

DAY 7: GOD'S PROMISED REST

Hebrews 4:1-13

Hebrews 4 continues the warning, begun in chapter 3, to Christians whose trust in Christ was being eroded. The author wants to show that God's rest, in and through Christ, is still available to those who obey God. To be at rest is to be at peace with God, free from feelings of anxiety or defeat. Rest also includes the idea of being established in Christ—remaining confident in the salvation of our Lord.

REST FOR GOD'S PEOPLE The author urges his readers to be watchful so that no one fails to reach the rest God offers. *“Failed to reach”* evokes the image of a racer unable to cross the finish line. After sounding the warning, the author points to the *course* (faith) on which the Christian must stay. Faith is the essential requirement for salvation and its benefits. The Israelites in the desert heard God's good news of rest, but the message did not benefit them because they failed to have faith. *Faith* is a key word in the book. God swore that, because of their unbelief, the Israelites would not enter into His rest—yet His rest stands ready for any who, by faith, will enter it.

The last part of verse 3 shifts to the topic of work. God entered into His rest when He finished His work at Creation. *Rest* does not imply that God was weary from His work of creation, but that He ceased from it. Neither does it imply that God has not been active since that time or that He does not govern the world He has made. The rest we enter is like that which God Himself enjoys. He possesses this abiding rest and He shares it with us.

Verses 4-5 support verse 3 by citing two Old Testament sources. The first—*“For He has somewhere spoken of the seventh day”* (4:4)—is an indirect reference to Genesis 2:2. God's *“rest”* must not be understood as a limited time of rest. Unlike the six days used for Creation, the seventh day has no night to close it, and it continues to the present. The establishment of the Sabbath day, with its call to set aside work, reminds us of God's rest.

THINK ABOUT how you keep the Sabbath. Jesus said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”* (Mark 2:27). That day was—and is—beneficial to people's physical nature and essential to our spiritual nature. How could you gain more spiritual, emotional, and physical benefit from Sabbath rest?

The author of Hebrews intends to convince his readers that the divine warnings and promises apply to them just as they did to the Israelites in the days of Moses or David. If they treat the saving message lightly, they will forfeit His rest. He appeals again, *“Do not harden your hearts”* (4:7).

The statement *“if Joshua had given them rest”* (Hebrews 4:8) implies in a new way that God's rest remains available today. The words for Joshua and Jesus are the same in the Greek Bible. The original language sets forth an argument by comparison between the *Jesus (Joshua)* who led his followers into partial rest in the earthly Canaan and the *Jesus (the Son of God)* who leads the heirs of the new covenant into their complete and eternal rest.

God spoke of *“another day,”* which suggests that there is an unrealized rest remaining for God's people. Verse 6 states that some will enter into this rest. The word used so far for *rest* referred to the land God promised Israel. Now *“Sabbath rest”* is introduced; it comes from a verb meaning *I keep the Sabbath*. God's rest after creation began an experience that His people would join in continually keeping: an eternal rest. *“The people of God”* (4:9) indicates the true spiritual character of all believers. Scripture insists that faith qualifies God's people. Heaven is a future home and holy rest; foretastes of it come in this life. Hebrews 4:10 anticipates the full reality of Sabbath-rest—the final day when we cease from all striving and enter life in its fullest experience in the presence of Jesus Christ.



Because of Jesus, there is no need to try to achieve salvation by works or to live the

Christian life by self-effort. Instead, we are able to quietly rest in what God has done.

EXHORTATION TO ENTER GOD’S REST Verse 11 urges watchfulness and diligence. It may sound contradictory to make every effort to enter rest, for God’s grace alone brings us into His rest; but it does so by His Word, which we must hear, receive, and obey through faith. Anyone who falls will be guilty of the same kind of disobedience the Israelites gave in to long ago.

THINK ABOUT how the Sabbath rest is both present and future—partial in this life, but fully realized only in the life to come. Everything is in process, including our salvation. Because we are “in process,” we must not be lethargic. We are to persevere until our rest is complete, focusing on obedience to God. Yet we are not to be anxious. God invites us to cast our cares on Him and offers us His peace. Jesus said, “*Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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 11:28-30).

The writer now stresses the point: “Let no one think that disbelieving or disobeying the Word is a light matter.” Every heart is known and measured by God’s Word. This refers to “*every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*” (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4)—every word God spoke to and through the patriarchs, prophets, and His Son, Jesus Christ. Through the Spirit-inspired authors of the Old and New Testaments, God has recorded and preserved every word.

Unlike man’s word, God’s Word is eternally alive and effective, bringing blessing to those who receive and obey it and pronouncing judgment on those who disregard it. Four things are claimed concerning it. It is “*living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,*” and it pierces (Hebrews 4:12). The living Word is an extension of the life of God Himself. God’s promises and warnings are an eternal part of Himself. As Jesus said, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away*” (Matthew 24:35). The Greek meaning for *active* means *full of energy* and suggests that the Word has an effective, dynamic capability to bring about God’s purposes.

The Word of God cuts through the innermost parts of man to judge “*the thoughts and intentions of the heart*” (Hebrews 4:12). Not only does God expose guilt, He uncovers motives. He reaches developing goodness and embryonic faith. He understands and rightly judges life experiences that shape every person’s thoughts, beliefs, and actions. His Word eliminates confusion and distortion, and that is good news!

It may be possible to hide our inner beings from other people, and at times even from ourselves, but nothing escapes God’s careful examination. The Word of God can confront and challenge; it can comfort and heal.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. The passage concludes with the reminder that the Word of God judges us. That would be a fearful thing, except that our God, the Holy One, knows us through and through and still loves us. He sees us not only as we are now, but as we will be when His good work in us is complete (1 John 3:2): “*Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.*”

REVIEW: GOD’S PROMISED REST

13. Review the different kinds of *rests* you find in this passage. Pick one of the *rests* you feel you need. What practical steps could you take in response to this need?