

Hebrews Chapter Four (vv.1-10)

Chapters Three and Four concern God's House (3.1-6) and God's Rest (3.7-4.13). Hebrews 4.14 resumes the theme of the Priesthood of the Lord Jesus (3.1). Hebrews 3.7-4.13 forms the writer's second parenthesis and **warning** to the readers (after 2.1-4). This section divides into three: 3.7-11 is a **quotation** from Psalm 95.7-11 which is then **expounded** in 3.12-19 and **applied** in 4.1-13. Chapter 3 is a warning in view of the present temptations in the wilderness; Chapter 4 is an encouragement based on the promise of future rest.

What is God's Rest?

'Rest' is mentioned **eleven** times in Hebrews and all of the references are in this section (3.11-4.11). The subject is therefore critical to the understanding of the passage. The rest referred to throughout this passage is not always the same; in fact there are **three**.

1. **Creation Rest** (4.4). *Hebrews 4.4: For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. Genesis 2.1-2: Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.* God did not rest on the seventh day of creation because He was tired. Creation rest was God's personal satisfaction and delight in a work well done; it was 'very good' (Genesis 1.31).
2. **Canaan Rest** (3.11, 18, 4.8). In the OT, God graciously offered His people a physical land in which to rest. This pictured the enjoyment of something greater to come. *Deuteronomy 12.10: But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety.* It was into this rest that the 'evil generation' of the nation failed to enter, having all fallen in the wilderness (3.16-19). Although eventual rest from their enemies was enjoyed in the land (Joshua 21.44-45), it was not the final and greater rest that both creation and Canaan pictured. Joshua 23.1: And it came to pass a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age. Hebrews 4.8-9: For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.
3. **Calvary (God's) Rest** (4.1, 3, 5, 9-11). Although God rested on the seventh day of creation, sin disturbed His rest. Since the fall God has been working to restore the damage caused. *John 5.17: But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.* This has been accomplished through the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary and now God delights again in a work well done. The full realisation of **God's rest** shall be enjoyed in heaven and in particular, the eternal state when the far reaching effects of Christ's work at Calvary shall be fully manifested (John 1.29, 1 Corinthians 15.28, 2 Peter 3.13, Revelation 21). *Revelation 21.3: And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

In all but one of the references (4.9), the same Greek word (*katapausis*) is used. This is made up of two Greek words which mean 'a permanent cessation of activity'. It also has the idea of a 'resting place'. The second word, used only once in the whole NT (Hebrews 4.9) is *sabbatismos*. This unique word means 'Sabbath keeping' or 'Sabbath celebration' and signifies 'festivity and joy expressed in worship and praise of God'. It is peace, rest and tranquillity. *Katapausis* therefore refers to the **place** of rest, *sabbatismos* to the **state** or **character** of that rest. In Hebrews, the future **place** of rest is seen in the heavenly city (11.10, 16, 12.22, 13.14), heavenly country (11.14) and kingdom (12.28). The future heavenly festivities are mentioned in 12.22-24.

Pictures of God's Rest

The Sabbath: It is first mentioned in Genesis 2.2 ('seventh day'), but not again until Exodus 16.23 in relation to the manna. This speaks of the fact that the Sabbath rest of God which was disturbed by sin has now been found in Christ, the Manna. *Ex 16:23 And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.* In addition, the Sabbath (a prominent feature of the Law, Exodus 20.8-11) is associated with deliverance from slavery (Deuteronomy 5.12-15) and the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16.31) all of which find their ultimate fulfilment in Christ (2.15, 17).

The Ark of the Covenant: It was given its final resting place on Mount Zion after Israel enjoyed rest from her enemies in the days of Solomon, the king of peace and rest (1 Kings 8.56). *Psalm 132.8, 13-14: Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength... For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*

Present Rest (Matthew 11)

Although the full enjoyment of God's rest is future (**prospective**), there is an aspect which is **present**. *Matthew 11.28-29: Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* Believers have **received rest** from the burden and conscience of sins (v.28) and **found rest** of communion through obedience to Him (v.29). The Greek word for 'rest' in Matthew 11.28-29 is *anapausis* and has the idea of 'lifting up' burdens from the shoulders of those who were labouring under the Mosaic Law – rest from **sin**. In Hebrews the word is *katapausis* (see above) which suggests the 'laying down' of the works of the law and adopting the principle of faith instead – rest from **self** (cf. Psalm 23.2).

Canaan was the God-given inheritance of Israel. The Christian's inheritance today is in heaven (1 Peter 1.4-5). This inheritance and God's rest is already ours in Christ (4.3), although we are not in the full enjoyment of it. For example, Israel's entrance into the land took place in two phases. From the moment they entered they could enjoy the old corn and fruit of the land (Joshua 5.11-12, Deuteronomy 8.8-9); but their enjoyment was restricted by warfare. Once their enemies had been destroyed they could enjoy it to the full. Are we living in the enjoyment of our inheritance and God's promised rest today? Are we feeding on the old corn (Christ in resurrection) and fruit of the land of Canaan (Christ in exaltation)? A vision of an exalted Christ will give us the strength we need for Canaan conflict.

Exposition (Hebrews 4.1-10)

1 *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his (God's) rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.* **2** *For unto us (Hebrews) was the gospel preached, as well as unto them (wilderness generation): but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

It was possible that some of the Hebrews to whom the apostle wrote would be 'excluded from' ('come short of') **God's rest**. The good news had been announced to them ('so great salvation', cf. 2.3-4) as it had been preached to the generation in the wilderness (the promise of rest, cf. Exodus 3.16-17, 4.27-31, 6.1-9). However, the word would be of no 'benefit' ('profit') to either group if it was not 'united with' or 'received in' faith by the hearers. In other words, being excluded from God's rest was consequent upon **believing**, v.3: *For we which have believed do enter into rest.* There are two important practical points here. First, the tense of the Greek construction in v.2 (perfect participle) suggests that the gospel was so thoroughly proclaimed that the memory of the message was indelibly impressed on the minds of the respective hearers, whether a generation of *hardened* hearts in the wilderness, or a company of *antagonistic* hearts in Jerusalem! There was no excuse that the message had not been *powerfully* and *clearly* presented. Second, for the word of God to take effect in our lives, it must be received by faith, even in ministry meetings!! Not only were we saved by faith, but we must *continue* in faith (Galatians 2.20, Hebrews 10.38).

The writer now seeks to prove that the promise of **God's rest** is still available today (vv.3-9). God completed and entered into His rest as far back as the seventh day of creation (vv.3-4, Genesis 2.1-3). The wilderness generation had an opportunity to enter into a foretaste of this rest but were excluded from Canaan through unbelief (v.6). Nevertheless, Joshua led some of God's people into Canaan, but this was temporal and physical rest, not the eternal, spiritual rest of God as pictured in creation. Although marred by sin, God's rest was restored in Christ. There is therefore another day (v.8). God **today** (3.13, 15) proclaims a further opportunity of entering into His eternal rest. This proclamation began with David (vv.7-8, Psalm 51) and continues today. *There remaineth therefore a Sabbath rest to the people of God* (v.9). Believers (v.3) will enter into God's eternal rest and it's all because of **Calvary**.

10 *For he that is entered into his (God's) rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his (own works).* What is the character of God's eternal Sabbath rest? Just as God rested from His own works after six days of creation, so true believers will rest from their own works when they reach God's eternal resting place. *Revelation 14.13: And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.* We shall rest from our labours! We shall rest from the works that follow faith and the reception of salvation. *1 Thessalonians 1.3: Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.*

This rather suggests that until we reach God's eternal rest we should be marked by works of faith!

2 Timothy 4.7: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.

1Co 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.