

THE STAND

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE HEBREWS CHAPTER 4



Chapter 4 Commentary

Today, rest may seem more like a rare opportunity or wishful dream than a promise. In our busy lives, many times we struggle to achieve the accurate amount of physical rest we need to stay physically and emotionally healthy. How do we end up in these situations? Many times, we allow work, school, families and even church to keep us so busy that we forget that physical rest is a necessity in our lives. The writer of Hebrews wants to show his audience how true rest is available here and now.

The writer believes that rest in Christ is so important and freeing that he even calls his audience to fear coming short of it. Now, as we have seen, the rest being described is not the redemptive rest of salvation, but a level of rest available in Christ after salvation. The writer calls this Sabbath rest and we will see it compared to the rest God took on the seventh day of creation. As believers, Sabbath rest offers us physical, emotional and spiritual peace in our lives. Sabbath rest acknowledges that Christ is alive, active and in full control of our lives.

The Israelites had this rest available to them, too, but the first generation of redeemed Israel never experienced it. The writer explains in Hebrews 4:2 that the good news preached to the Israelites didn't profit them because they didn't respond in faith. They did not believe they could take the Promised Land because the people already living in the land were giants with powerful armies. They did not have faith that God would give them what He promised, and they missed God's rest. Intellectual belief alone never leads to rest, but faith that is willing to take a stand will lead to ultimate rest that only God can provide.

Next, the writer explains to his audience that the rest of the Promised Land is not the only rest available for God's people. If the Promised Land had been the ultimate rest, Joshua would not have spoken of another rest. Hebrews compares Sabbath rest to the rest God took after creation. The writer of Hebrews claims that all God's works were finished by the seventh day of creation. Every work God would ever accomplish was thought about and created during the six days of creation. Christ's plan of salvation and our redemption was authored even before it was needed. From creation forward, nothing would surprise God; nothing would change God's history. Once God completed these works, He rested. God states in Genesis 1 that all of His creation was good. On the seventh day when God rested, He was satisfied. Even though He would be heart-broken, because He knew we as man would sin against Him, He was able to rest in the salvation He authored. The writer goes on to say in verse 10 that we, too, can enter into this rest with God. We can take full comfort in the fact that God's plan is already in the books. We enter this same rest when we have true faith in God's sovereignty. We can know the story is complete and, as followers of Christ, that we are a part of God's redemption from the beginning of time. Experiencing Sabbath rest means we rest in the works of God, instead of working to find rest in God.

Some of the audience may have questioned whether or not they had already missed their opportunity to enter this rest. However, the writer explains this rest is still available. In fact, as long as it is "Today" we can enter into God's rest. If the Promised Land had been the only rest for God's people, then David would not have written about this promise of rest in Psalm 95 decades after Israel entered the Promised Land. In fact, the Promised Land was simply a foreshadowing of the freedom and great rest they would have in Jesus Christ. Until now, they would have not been able to fully understand Sabbath rest because their faith centered around a sacrificial system where rituals and rules were necessary to be in obedience with God. Now, through Christ, they could completely see the freedom of Sabbath rest. There are no more works or rituals that must be done to come before God. When we accept the sacrifice of Jesus



Quarreling and Testing

The original verse quoted from Psalm 95 reads,

"do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert,"

The original verses discuss these two places, Meribah and Massah. The original meaning of these words actually gives us some insight into how to avoid a hardened heart. Meribah literally means "quarrelling" and Massah was "the place of testing."

The very names of these places show us when we quarrel and complain about our circumstances that our heart becomes hardened. As well, when we "test God" we are basically saying, "I don't trust You." This lack of faith will harden our hearts as well.

Christ, we can rest in the fact that our entire life was authored at creation and that He is in full control.

Once we are truly in Christ, God will never allow us to go back to where we came from. God never let the Israelites go back to their bondage in Egypt, even though at times this is what they wanted. Just like the Israelites, we are not perfect people today either. We are still tempted and still sin on a regular basis, but sin is nothing more than disbelief in God. Any act of sin we commit is basically saying God's way is not the best way. Therefore, when we sin, we stop believing that God has control and will provide. Over and over the Israelites chose their way over God's way. While they remained God's chosen people, they never experienced Sabbath rest with God. We can go through our whole lives redeemed and never experience the fullness of Jesus Christ because we fail to give up all control.

The writer seems to quickly take a turn in the conversation from rest to the Word, but He's not starting the next part of his message. He is simply revealing the blueprint for rest. He claims in verse 12, "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow." To these Messianic Jews, the Word of God would have been books of the Old Testament and the message of Jesus Himself. The author suggests that looking at the full revelation of God will pierce one to the very center. The word is not a single edged knife that simply cuts and slashes its way through, but a two-edged sword. With little force, this sword can go right through your body and have significant impact in your life. Your thought life and heart will be transformed if you have this kind of encounter with the Word of God. We can see proof of this rest through the testimony of the full counsel of Scripture.

Jesus' Temptation



Sometimes we are tempted to think that Jesus was not tempted as we are. Scripture shows Jesus at the beginning of His ministry being directly tempted by Satan and these temptations are really the basis for all the temptations we might face.

Read Matthew 4:1-11.

We see that Jesus was first tempted with food. Many times we are tempted to provide for ourselves and not rely on God. We see this mostly with money. Our culture teaches that success provides, not God.

Secondly, Jesus was tempted with pride and power. Satan knew Jesus could call down angels to save Him if He jumped, but such an act would have been prideful. Pride is a big struggle for many of us today.

Finally, Jesus was tempted with who was number one. Should He worship God or Satan. Today, we are regularly tempted to put things in front of God. Sometimes we view jobs, cars, success and relationships as more important than God. We believe what these things offer is better than what God can offer us. This is idolatry.

We can really sum up almost every temptation in life into these three categories: lack of trust, pride and idolatry.

Finding this Sabbath rest in Christ is what will give us the physical, emotional and spiritual rest most of us yearn for today. God wants everyone to take part in His rest. He doesn't want to see His people stressed, broken and hurting. However, the reason many of us find ourselves in pain is because we believe our way is better than God's way. Sabbath rest is so very important because missing it can make us miserable, and in turn we are no longer good witnesses for the Kingdom of God. We must learn to rest in God with our finances, marriages, children and jobs. There may be short seasons in our lives that seem more intense or stressful; we see this in the lives of the disciples and apostles. Even through adversity, these men show us complete rest in Christ.

The writer of Hebrews always takes time to explain why we should follow His claims of Christ. The quest for Sabbath rest is no different. At the end of Chapter 4, he finishes the discussion on the priesthood of Christ. He reminds the audience of his initial claims of Christ as priest at the end of Chapter 2. The writer continues to reveal more about Christ's ability to sympathize and understand mankind. In verse 15, we see that Christ has been tempted in every way man is tempted. What a comfort! The person who is representing mankind before the Father has experienced everything we go through on a daily basis. Not only is Christ able to sympathize, but He's actually lived it. He lived a sinless life and offers grace and mercy to sinful man.

If you are experiencing unrest in any area of your life, you must look and ask if God has a better plan? Have I missed something? Is this job worth it? Why am I constantly tired? What can I give up? Seek Sabbath rest.



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Personal Study Questions

The purpose of these study questions is to help you get into God's Word. We hope that through a personal encounter with God's Word, He will reveal His Truth and allow you to understand His story first hand.

1. Hebrews 4:4 and Genesis 2:2 say that God rested on the seventh day. Why do you think He chose to rest?

2. God believes rest is very important. In Old Testament times there were very specific regulations on the Sabbath day (or day of rest). List a few from the following verses. Exodus 20:8-10, 23:12, 35:3

3. What are the four things the writer claims the Word of God can do? (v12) Describe a time when you have experienced one of these claims.

4. One of Christ's purposes is to provide you rest here and now. List a couple of areas where you want to experience His rest. This week, specifically pray for the ability to take rest in Christ for that specific situation. One of the ways He will guide you to rest is through the Word. Re-read Hebrews Chapters 1-4 this week and be reminded of the Truth you have learned so far from His Word.

