

1. Falling Short of God's Rest (Heb 4:1-2)

The chapter break should be ignored, for the warning continues with a third “lest”: “*let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it*” (Heb 4:1; cf. 3:12-13). The Israel-ites had “good news” preached to them: a promised land of no bondage or war, abundant produce, ready-made cities, freedom of worship, etc. But this good news “*did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it*” (4:2). Sometimes human nature can be mystifying: God promises everything we could ever want or need; yea, He offers glory and splendor we could never achieve on our own. Yet without faith, these magnanimous offers fall on deaf ears. God’s people must *fear* unbelief, not deny it. We must constantly examine ourselves for signs of waning faith or indifference.

1. Explain the term “gospel” as used in Hebrews 4:2.

2. Entering God's Rest (Heb 4:3-5)

The author begins to focus upon the reality of an eternal rest offered by God. His first point goes back to the creation week in which “*God rested on the seventh day from all His works*” (Heb 4:4; Gn 2:2). This rest was established at the beginning and is a state into which God, Himself, entered. Further, it is a state which He desires to share with man. This rest is not the Jewish Sabbath, although that weekly respite was modeled after creation (Ex 20:8-12), neither was it the entrance into Canaan, as will be shown in 4:8. The disobedient Jews did not merely miss Canaan by their apostasy, they missed *heaven*, for the rest God offers is nothing less than fellowship with Him in eternity.

2. What is the condition of entering into God's rest (Hebrews 4:3)?

3. “There Remains Therefore A Rest” (Heb 4:6-10)

The offer of rest was not exhausted as Joshua led the people into Canaan, for several hundred years later “*He designates a certain day, saying in David, ‘Today ...’*” (Heb 4:7). That is, the rest offered by God was still available as David wrote Ps 95. Further, the Hebrew writer says it is still available as he writes, and by extension it remains available to-day. The author considers the word “today” from Ps 95:7 crucial, for he mentions it five times (Heb 3:7, 13, 15; 4:7 – twice). God ever offers to man heavenly, eternal relief from the mental, physical and emotional burdens which accompany earthly life. This rest is not cessation from activity, even as God has not ceased His activity following the sixth creation day, but rather the absence of exertion and stress that so often accompany earthly endeavors (4:10). Still lurking is the admonition, “*Do not harden your hearts ...*” (4:7). Human history is strewn with the bones of men and women who were offered heavenly rest along with capable leadership and divine assistance but who “*did not enter because of disobedience*” (4:6).

3. Who spoke of another day of rest after Joshua?

4. From what do those who enter heavenly rest cease?

4. The Living and Powerful Word (Heb 4:11-13)

The author again urges diligence “*to enter that rest*” and cites a fourth “lest”: “*lest any-one fall after the same example of disobedience*” (Heb 4:11). One cannot in light of these passages deny human responsibility respecting salvation. Calvinistic theologians strive to place salvation on God’s shoulders entirely and scoff at the notion of the believer *doing* anything to ensure it. But the writer has urged his readers to “give the more earnest heed” (2:1), “hold fast” (3:6), “beware” (3:12), “exhort one another” (3:13), “fear” (4:1) and “be diligent” (4:11).

However, salvation is not *entirely* dependent upon the resources of the individual. The author now turns to the assistance of God’s word available to all. Since he has stressed the heart as the seat of obstinacy and unbelief, the author extols the virtues of the word in accurately assessing and exposing the heart. The word of God is “*living and powerful*”; the Scriptures are not outdated words on dusty scrolls but vibrant, relevant and unassailable truths which ever retain their vitality. God’s word pierces to the very thoughts, intentions and ambitions of every man. No one can escape its discerning power; no part of the soul can be hidden from its whetted edge (4:13). Respect for this truth will lead one to embrace the surgical benefits of such an instrument: removing from the heart the fatal growths of sin and unbelief.

5. Living words come from what kind of God (Hebrews 3:12)?

6. What must all men give to God eventually?

5. Come Boldly to the Throne (Heb 4:14-16)

The present exhortation ends with a transition to the subject of the high priesthood of Jesus. Not only do we have the benefit of the living word but a High Priest “*who has passed through the heavens*” (Heb 4:14). He serves in the very place of the offered rest: “*at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (1:3). Further, He can “*sympathize with our weaknesses*” having shared our fleshly nature. In the author’s mind, this all adds up to one thing: **boldness** before the throne of God. This boldness is available in our darkest hours – “*In time of need*” (4:16). Unfortunately, we tend to shy away from God in situations of shame or discouragement. This must be overcome in the knowledge of God’s great efforts to provide redemption and encourage reconciliation. God **never** discourages man or woman from returning to Him after sin.

7. The throne of God is a throne of what? What will we find from God in time of need?

8. To what must we hold fast?