers go with the thought that the author was speaking of present *rest of soul* in Hebrews 4, because of the beginning of verse 3: “*For we who have believed do enter that rest,*” and also verse 10: “*For he who has entered His rest.*” It certainly sounds the author was speaking of a rest that we can have now.

So was God’s future *eternal rest* primarily in view in this chapter, or was it a *rest* that we enter now? When you become a Christian, you have eternal life. Eternal life and its benefits do not start when you die and go to Heaven – they are present benefits of salvation! So in that sense, you enter the *future rest of God* now.

The primary point that the author of Hebrews was driving home to his readers was to ***make sure you are saved now!*** Make sure that you’re not just professing to be a Christian. Don’t fall away and go back to Judaism! Turning back is an indication that you never really entered God’s *rest of salvation*, and that and you will not take part in the *rest of Christ’s coming kingdom* and the *rest of Heaven*.

What an important message for every reader of Hebrews – then and today! Let me ask you - have you entered the *eternal rest of God*? Will you participate in the *rest* of the world to come, both in Christ's kingdom here on this earth, and on into the eternal state? Make sure of your salvation today. Make sure that you have your title to the *eternal rest of God*.

Here are a few more points from this chapter that persuade me that God's future eternal rest was primarily in the author's mind when he wrote Hebrews 4.

**a. God's creation rest (v3-4).**

This *rest of God* has been available from the foundation of the world! It's greater than the *rest* of entering the Promised Land, or Canaan. This is the *eternal rest* of God. Even though that *rest* has been disrupted and disturbed temporarily because of sin and Satan, yet it is still there - and it will be there forever!

**b. The "rest" was future to Joshua and David (v7-9).**

Verses 8-9: "*For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.*" Verse 8 sounds like a contradiction to what we read in the book of Joshua, but is it? No! Joshua did not bring the children into the *Messianic rest* of the Lord's future kingdom or to the *eternal rest* of God that is mentioned in Hebrews 4. And neither did David (v7). Even David's glorious kingdom was not the "rest" of Hebrews 4.

Abraham looked forward to the "rest" of Hebrews 4 - the *rest* that will be associated with that eternal "*city which has foundations whose builder and Maker is God*" (*Hebrews 11:10*). Even though that *eternal rest* is still future, true believers can enter it now.

**c. "Sabbath rest"**

Verse 9: "*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.*" The word that's used here for "rest" is a different Greek word, and it means **Sabbath rest**. It refers to that *eternal Sabbath rest* which will never be disrupted or disturbed. That *eternal rest* is available to all - but it must be entered by faith now.

## 2. Faith, evidenced by perseverance, opens the door to the "rest of God."

Verse 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.*" Faith is the key to entering the *rest* of God.

How do you know if you have saving faith? How do you know it's not just a profession of faith, like some of those 1<sup>st</sup> century readers of the letter to Hebrews?

The answer is that **true faith perseveres**. Continuance in the faith is proof of the reality of faith. Remember Hebrews 3:6 - "*whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.*" The Bible never teaches that you will enjoy the *eternal rest* of God because you raised your hand in church at some time, or if you casually said you believed in Christ but never followed up on it.

Let's say someone is living a life of sin, but still claims they're saved. They say they're saved because they walked down the aisle at an evangelistic service or a Billy Graham crusade - or they raised their hand somewhere. But God will never allow that kind of profession of faith. God's Word states that "**True faith perseveres.**" If you are continuing in the faith - that's how you know you have true saving faith.

Remember our Lord's "Parable of the Sower"? The seed that fell on rocky ground certainly looked like "the real thing" at first - but it didn't last. It didn't persevere.

True faith perseveres. Faith, evidenced by perseverance, opens the door to entering the *rest of God*.

## Practical Application

### It **does** get better than this!

"It doesn't get any better than this!" I'm sure you've heard that expression in ads for various exciting experiences or fancy vacation spots. Well, let me tell you, it **does** get better than this! For those of us who are believers, it certainly does get better - **much better** - than what any of those ads portray!

Think of the *eternal rest and peace* of being with the Lord forever! When God ceased from His wonderful work of Creation, He rested. "*For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His*" (v10). The rest of soul that we enjoy now is only a foretaste of what's to come when our life's work is complete - that *eternal rest of God*!

In that eternal peace and rest of God, there will be no more tears, no more struggles, no more suffering, no more loss, no more affliction, no more labors. What a future we have to look forward to - that future eternal rest of God! It certainly **does** get better than this!