

## IX. Enter Your Rest

January 23/24/25, 2017

Hebrews 4:1-11

**Aim:** To learn from the negative example of the Israelites in the wilderness in order to enter into the promised Sabbath rest which remains for the people of God.

*Phillips:* The long exhortation that began in chapter 3 and continues through chapter 4 centers around the writer's use of Psalm 95, with the key verse, 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.' The key term is 'Today,' which the writer says applies to his first-century readers just as it did to David's readers a thousand years before, and just as it did to the exodus generation he is referring to. 'Today' is the time when the promise that all believers will enter God's rest is still open and available. 'Today,' in that sense, is our time as much as it was theirs.

### A. Promised Rest (Hebrews 4:1-5)

*Schreiner:* The author continues to apply Psalm 95 to his readers. The main point of 3:12-19 is that the readers should be on guard against an unbelieving heart, for that would lead them to fall away from God so that they don't enter God's rest. The same concern animates 4:1-5. Here the main point emerges in verse 1. The readers should fear, and their fear should motivate them to enter God's rest.

#### 1. The Meaning of 'Rest'

*Schreiner:* The rest certainly includes the notion of place. I would suggest that this view is strengthened if one accepts that the rest is also described as 'the city that has foundation' (11:10), as a 'homeland' (11:14), a 'heavenly' one (11:16). It is 'the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem)' (12:22), the 'kingdom that cannot be shaken' (12:28), and the city 'to come' (13:14). That the rest also includes the idea of a state is evident if there is an already-but-not-yet character to the rest (4:3). It seems that the rest can't be limited to a place since God rests from His works, and such rest doesn't designate a place. The notion of Sabbath rest (4:9) also suggests that rest transcends the notion of a place, though the idea of a place is not abandoned.

*Phillips:* Consistently, and drawing his terminology from Psalm 95, the writer of Hebrews describes salvation as the 'rest' offered by God. What does he mean by this kind of language? As Lane explains: 'The concept of rest in the context of the promise to the Exodus generation had the connotation of entrance into Canaan (the Promised Land), where Israel would experience relief from turmoil and security from their enemies.' In what sense does this apply to the readers of Hebrews? The writer does not mean that they will lead lives of material riches and temporal peace, since this letter was written to those facing persecution, and with all the deprivation and danger that implies. The New Testament does not promise believers that they will be free from strife in this world (cp. Jn. 16:33). Obviously, then, the meaning is spiritual. It is our souls that will be supplied and kept safe (cp. Jn. 6:35, 39). Jesus offers our souls the same benefits offered to Israel in the Promised Land: bountiful provision and complete security.

*MacArthur:* The English 'rest' and the Greek word (*katapausis*) that it translates here have similar meanings. The basic idea is that of ceasing from works or from any kind of action. You stop doing what you are doing. Action, labor, or exertion is over. Applied to God's rest, it means no more self-effort as far as salvation is concerned. It means the end of trying to please God by our feeble, fleshly works. God's perfect rest is a rest in free grace. Rest also means

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freedom from whatever worries or disturbs you. It involves remaining confident, keeping trust. We have no more reason to fear. It also means to lean on. To enter into God's rest means that for the remainder of our lives and for all eternity we can lean on God. We can be sure that He will never fail to support us. The rest spoken on in Hebrews 3 and 4 includes all of these meanings. It is full, blessed, sweet, satisfying, peaceful. It is what God offers every person in Christ. It is the rest pictured and illustrated in the Canaan rest that Israel never understood and never entered into because of unbelief. And just as Israel never entered Canaan rest because of unbelief, so soul after soul since that time, and even before, has missed God's salvation rest because of unbelief.

### 2. A Warning Regarding Rest (4:1-2)

#### a) *Let Us Fear (4:1)*

<sup>1</sup>*Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*

*Schreiner:* The author applies afresh, as he did in 3:12, the story of the wilderness generation to his readers, warning them to take seriously his words so that they don't fall short while the promise of entering God's rest remains. The 'therefore' (*οὖν, oun*) in verse 1 indicates that a conclusion or exhortation is drawn from the experience of the wilderness generation. The readers are summoned to fear lest they fail to enter God's rest.

*MacArthur:* 'Therefore,' refers, of course, to Israel's unbelief and consequent failure to enter God's Canaan rest. As long as 'a promise remains,' there is opportunity to be saved and to enter God's rest. Otherwise appeal for belief would be a mockery. There is still time. God still holds the door open.

*Bruce:* The promise of entering the 'rest' of God remains open. The meaning of that 'rest' was not exhausted by the earthly Canaan which was entered by the Israelites of the generation which had grown up to manhood in the wilderness; the spiritual counterpart of the earthly Canaan is the goal of the people of God today. Our author therefore urges his readers again to press on and attain that goal. It will not be reached automatically; they will do well to fear the possibility of missing it, just as the generation of Israelites which died in the wilderness missed the earthly Canaan, although that was the goal which they had before them when they set out from Egypt.

*Schreiner:* The verb 'let us fear' (*φοβηθῶμεν, phobēthōmen*) is a first personal plural, showing that the author includes himself in the admonition. The warning is not restricted to so-called weak Christians but is addressed to all Christians everywhere. We saw in 3:12 that Christians should be on guard, and here they are called upon to fear. The reference is not to paralyzing fear that disables and enervates. The fear commanded here is a stimulus to action, provoking readers to enter God's rest and stimulating them to believe and obey.

*Phillips:* The Greek text literally says, 'Let us be afraid.' The point is to say: 'Therefore, let us be alarmed at the prospect, given this decisive age of opportunity and testing, that any of you should not press on to salvation.' We see a couple of emphases here that are central to the overall message of this book. First is the demand for perseverance under trial. That is what the author means by saying 'lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.' The metaphor is an athletic one, and the idea is that of finishing the race. Perseverance is an essential element of the Christian life. Indeed, running the race to the end is the hallmark of genuine, saving faith, while falling away is the mark of a spurious faith that does not lead to salvation.

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*Phillips:* The second emphasis is that of corporate or mutual responsibility (cp. 3:13). ‘Let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.’ Notice that the subject of the sentence is plural—it is ‘us’ who must be careful—while the object is singular—lest anyone fall away. This is the attitude we need in the church today, one that says: ‘Yes, I *am* my brother’s keeper. I have a stake in the spiritual affairs of others here and a responsibility not merely for my own salvation, but for theirs as well.’ This is not an invitation for destructive meddling but for the mutual building up that is to define life in the church. A good church, therefore, will not be defined by the size of its building, nor by the number of people attending or the amount of money raised. Rather, by God’s standard, a quality church will be one that leaves no stragglers to lag behind or perish in unbelief. The kind of church the writer of Hebrews is looking for is one where the *discouraged* are propelled forward by *encouragement*, where the weak find strength in the care of others, and those in danger of being deceived are recalled to the truth in a spirit of love.

*MacArthur:* A more accurate translation of the last part of verse 1 is, ‘lest you think you have come too late to enter into the rest of God.’ In other words, some Jews were in danger of talking themselves out of trusting in Christ because they thought it was too late. Perhaps they believed their people had forfeited the opportunity to receive the Messiah and be saved. They had no reason for such despair, because a promise still remained. But they did have reason to be afraid—not because they had lost the opportunity for salvation, but because they *could* lose it if they continued to put off accepting Christ as their personal Savior.

*Schreiner:* The reader should consider their place in history. The opportunity to enter God’s rest still lies before them. They have not yet been rejected as the wilderness generation was. Nor has the rest yet been consummated. It has been promised but is not yet realized. The heavenly city, which is such a prominent theme in Hebrews, has not yet arrived. The readers, therefore, should seize the day. They must not fall short of the promised rest. In contrast to the wilderness generation, they must believe and obey.

### b) *Let Us Trust (4:2)*

<sup>2</sup>*For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.*

*Hughes:* Israel had heard the ‘good news’ (that is, the good news brought by Caleb and Joshua that the land was theirs for the taking, the Nephilim notwithstanding). So confident were Caleb and Joshua in heralding the good news that they said, ‘They are bread for us’ (Num. 14:9), or in today’s language, ‘It’s a piece of cake!’ But Israel’s response to the good news was tragically deficient: ‘the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.’ Literally, they didn’t mix it with faith.’ This is amazing because they had had constant witness of God’s character and provision. Many, perhaps thousands, were believers (they *believed* in God), but only two really *trusted* God and found rest. ‘Faith’ here in 4:2 is the attitude of trusting God wholeheartedly. So we must understand that the opening line of verse 3, which says, ‘For we who have believed enter that rest,’ specifically means, ‘we who have *wholeheartedly trusted* enter that rest.’ Thus, it is spelled out in no uncertain terms that *faith that pleases God is belief plus trust*. Belief, the mental acceptance of a fact as true, will simply not bring rest to any soul. Acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world will not give us rest. *Trust* in Him is what gives rest to our souls.

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*Phillips:* We must embrace God's offer of salvation personally through faith. This is the writer's point in verse 2. It is not enough simply to come to church, any more than it was enough to have been a member of Israel during the exodus. It is not enough to hear the gospel or even to understand it, to explain it to others or even to appreciate the wonder and beauty of the gospel. Unless you receive the gospel in faith, you will not enter into God's rest; you will not be saved. Indeed, if you hear the gospel and do not combine the hearing with believing, if you do not respond to it by confessing yourself a sinner and casting yourself upon Christ for salvation, that gospel, which verse 12 describes as 'sharper than any two-edged sword,' will become the source of damnation instead of your salvation. To all who hear but do not believe, regardless of anything else they do, God says, 'As I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."'"

*MacArthur:* From the human side, the first requirement for salvation is faith. Hearing the gospel is essential, but it is not enough. The ancient Israelites heard God's good news of rest, but it did them no good since they did not accept it. They did not trust in the God who gave them the good news. It does not good to hear if we do not believe. That is the point here. Hearing the good news of the rest of God is of no benefit, no profit, to any person at any time unless the hearing is 'united by faith.'

*Bruce:* The parallel between those Israelites and the people of God in the new age is impressive enough for the disaster which befell the former to serve as a warning to the latter. The Israelites of those earlier days had good news proclaimed to them, just as the readers of this epistle had good news proclaimed to *them* (cp. 2:3ff.). But the hearing of the good news brought no lasting benefit to those earlier Israelites; it did not ensure their attainment of the goal for which they set out. Why? Because they did not appropriate the good news by faith when they heard it. The reason why this message did not do them as much good as it was designed to do was that, in spite of their serious undertaking, they did not obey His voice or keep His covenant. The practical implication is clear: it is not the hearing of the gospel by itself that brings final salvation, but its appropriation by faith; and if that faith is a genuine faith, it will be a persistent faith.

*Schreiner:* Both the readers and the wilderness generation were the recipients of good news, but the proclamation of God's saving goodness did not benefit the wilderness generation because they failed to believe. The author reminds the readers that the proclamation of the good news has no inherent benefit. Simply hearing the gospel will not guarantee that they enter God's rest on the last day. After all, the wilderness generation heard the good news about entrance into Canaan, but they never entered the land. They heard what God promised, but they were not united with those (like Joshua and Caleb) who heard the message in faith. The wilderness generation is repeatedly held up to the readers as a warning on account of their disbelief. Merely hearing the good news does not guarantee future security. The message heard is only useful if it is believed. Otherwise, it remains an abstraction instead of a living reality.

### 3. The Nature of Rest (4:3-5)

#### a) Current Rest (4:3a)

<sup>3</sup>For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" ...

*Schreiner:* The first part of the verse reiterates a central theme of this section. Believers enter God's rest. The promise will not become a reality for those who dishonor God by refusing to

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trust what He says. It is difficult to decipher the significance of the present tense verb ‘enter’ (*εισερχομεθα, eiserchometha*). Is Hebrew suggesting that the rest is entered both now and eschatologically? Is there an already-but-no-yet dimension to the rest? Certainly the author emphasizes that the rest is eschatological since it lies ahead of believers, and they must persevere to the end to enjoy it. Since the focus is on end-time rest, the question is whether there is a present dimension to the rest as well. Even though the emphasis is on the future rest, it seems that an already-but-not-yet dimension of the rest is also present (cp. 12:22). In one sense believers have even now arrived and come to the heavenly city, but in another sense it is future. They still experience the suffering that constitutes life in ‘the city of man.’ It seems that the same is true of the rest. The rest is fundamentally eschatological, and yet the eschaton has penetrated the present. Believers enter God’s rest, which has been accessible since the day of creation; but they have not entered the fullness of His rest, for they must continue to believe and obey until the end to obtain it.

*MacArthur*: Both the positive and the negative sides of this truth are categorical, absolute. Those ‘who have believed enter that rest’ and those who do not believe ‘shall not enter My rest.’ Belief and unbelief are very serious things. From the human side, belief with nothing else will save us; unbelief with everything else will condemn us. These are the two equally true sides of the gospel, which is *good* news only for those who accept it with all their hearts.

*Hughes*: Furthermore, this rest is available right now! Verse 3, which introduced this section on the nature of our rest, says, ‘For we who have believed enter that rest.’ The verb ‘enter’ is in the present tense, which means that as believers we are now in the process of entering. There is a *now* and *then* to our rest. *Now*, in Christ, we have entered and are entering our rest. Our experience of rest is proportionate to our trusting in Him. A wholehearted trust brings His rest into our souls in all its dimensions. But there is also a future rest in Heaven—the repose of souls in God’s rest forever.

*Phillips*: Hearing the offer of such a rest, we can understand the urgency with which the writer of Hebrews speaks about faith in Jesus Christ. The question is: How can I enter into this wonderful rest? The answer is, By trusting the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Verse 3 tells us, ‘We who have believed enter that rest.’ Who are the people who are saved, the people of God who enter into His rest and enjoy a saving relationship with Him? It is those who believe the message of the gospel they have heard.

*Phillips*: Spiritual provision and complete security is clearly implied by the reference to the exodus wandering and the offer of rest. The writer emphasizes this by repeating the quote from Psalm 95 in verses 3 and 5: ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ The point is not just to reiterate the failure of the unbelieving Israelites, but to emphasize the reality of the rest that was provided and remains offered to this day.

*Schreiner*: The connection between the clauses in 4:3 is not easy to discern. The logic of the verse would be as follows: those who believe enter God’s rest, and the necessity of belief is evident, for God swore in His wrath that the wilderness generation would not enter the rest. In other words they didn’t enter the rest because of their unbelief.

*Bruce*: In what sense does God speak of ‘My rest’? Does it simply mean ‘the rest in which I bestow’ or does it also mean ‘the rest which I Myself enjoy’? It means the latter: the ‘rest’ which God promises to His people is a share in that rest which He Himself enjoys. Here, then, our author proceeds to bring out the underlying meaning of the reference to God’s rest in Ps.

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95:11 by relating it to Gen. 2:2ff., where God is said to have ‘rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done’ in the course of the preceding six days. The Septuagint uses the same Greek word for God’s ‘resting’ or ‘desisting’ on the Sabbath day from His creative work (Gen. 2:2ff.; Ex. 20:11) as for the rest of God in Psalm 95:11).

### b) *Cosmic Rest (4:3b-4)*

#### (1) God Finished His Works (4:3b)

*...although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.*

*Schreiner:* The HCSB links the concessive clause (‘and yet His works have been finished since the foundation of the world’) to verse 4. Grammatically, however, the concessive clause is more likely attached to verse 3. What is the verse’s logic? It seems that the writer asserts that Israel could have entered God’s rest. They didn’t enter it, but the possibility was open to them, for God’s rest began from the foundation of the world, from the seventh day of creation as we learn in verse 4. Israel’s failure to enter, then, was not because God’s rest was unavailable to them. They failed to enter because they refused to enter, because they did not believe God’s promises.

*MacArthur:* One other point should be made here. The rest promised to those who believe is ‘My rest,’ that is, God’s rest. God’s own rest from His work of creation, and the rest that He gives us in Christ, are not the rest brought on by weariness or the rest of inactivity, but are the rest of finished work. ‘His works were finished from the foundation of the world.’ God has finished His work. God has done it all, and for anyone who wants to enter into His finished work and to share in His rest, it is available by faith.

#### (2) God Rested from His Works (4:4)

*<sup>4</sup>For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.”*

*Hughes:* In verses 3b, 4 the author further reveals the character of this rest by relating it to the rest God entered when He finished creating the universe, His cosmic rest. The seventh day, God’s Sabbath, still continues. God’s rest began with the completion of the cosmos and continues on and on—and thus is available to all His children. Its fullness is available to all.

*Phillips:* In the latter part of verse 3 and in verse 4, however, the writer of Hebrews adds another Old Testament reference to expand his definition of the salvation rest. Here the citation is from the creation account in Genesis 2:2. The point here, and it is a weighty one indeed, is that the rest God offers to us in salvation is nothing less than the very rest He Himself has enjoyed since the completion of His creation work. We remember from Genesis 1 that God labored for six days, each day adding more to His creation wonder. Then on the seventh day God rested. This rest was not a temporary state, but God’s abiding condition. Unlike the other days, the Sabbath day of rest does not end; it is not brought to completion, but goes on forever.

*Phillips:* When we say that God rested, we do not mean that He went on vacation or removed His care from our world. The picture is rather that after having made and ordered and subdued the creation according to His desired plan, His control was so absolute, His sovereignty so unquestioned, that God enthroned Himself without effective opposition. His reign is one of rest—that is, of absolute supremacy and unassailable sovereignty—so much so that He exerts all His rule from the position of rest. So when we think of God’s Sabbath rest, we should immediately think of His utter, uncontested sovereign rule.

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*Phillips:* To enter God's eternal Sabbath rest, therefore, means to enter into saving relationship with such a God. When God becomes our Savior, we become part of that kingdom in which He so utterly and sovereignly rules over us and for us. His work in our lives is established, even as the writer of Hebrews says of God's work in creation, 'His works were finished from the foundation of the world' (v. 3). This means that if you have put your faith in this saving God, if you have trusted His gospel in Jesus Christ, you can now rest. You can stop worrying about whether or not you will have a place in heaven. You can stop fretting about whether you will endure as a Christian. You can stop being afraid of what the world will do to you. You can face the prospect of loss in this life, of suffering, and even of death, for ours is the God of the Sabbath, who established His purposes forever from the beginning. Through faith in Him you enter into His rest. He offers rest from the burden of your sins (cp. Mt. 11:28-30), which He takes onto His back and puts away at the cross, and rest from the troubles of this world. Salvation rest is living in God's presence, feeling the warmth of His love, trusting the strength of His hands to hold us forever.

*Schreiner:* As is typical in Hebrews, God 'speaks' in Scripture, declaring His word to human beings. The word 'somewhere' does not betray ignorance of the context or the location of the text cited. The citation is from Genesis 2:2. When God completed the creative work of the six days, He rested from His work. He didn't rest because He was exhausted or weary but because His work was completed. Furthermore, God's rest doesn't mean He refrained from all activity but from His work in creation. Hence, there is the suggestion that the rest, though it refers to a place, also includes the notion of fellowship with God. The author makes the point that God's rest has been available since creation. While human history lasts, there is opportunity to enter God's rest. The author circles back, therefore, to verse: the promise of entering God's rest still remains.

*Bruce:* The vagueness of the terms with which the quotation from Gen. 2:2 is introduced is characteristic of our author. It was not because the 'rest' of God was not yet available that the wilderness generation of Israelites failed to enter into it; it had been available ever since creation's work was ended. When we read that God 'rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done' (Gen. 2:2), we are to understand that He *began* to rest then; the fact that He is never said to have completed His rest and resumed His work of creation implies that His rest continues still, and may be shared by those who respond to His overtures with faith and obedience.

### c) *Divine Rest (4:5)*

<sup>5</sup>And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest."

*Hughes:* We note that the author twice quotes Psalm 95:11—"They shall not enter my rest (vv. 3, 5; cp. 3:11, 18). His purpose is not to imply that his readers will not enter the rest, but rather to show that God calls the rest being offered 'My rest' because it is the rest that He Himself enjoys. This in itself is a stupendous revelation. It means that when we are given rest by Him, it is not simply a relaxation of tensions, but a rest that is qualitatively the same rest God enjoys—His personal rest that He shares with us! The character of God's rest is the ideal of all rests. First, it is *joyous* (cp. Job 38:7). Second, His rest is *satisfying*. Third, it is a *working* rest. God finished His great work and rested, but it was not a cessation from work, but rather the proper repose that comes from completing a great work. So we see that His rest is a *joyous, satisfying, and working* rest. Fellow-Christians, God does not offer us just any rest. He offers us, in His own words, 'My rest'—the repose of His soul—*divine* rest. It is *cosmic* in its origin, as old as the universe.

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And as such, a continuing Sabbath is available to all. It is the *ideal* rest, for it comes from a loving, almighty God.

*Bruce:* The repetition of the warning words of Ps. 95:11b after the Genesis quotation emphasizes the identification of the one rest with the other: God’s rest has remained open to His people since the work of creation was finished, but it will be forfeited by disobedience.

*Schreiner:* Given how the previous verse ends, it is rather surprising to return to the words of Ps. 95:11: ‘They will not enter My rest.’ For the third time the author quotes Ps. 95:11 (see also 3:11, 18), indicating the importance of the verse in his argument. What is the import of this verse? Why does the author cite it here? He has just emphasized that God’s rest has been available since the beginning of the world. But he then turns and emphasizes that the wilderness generation will never enter God’s rest. He addressed his readers by juxtaposing these two. On the one hand, they live in the day of opportunity. The rest is still open to them. The door has not been closed for entering the rest of God. On the other hand, the wilderness generation demonstrates that some have repudiated the rest God offers. The readers should not follow the example of those Israelites who refused to believe in and obey God. The decision before them is of immense importance, and hence he exhorts them to fear (v. 1), warning them about the consequences of falling away.

### B. Remaining Rest (Hebrews 4:6-11)

*Schreiner:* The main point in 4:6-11 runs along the same lines. The readers should be diligent to enter God’s rest so that they do not miss out on it by disobedience. We see in the various sections of 3:7-4:13 that the author reiterates the main theme repeatedly, stating it from different angles so that the readers grasp what he is saying and are impressed with the gravity of the situation.

#### 1. The Availability of Rest (4:6-10)

##### a) *A Rest Remains for Some (4:6)*

<sup>6</sup>*Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience...*

*Schreiner:* The author sums up and restates the previous discussion, linking the present verse with what has gone before with the words ‘since therefore.’ The rest God promised still remains. It is still accessible and available for the people of God, for those who trust in Him and obey Him. At the same time, not all those who received the good news entered the rest. The author continues to forge a close link between faith and obedience, for those who fail to trust in God also refuse to do what he commands (cp. 3:12, 18-19; 4:2-3, 11).

*Hughes:* Those who formerly had the gospel (good news regarding the entry to Canaan) did not enter the land of rest because of their lack of faith, which produced shameful disobedience. The point here is that nothing can prevent the promised rest from taking effect except distrust and disobedience. God’s promised rest stands. Anyone can have it.

##### b) *A Rest Remains Today (4:7)*

<sup>7</sup>*...again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

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*Hughes:* Twice in chapter 3 (vv. 7, 15) the author has quoted Psalm 95:7-8 to draw attention to the promise of rest, and here in verse 7 he does it again. In David's day the rest was offered by the Holy Spirit saying, 'Today, if you hear His voice...' Today meant 'now' in their time, and that is what it means today. The only way this rest will be missed is through a hardened heart, a disbelieving heart that shows contempt for God in disobedience. The tone here is one of urgency. *Now* is the day of salvation!

*MacArthur:* God fixes 'a certain day, "Today."' Opportunity for God's rest remains, but it will not remain indefinitely. For each individual it will end before or with death; and for all mankind it will end in the Last Day. The age of grace is not forever. This is why immediate action is a basis of entering God's rest, of being saved (cp. 2 Cor. 6:2).

*Schreiner:* The continuing availability of God's rest is evident since rest is offered to Israel again by David (Ps. 95:7-11) hundreds of years after the rest offered in the days of Moses and Joshua. The author seizes upon the word 'today' from Ps. 95:7 and gives it great significance. Since the Lord exhorted Israel not to harden their hearts anew and afresh in David's day, it follows that the rest promised by Moses and Joshua has not been terminated. It was still available for Israel in David's day, and by the same token it is open for the recipients of the letter. Hence the readers must not let their hearts grow hard today. They should hear God's voice and believe and obey so that they will receive the final reward.

*Bruce:* It was disobedience, as we have seen, that kept the generation of the Exodus out of God's promised rest, in spite of the good news which was announced to them. But that same promised rest was still open for the people of God centuries after the wilderness period, for the writer of Ps. 95 urges his contemporaries to listen to the voice of God 'today,' instead of hardening their hearts in obstinacy like their ancestors and being debarred from entering into the rest of God as they had been. Ps. 95 is anonymous in the Masoretic text, but the Septuagint assigns it to David. Our author's phrase 'in David' may mean simply 'in the Psalter'; whether he thought of David as the composer of this particular psalm or not is immaterial to his argument. Whether the psalm is the composition of David or not, the point of paramount importance is that it was God who spoke 'in David' (cp. 3:7) and His word remains effectively vital long after it was uttered, addressing the heart and conscience of hearers in the Christian era with the same convicting relevance as characterized it when first it was spoken. By dint of repetition our author endeavors to bring home to his readers the fact that the divine warning is as applicable to them as it was in the days of Moses or David. If they treat the saving message lightly, if they 'tempt' God by trying to see how far they can presume upon His patience, they in their turn will forfeit His 'rest.'

### *c) A Rest Remains After Joshua (4:8)*

<sup>8</sup>*For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.*

*Schreiner:* The author continues to explain why the rest is still available for the readers of his day. The rest given by Joshua can't be the final rest since David hundreds of years later speaks of another rest, of a rest that is still available for the people of God. If the rest given by Joshua was final and definitive, no further rest would be offered. The author often makes the argument that the new is better, contrasting it with the old. In Joshua rest is linked to entering and possessing the land of Canaan (Jos, 1:13, 15; 11:23; 14:15; cp. also Dt. 3:20; 12:10; 25:19). After Joshua had defeated his enemies and Israel inherited the land, we read that 'the Lord gave them rest on every side according to all He had sworn to their fathers' (Jos. 21:44; cp. 22:4; 23:1).

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*Bruce:* It is plain (our author implies) that the ‘rest’ spoken of in Ps. 95:11 is not the earthly Canaan. For that land of rest was occupied by the Israelites of the second generation, who entered it under the command of Joshua. The people addressed in the ninety-fifth psalm were already living in the land of Canaan, as their ancestors had been for generations now. Likewise, the ‘rest’ which they were in danger of forfeiting through stubbornness of heart must have been something different from the ‘rest...from all their enemies round about’ which God had given to Israel in Joshua’s day (Jos. 23:1; cp. 21:44).

*MacArthur:* The rest spoken of here is not the physical rest of Canaan. That was only a picture. God’s true rest comes not through a Moses or a Joshua or a David. It comes through Jesus Christ. God’s rest is not essentially physical at all. Certainly, resting in God and trusting in His promises can relieve us of nervousness, tenseness, and other physical problems. But these are by-products of His rest. The rest God promises is spiritual, not physical. Whatever physical or earthly benefits the Lord may give us, His basic promise is to give us spiritual rest, spiritual blessing.

*Schreiner:* The typological nature of the rest given by Joshua is evident here. Joshua anticipates the name Jesus Christ. Indeed, the name ‘Joshua’ (*Ἰησοῦς, Jēsous*) here in Greek is spelled exactly as ‘Jesus’ is spelled in the NT. Jesus is the new and final and better ‘Joshua.’ The salvation and rest given through Joshua were never intended to be the final rest for the people of God. The earthly rest in the land under Joshua points forward to the heavenly rest given in Jesus Christ, to the heavenly country and city (11:10, 13-16; 12:22; 13:14) awaiting believers in Jesus Christ.

*Bruce:* The reader of the Greek Bible had (and still has) an advantage over the reader of the English Bible because to him ‘Joshua’ and ‘Jesus’ are not two names but one; he could distinguish between our Lord and His most illustrious namesake of Old Testament days, and at the same time appreciated some of the implications of the fact that they *are* namesakes. The parallel between the Old Testament ‘Jesus,’ who led his followers into the earthly Canaan, and Jesus the Son of God, who leads the heirs of the new covenant into their heavenly inheritance, is a prominent theme of early Christian typology, and could scarcely have been absent from our author’s mind. Yet he does not dwell on it here; he is more concerned to point the contrast between the temporal ‘rest’ which Israel entered under Joshua and the true rest which is still reserved for the people of God.

*Hughes:* The words for ‘Joshua’ and ‘Jesus’ are exactly the same in the Greek—Jesus was named after Joshua. The Old Testament ‘Jesus’ (Joshua) had led his followers to the land of Canaan. But that was not the real rest but only a type. And that is why the real rest was offered by David in his ‘Today’ and now to us in our ‘Today.’ So the great truth is, there was a ‘Jesus,’ the son of Nun, who failed to lead his people to true rest. But now there is another Jesus, the Son of God, who can. He is the pioneer and captain of our salvation—the ultimate Joshua (cp. 2:10).

### *d) A Sabbath-Rest Remains (4:9)*

<sup>9</sup>*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God...*

*Schreiner:* The threads of the preceding verses are picked up here and the author draws a conclusion about the nature of the rest God promised. The word ‘therefore’ (*αρα, ara*) signals that a conclusion is drawn from the preceding verses. Another link with the preceding verses is the repetition of the verb ‘remains’ (*απολειπεται, apoleipetai*; cp. 4:6). The rest continues to be open for God’s people. The word spoken to Israel so long ago has a continuing relevance for

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believers in Jesus Christ. Israel's entrance into the land (and refusal to enter it as well) is not just a historical fact. That event and word address believers throughout history, for the rest described there has a predictive and typological character.

*Schreiner:* Indeed the author pulls together the rest promised to Israel in the land with God's rest on the seventh day of creation. The word translated as 'Sabbath rest (*σαββατισμος*, *sabbatismos*)' does not actually use the word 'rest,' though rest was closely linked with the Sabbath in Jewish tradition (Ex. 16:23, 30; 20:11, 23:12). The reference to the Sabbath here points to the celebration and joy of the Sabbath. A link between the Sabbath and God's rest on the seventh day is suggested in 4:4, and here the joy and praise that mark the end-time rest are featured.

*Bruce:* The rest which is reserved for the people of God is properly called a 'Sabbath-rest'—a *sabbatismos* or 'Sabbath keeping'—because it is their participation in God's own rest. When God completed His work of creation, He 'rested'; so His people, having completed their service on earth, will enter into His rest.

*Phillips:* All through this exhortation, the writer has been using the Greek word *katapausis* for the idea of rest, which in the Greek translation of the Old Testament stood for rest in the land of Canaan. In verse 4, he expands his idea of rest by referring to God's rest in creation, so that his readers will start linking that geographical rest to the weekly Sabbath-rest of Israel. Now, in verse 9, the writer pointedly changes the word he uses for rest. Here he uses *apoleipetai*, combined with the word *sabbatismos*, a construction that designated the rest of the Sabbath day. It is because of this change in terminology that many English versions use the translation 'a Sabbath-rest.'

*Hughes:* Now comes the sublime statement of availability. When God finished the cosmos, He rested in the Sabbath-rest that works. When Christ cried, 'It is finished,' He forever rested from His atoning work. But the resting Christ works, even as the working God rests. Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath! When we believed, we finished with our works-righteousness and entered God's rest. Yet we long to serve Christ. This will all eventuate in the eternal Sabbath-rest and the beatitude of the Holy Spirit. 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, 'says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them! (Rev. 14:13).

*Schreiner:* The author's reading of the bible's story line is fascinating. God's rest in creation and the rest of Israel in the land have an eschatological character. God's creation rest anticipates the rest that will become a reality in the new creation. The rest realized under Joshua can't be the full and final rest since God still speaks of rest after the days of Joshua. The ultimate rest will match God's seventh-day rest as we shall see further in the next verse. Perhaps we have a hint here that the rest has an already-but-not-yet character. Israel, in the land, experienced God's rest to some degree. In the same way believers in Jesus Christ enjoy God's rest in part, but the fullness of that rest will only be theirs in the heavenly city.

*Schreiner:* Another typological connection should be made explicit. The writer refers her to 'God's people.' The rest given to Israel was a rest for a particular people in a specific location. But just as the rest points forward to a rest that embraces the whole creation, the new creation, the heavenly city, so Israel functions as a type for the new people of God, the church of Jesus Christ. The new people of God is not restricted to Israel but consists of Jewish and Gentile believers scattered throughout the world. The author doesn't erect a distinction between Israel and Gentile believers, indicating that he envisions one people of God.

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*MacArthur*: [DISPENSATIONAL WARNING!!!] The term ‘people of God’ may refer generally to anyone who knows God; but here it specifically refers to Israel. Salvation is first of all for Israel. There is a rest remaining for the people of God, and in the Old Testament Israel is designated the people of God. His spiritual rest is promised first to Israel, and He will not be through with her until she comes into His rest.

### e) *God’s Rest Remains (4:10)*

...<sup>10</sup>for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

*Schreiner*: The nature of the Sabbath rest is unfolded by the author. Just as God rests from His works on the seventh day of creation, so when human beings enter God’s rest, they rest from their works. The rest envisioned is patterned after God’s rest on the seventh day when God rested from His works. God rested from His works because He was finished with His work, not because He was tired or exhausted. The comparison furnished here is crucial and fundamental for understanding the rest promised to believers. It transcends the rest given to Joshua and Israel in the land. Their rest was an earthly rest, a rest in the land of Canaan, but the rest envisioned for those who belong to Jesus Christ is a greater rest than what was given under Joshua. The author declares that those who enter the rest promised by God rest from their works. The reference to works here has nothing to do with works righteousness. He is not saying believers rest from relying on their own works and start relying on God and His grace when they enter God’s rest. After all, the author says believers rest from their works in the same way God rested from His works on the seventh day of creation. Certainly God did not rest from works righteousness!

*Bruce*: Verse 10, with its initial conjunction ‘for,’ explains the description of the believers’ coming rest as a ‘Sabbath keeping’ in verse 9. What then is this Sabbath rest which awaits them? It is evidently an experience which they do not enjoy in their present mortal life, although it belongs to them as a heritage, and by faith they may live in the good of it here and now. In chapter 11 we have further references to the eternal homeland which is the heritage of believers, the saints’ everlasting rest—the ‘better country, that is, a heavenly one’ which they desire, the ‘city’ which God has prepared for them, the well-founded city of which He is both architect and builder (11:10, 16). Of this city of God men and women of faith are citizens already, although the full exercise of their civic privileges in it is reserved for the future. It is perfectly conceivable that in the author’s view the Old Testament believers entered into the rest of God as soon as Christ had accomplished His redemptive work, while believers of the New Testament age enter it at death. Regardless, this blissful rest in unbroken fellowship with God is the goal to which His people are urged to press forward; this is the final perfection which has been prepared for them by the sacrifice of their heavenly high priest.

*Schreiner*: Resting from works means, then, that human beings stop working because their works are completed, just as God ceased working on the seventh day because His work of creation was completed. Clearly human beings only cease from works or activity at death. Hence we enter the rest finally and definitively after our death. Entering the rest is complementary with entrance into the heavenly city (11:10, 13-16; 12:22; 13:14). The parallel to Rev. 14:13 is apt.

*MacArthur*: God’s rest is also future. I believe Hebrews 4:10 anticipates that final day when we cease from all effort and all work and enter into the presence of Jesus Christ. It includes the promised rest to Israel, the ultimate rest when she and all of God’s other people will cease from work and rest as God did when He finished His creation. That is the reality of Sabbath rest.

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### 2. The Challenge to Rest (4:11)

<sup>11</sup>*Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.*

*Bruce:* In view of all the glory which is accessible to faith, in view of the disaster which follows upon unbelief, our author urges his readers once more to make it their earnest endeavor to attain the eternal home of the people of God, and not miss it through disobedience like that of the Israelites in the wilderness. God's 'Today' has arrived; let us take His word seriously and make haste to enter His rest.

*Schreiner:* The day of final rest has not yet arrived; hence the author relays the main point of the paragraph, drawing an inference ('then') from the promise of the future rest. Believers (and the author includes himself here with the first-person plural) should be diligent to enter into rest. They must not take God's promises for granted as if they could inherit the rest even while straying from the message of Jesus Christ. The author returns to where he began (3:7-11), reminding his readers of the example set by the wilderness generation. They disobeyed God's commands and failed to enter Canaan. The rest was available to them, just as it is accessible to the recipients of the letter, and yet they did not take advantage of their privileges.

*Phillips:* At first glance, this command seems contradictory. Verse 10 tells us that entering God's rest means resting from our work as He did from His. The very next verse tells us to get busy working for that rest; we are to make every effort to enter it and not fall away, as the Israelites did in the wilderness. In fact, there is no problem here at all. The overarching model for this whole exhortation is the exodus wanderings of Israel. They had left the bondage of Egypt, but had not yet entered into the land of rest. We, too, are to press onward through our difficulties, not complaining against God or hardening our hearts against Him, but relying on Him in this present day of testing. We are to strive with the resources of His rest. In contrast to the unfaithful Israelites, who failed to trust the provision of God's grace, we follow and strive because our faith receives the benefits of God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

*Phillips:* Now is the day of our labor, the day when we do work. We rest our burdens on Jesus Christ, and He sends His Holy Spirit to help us shoulder the load. Our final day of rest is yet to come. It awaits us in heaven. God worked for six days and then He rested; now is the time when we work, after which we too will rest. That is what verse 10 emphasizes, pointing to the rest that is yet to come. So understand that your labor now is not in vain. Your struggle, born of faith, fueled by God's Holy Spirit as He works in you, is not for nothing. We are storing treasure up in heaven.

*Hughes:* The preacher properly closes this section with a challenge to his church. How, then, do we 'strive' (or, as some translations have it, 'do our utmost') 'to enter that rest'? Our passage suggests two things. First, we must do our utmost to focus on the rest. We must strive to comprehend that it is a *divine rest*—the rest that God personally enjoys—'My rest' (vv. 3, 5), as He calls it. It is a Sabbath-rest as old as the universe. It is joyous, satisfying, and productive. We must do our utmost to grasp this. There is no room for mental laziness. Think with all you have on God's rest as described by the Holy Spirit and as offered to you in this passage. Second, we must do our utmost to combine the hearing of the good news of the offered rest with genuine faith—that is, *belief plus trust*. In the midst of life's uneven seas, we are called, as was the early church, to *believe* in the mighty God of the exodus, He who parted seas, brought forth water from the rock, and feed His people with manna. Even more, we are to believe in the Bread of Heaven

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who gave His life for us and rose from the dead and ascended to God in mighty power. Can we add to this belief *trust*? This was the bottom line for the wavering church. Could they trust God to take care of them? There is no rest in this life without trust.

### 3. An Eschatological Rest

*Phillips*: The term ‘rest’ occurs five times in verses 6-11. It first occurred in 3:11, where the writer quoted Psalm 95 with reference to the faithless generation of Israel during the exodus: ‘As I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest.”’ There ‘rest’ referred to entry into the Promised Land of Canaan, the land of prosperity and security. For several paragraphs, the writer of Hebrews has been exhorting us not to follow the example of that exodus generation that complained against God, accused Him of failing to provide, and refused to place their trust in Him. As a result, they did not enter the Promised Land, but died in the desert between Egypt and Canaan.

*Phillips*: As this argument develops, the author anticipates an objection. His readers might naturally wonder, ‘Yes, that faithless generation did not enter the rest in Canaan, but their children did under Joshua. Why, then, do you keep talking about a “rest” that still remains?’ He answers this question in 4:6-10. Verse 9 makes clear that our salvation rest is something that is ultimately future; it is something that still remains for the people of God to enter. As great as Israel’s rest in Canaan was, it was not the ultimate rest that God intended for His people. It was outward. It was physical and symbolic; rather than fulfilling God’s rest it symbolized the rest that was to come.

*Phillips*: To understand what Hebrews means by a rest that remains, it helps to understand a theological concept known as *realized eschatology*. *Eschatos* is the Greek word for ‘last,’ and eschatology means ‘last things’ or ‘with reference to the end.’ When we say that Hebrews holds a ‘realized’ eschatology, we mean that the writer emphasizes our present possession of things that God has promised. Although those blessings will be fully received at the end of history, we already begin to realize their benefits now by faith.

*Phillips*: An example of realized eschatology is the rest offered to God’s people. On the one hand, we now enter that rest by faith: ‘We who have believed enter that rest.’ Note the present tense. Through faith we know the certainty of salvation and come into communion with the living God, which is what eternal life is all about. Instead of laboring in futility to earn forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God, we *rest* upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Even in this present life of toil, our faith rests on Him and His saving power. This is what we mean by a ‘realized eschatology’: the things of heaven, the things of the future which are promised us by God, are made real to us now through faith, so that we live by a strength that is not of us but of God.

*Phillips*: As strong as that emphasis is, however, it is important that we do not overstate the case. Israel in Canaan had a foretaste of God’s rest; that is what the Promised Land signified. But they were in fact surrounded by real enemies; their need for labor and warfare was very great. The Book of Joshua tells of their successes and failures; it is a book of war and not of peace. The Canaan rest pointed to a greater salvation, of which it gave a foretaste but not the fulfillment. This same understanding applies to the Christian life. How wonderful it is that we rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet what we long for is the day when there will be no more tears, when there will be nothing to fear, and when God’s promised rest is brought to full consummation in glory. But this is not our present experience. This present life compares to the wilderness journey, to

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the time of trial and testing, and not to the Promised Land itself. ‘There remains,’ the writer of Hebrews reminds us, ‘a Sabbath rest for the people of God.’ Though we have very real blessings in this present life, what we now experience is not all there is for the believer, and we rightly long for a greater rest to come.

*Schreiner:* This text underscores the importance of history. The promise of rest ‘today’ in Psalm 95 indicates that the rest given under Joshua cannot be the final and definitive rest, for David promises that a rest still remains for God’s people. Indeed, the rest under Joshua figuratively anticipates the rest that will be secured under the new Joshua (Jesus). Since Jesus grants a better rest, He is superior to Joshua. Indeed, the rest Jesus gives is a Sabbath rest, which is defined as an everlasting rest, a rest that means the cessation from the toil and labor of life in this world. We have seen that the rest will be enjoyed in the city to come, the heavenly city. At the same time the rest can be described as the reward that will be granted to those who persevere to the end.

*Schreiner:* Perseverance is the author’s main concern. The readers should not disobey as the wilderness generation did. They should strive to enter the rest while the opportunity still remains. The same applies to us today. The Lord is gracious and compassionate, but we should continue to trust in Him and obey Him until the end. God’s word is powerful in judging (and saving) those who turn against Him. It penetrates to the deepest secrets of our lives. God knows who and what we are and will judge us if we depart from Him.

For next time: Read Hebrews 4:11-16.