

Hebrews 4:1-13 – The Remaining Rest

[Textual note: Hebrews 4:1-13 concludes the discussion begun in chapter 3:7 regarding the need for steadfast faith, whereas Hebrews 4:14 begins a new discussion of the Jesus, our great high priest. To quote A.T. Robertson, “This is a poor chapter division.”]

1. “Therefore, since a promise _____ of entering His rest, let us _____ lest any of you seem to have _____ of it.”

[“fear” comes from the Greek phobeo (Strong’s #5399) from which we get our word phobia, or fear. The author is emphasizing the real concern God’s children should have concerning their continued faithfulness. This entire context shows the fallacy of the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy of God’s children (i.e., “once saved, always saved). Note the author’s inclusion of himself in his admonition as he uses the terms “we” and “us” throughout the text.

“A promise being left us” = ‘a Divine assurance of good still held in reserve.’ Note especially the reference to “His rest,” that is, the rest provided by God.

“seem to come short of it” (“be judged to come short of it” - RSV). The idea conveyed is similar to Daniel’s statement to Belshazzar in Daniel 5:27, “you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting.” What a terrible thought for a Christian to be found wanting in the day of Judgment.]

2. “For indeed the _____ was preached to us as well as to them: but the word which they heard did not _____ them, not being _____ with _____ in those who heard it.”

[The “them” of verse 2 refers to those with whom God was grieved forty years (3:17), those who could not enter in because of unbelief (3:18-19). This gospel (“good news”) was of God’s promised land preached to Israel by Caleb (Num 13:30) and Joshua (Num 14:6-9), but the people did not have faith in the message they preached, choosing instead to believe the evil report of the other 10 spies. This unbelief was a repudiation of the promise and power of Jehovah to deliver them from bondage and provide them rest (Ex 6:6-8, 7-14).

In like fashion, the good news of God’s rest had been preached to the Hebrews. However, they were in danger of turning their back on God and heading back into the bondage of Judaism (cf Gal 5:1-4). As for us, we should call to mind 2 Corinthians 1:20, “For all the promises of God in Him (Christ - JTC) are yes, and in Him Amen, (“so be it”), unto the glory of God by us.” We must continue to live faithfully in view of the faithfulness of our God.]

3. “For we who have _____ do enter into _____.”

[There is some discussion about the meaning of the phrase “do enter.” Some think the rest is begun in the present, while others believe it is in the future. It seems to me that both ideas are here conveyed, but with an emphasis on the latter. The word translated “rest” has some reference to the security of a dwelling place. When we obey the gospel, we “rest” or abide in Christ and His kingdom. The Israelites were promised a resting place (abode) in the promised land, though it was not to be their ultimate (final) destination, as there was an eternal land to which they would go if they continued in faithfulness to God.

For Christians, I think the rest under consideration is heaven. The remainder of the text seems to bear this out. Through our faithfulness to God, there is made for us an “abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God” (2 Peter 1:10-11). The church is the kingdom of God on earth (Matt 16:16-18; Col 1:13). At the last day, Jesus will delivered up this kingdom to God the Father eternally (1 Cor 15:23-24). No matter what rest is here under consideration, there is attached to it the condition of abiding faith. Note again the use of the word belief to convey the idea of obedience, as seen earlier in chapter 3 (cf Bruce, 75.)

4. “So I _____ in My _____, they shall not enter My rest; although the works were _____ from the _____ of the _____.”
5. On what day did God rest from His works? _____ To what event does this have reference? _____

[The phrase “if they shall enter into My rest” is accurately translated in the KJV, but the meaning of the phrase is “they shall not enter into My rest.” The same thing may be said of the like phrase in verse 5.

The Israelites were not denied entrance into God’s rest because it was not ready, as the text indicates the rest was prepared from the beginning of the creation. (Lightfoot, 96)]

6. “For if _____ had given them rest, then would he not have afterward spoken of _____.”

[Joshua led the children of Israel into the promised land. This name appears as “Jesus” in the KJV. In the Greek, there is no linguistic difference between the names Jesus and Joshua (cf Acts 7:45). Both refer to one who saves or delivers.

Consider the contrast in the “rests” of Joshua and Jesus. Joshua’s was a physical (temporary) rest, as the text indicates that another rest was also mentioned. This is contrasted with Jesus, who leads us to a spiritual (eternal) rest (97).]

7. “There _____ therefore a _____ for the _____ of _____. For he who has _____ his rest has himself also _____ from his _____ as God did from His.”

[The word translated “rest” in this verse differs from all the others in the original language. It has as its root the Greek “sabbaton,” from which we get the word “sabbath.” The sabbath was a rest provided by God for His people under the Old Law. There is a day coming when the faithful will cease from all their labors, (compare the language here to that of Revelation 14:13). This is pictured by God’s rest from the creation (Gen 2:1-3) and the Jewish observation of the Sabbath following their departure from Egypt (Ex 31:13-18; Deut 5:12-15).]

8. “Let us therefore be _____ to enter that rest, lest anyone _____ according to the same example of _____.”

[Compare the rendering disobedience to that of unbelief in the King James., as was seen at the end of our lesson on chapter 3 (cf v 18).]

9. “For the word of God is _____, and _____, and _____ than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of _____ and _____, and of joints and marrow, and is a _____ of the _____ and _____ of the _____.”

[This is one of the most well-known and oft-quoted verses in all of the Hebrew epistle. Generally speaking, it is used to describe the “raw power” of God’s word. However, I do not believe this is the author’s intent. This verse must be considered in light of the previous verses, as it begins with the Greek “gar” (“for”), indicating an explanation of the previous text (cf Rom 10:9-10; Gal 3:26-27). Therefore, the verse takes on the essence of the “revealing power” of God’s word.

- a. Concerning Canaan, what did the Lord tell Israel to do in Deuteronomy 1:8? _____

- b. What did Moses say to the people in Deuteronomy 1:21? _____

- c. What did God say concerning the land in Numbers 13:2? _____

[The “hearts” of the unbelieving spies and grumbling, faithless Israelites was revealed by their refusal to believe and obey God’s word. All who claim to believe in and love God are revealed as unfaithful and unbelieving by their refusal to obey the word of God.

For example, in studying with people in religious error, how many times has this statement been made; “I know the Bible says baptism is necessary to be saved, BUT...”? Do you see it?

One word (“but”) says everything one needs to know about their heart. We do not reveal or judge their hearts, but their refusal to obey God’s word reveals it in light of that same word.]

10. “And there is no creature _____ from His sight, but all things are _____ and _____ to the eyes of Him to whom we must give _____.”

[The root word translated “manifest” is found 32 times in the NT, and is generally translated “appear(ed)” or “shine.” It means readily or easily seen. “Naked” means exactly that, without clothing or external covering. “Open” has reference to exposing an animal’s throat for the purpose of killing it. Some have suggested the word was used prior to the New Testament to describe the laying open of an animal to check the inside for defilement. One is reminded of a variation of an old saying, “You can fool most of the people some of the time, some of the people most of the time, but you can’t fool God.”

The phrase “with whom we have to do” literally means the one “to whom we must give word or give an account,” utilizing a form of the Greek *logos* (Strong’s 3056).]

[Lightfoot identifies Hebrews 4:14-16 as “transitional.” That is, “they serve both as a conclusion and as an introduction” (99-100). They conclude a series of “let us” admonitions in chapter 4 (vv 1, 11, 14, 16), and introduce the section on the high priesthood of Jesus (though it was mentioned briefly in 2:17). For our class purposes, I have chosen to place it in the context of chapter 5.]