

“The REST of God’s Promise”

Hebrews 3:1 – 4:10

August 5, 2018

VIDEO: *“Contentment In A Driven World”*

- *I had to do something of value to be of value...*
- *That lifestyle is exhausting, just exhausting!*
- You don’t have to **ACHIEVE** to receive rest...
- You **BELIEVE** the Gospel to receive God’s rest!

INTRO: Today we’ll see & BE biblical discipleship. In short, God’s Word is going to *Inform, Inspect, & Inspire* us!

This Scripture passage (and ALL biblical) exhortations & warnings are designed to develop greater Christ-likeness in a disciple’s worship, walk, work, & witness. -JDP

Today we’re going to BE equipped to build to code!

BIG IDEA: Christian REST is SO much more than just comfortable relaxation!

God’s rest is not a fix for exhaustion, it is the celebration of completion! -JDP

EXAMPLE: *“I rest my case...”*

T/S: *“Come To Me.... I will give you Rest...” (2X)*

- Rest **for**: *Worship, Walk, Works, Warfare, Witness.*
- Rest **from**: *Worry, Wounds, Warts, Warfare, Works*

CONTEXT:

- Hold On... Hebrews “**exhorting**” sermon series
- Warning #2: Don’t disconnect... *Christ/Church/Rest*

...The walk of reverence is the way of rest! -JDP

PREVIEW:

1. The **WAY** into God’s rest
2. The **WARNING** about God’s rest
3. The **WONDER** of God’s rest

*** 10 Facets of Biblical Rest ***

1. Rest & biblical **family** – God’s biblical family! (3:1-6)
2. Rest & biblical **forewarning** (3:7-19)
3. Rest & biblical **fear** (4:1)
4. Rest & biblical **faith** (4:2)
5. Rest & the **finished works** of the LORD (4:3)
6. Rest & biblical **foundations** (4:4)
7. Rest & biblical **failure** (4:5-6)
8. Rest & biblical **fixes** (4:7)
9. Rest & the biblical **future** (4:8-9)
10. Rest & biblical **fulfillment** (4:10)

I. The **WAY** Into God’s Rest

A. Rest & biblical **FAMILY** - Hebrews 3:1-6

¹ *Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;*

⁶ *but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, **IF** we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.*

➤ REST as Real Church-family vs. Religious *church*

➤ Consider (and REST) in Jesus:

- a. **Apostle** - **High Priest** - **Christ** (center of confession)
- b. **Faithful**.... **Builder** of our “oikos”/Church
- c. God (Christ is Creator/Builder of all)

II. The **WARNING** About God’s Rest

B. Rest & biblical **FOREWARNING** - Hebrews 3:7-19

- Quoting & Contextualizing Psalm 95
- Explicit “Warning #2”
- Shocking “confrontation of contemplation”

- Direct & indirect responses are called for...
 - **Listen** to God & **His WORD**
 - **Remember** God & **His WRATH**
 - **Exhort** God’s people **with your WALK**
 - BE persistent/persevere as ambassadors!
 - Bring God’s truth in love
 - Clarify & apply God’s gospel-standards

Psalm 95 simultaneously condemns the wilderness generation for its disobedience and invites its original hearers to respond to God's promises in faith, which the author of Hebrews picks up and applies to his own audience.... Furthermore, just as David urged his original hearers to respond to God in faithfulness "today," so too does the author of Hebrews urge his readers to respond to God in faithfulness "today."

¹² Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end... ¹⁵ while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."

¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

- Disobedience & unbelief are unified in God's Word
- Disobedience & unbelief are contextualized
- **Disobedience & unbelief are the root of "un-rest"!**

Because the people went backward in unbelief instead of forward by faith, they missed their inheritance and died in the desert.

III. The **WONDER** of God's Rest

C. Rest & biblical FEAR - Hold On #16 (Hebrews 4:1)

¹ *Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.*

D. Rest & biblical FAITH - Hold On #17 (Hebrews 4:2)

² *For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.*

- See the “gospel”/”good news” enters here...
- See the connection of “gospel” & “promise!”

E. Rest & the FINISHED works of God (Hebrews 4:3)

- Only 2 groups... “enter” & “NOT enter” people
- *although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.*
- Security produces & protects rest!
- Without Security it’s impossible to rest...
- ***You can’t rest standing on a trap door!*** - JDP
- Biblical rest = union & communion with God
 - No one can **take** it
 - No one can **break** it
 - No one can **forsake** it (aka “**spiritual Suicide**”)
 - Too many **fake** it
 - Rest = Heaven! & Unrest = Hell!

➤ Relationships

- Biblical Belief & Faithful Obedience = **rest**
- Disobedience & Damning Deception = **unrest**
- Biblical fear & saving faith = **rest**

VIDEO #2: "Narrow Christianity"

The way of God's rest has always been narrow, w/ only a few...
"a remnant chosen by grace" (**Rom. 11:5**)

F. Rest & biblical FOUNDATIONS (Hebrews 4:4)

⁴ *For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day:
"AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS
WORKS";*

- **What is this rest?**
 - Assurance vs. Insurance
 - Completion vs. Exhaustion!
 - Revelation vs. Regulation
 - Satisfaction vs. Scheduling (Sat. vs. Sunday)
 - Declaration vs. Denomination (worship vs works)
- **What were "all His works"** (see last week)

G. Rest & biblical FAILURE (Hebrews 4:5-6)

⁵ *and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST."* ⁶ *Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,*

- See the destructive work of unbelief & disobedience!
- In O.T., N.T. & today this failure happened & happens, in spite of the fact that THE gospel has been shared...
 - *People push away the Light because they prefer the dark & darkness... - Jesus*

H. Rest & biblical **FIXES** (Hebrews 4:7)

⁷ *He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "**TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.**"*

David's Psalm 95 tells us that opportunity for God's rest remains, but it will not remain indefinitely.

The age of grace is not forever.

Paul said, "Now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation'" (2 Cor. 6:2).

➤ Rest & FIXES

- Pay attention; Listen; Repent; Surrender/soften
- Believe, abide, & obey (no matter what!)

Some of God's most faithful believers are the busiest, the hardest working, and sometimes even the most afflicted people imaginable. Yet they are in God's salvation rest. - MacArthur

I. Rest & the biblical **FUTURE** (Hebrews 4:8-9)

⁸ *For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.* ⁹ *So/consequently, there remains a Sabbath-rest (UNIQUE biblical word) for the people of God.*

- *Ask yourself... Didn't Joshua bring them into the Promised Land?*
- Hebrews 4:9 is attempting to stir believers on to serve the Lord faithfully while still on the earth.

How do we enter this Sabbath rest? The whole letter of Hebrews tells us: by believing in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath.

- The Good News has always been the way to rest...
 - God's *Plan*... with *Power*
 - God's *Promise*... with *Purpose*
 - God in *Person*... with *His People*

Whatever the rest is, it is available now and not only in the future when believers get to heaven.

***** Let's put to rest some dangerous heresies:**

- **Insecurity**
- **Insincerity**
- **Insurance policies**
- **Insidious policies**
- **Insecurity**
 - Those who don't trust the promises of God
 - Those who think you can lose your salvation

➤ **Insincerity**

- Religious resume builders
- Compromising cheap-gracers
- Rationalizing luke-warmers
- Self-righteous rich-young rulers
- Any who alter the gospel's biblical definition

➤ **Insurance policies**

- Worry (putting faith in the enemy...)
- Work (Catholicism & many Protestants)
- Willpower (man-made vs miraculous work)

➤ **Insidious policies**

- Loose-lovers = **Hippie** Jesus
- Libertines = **Happy** Jesus
- Legalists = **Hammer** Jesus

▪ **Special NOTE:** for 7th Day Adventists

- **Did Jesus ever break God's Law?**
- Jesus "broke" man's Sabbath rules

Sabbath rest was instituted as a symbol of the true rest to come in Christ. That is why the Sabbath could be violated by Jesus, and completely set aside in the New Testament. – Matthew 12:1-8

"Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:16-17).

(Deut. 5 = "Sabbath is a SIGN of relationship")

Spiritual rest is ongoing maturity and perseverance, a community ethic, made possible by faith and obedience.

- The New American Commentary

*The calendar merely wraps the Sabbath day in a week,
where-as the biblical Church's disciples witness
to the Savior's Sabbath when we walk, work, & worship
with BOTH, divine reverence AND daily rest.* - JDP

J. Rest & biblical FULFILLMENT (Hebrews 4:10)

¹⁰ *For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested
from his works, as God did from His.*

- Finality & Security go hand & hand...
- God's promises bring peace to His people! – JDP

*Biblical Christians are people of the "already/not yet,"
"both/and" promises of God's good news/gospel!*

*The good is just getting started...
& bad is going away for good!* - JDP

VIDEO #3: *"The Beginning of Happiness"* (eternal fix)

God's rest is also future.

*"Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'
'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for
their deeds follow with them'" (Rev. 14:13)*

CLOSE:

When God had finished the creation, He said (briefly paraphrasing Gen. 2), "It's done. I've made a wonderful world for man and woman. I've given them everything earthly they need, including each other, for a complete and beautiful and satisfying life. Even more importantly, they have perfect, unbroken, unmarred fellowship with Me. I can now rest; and they can rest in Me."Adam and Eve were completely righteous when they were created. They walked and talked with God as regularly and as naturally as they walked and talked with each other. They were at rest, in its original and its fullest sense. They relied on God for everything. They had no anxieties, no worries, no pain, no frustrations, no heartaches. They did not need God's forgiveness, because they had no sin to be forgiven of. They did not need His consolation, because they were never grieved. They did not need His encouragement, because they never failed. They only needed His fellowship, because they were made for Him. This was their "rest" in God. God completed His perfect work and He rested. They were His perfect work and they rested in Him.... But something terrible happened. When Satan began to impugn God's word and integrity and love, Adam and Eve chose to believe Satan. They trusted him rather than God. And when they lost their trust in God, they lost His rest. And from that time until now, man apart from God not only has been sinful but restless. **The entire purpose of the Bible and the entire working of God in human history have one theme: bringing man back into His rest....** To accomplish that, God had to remove the barrier to their rest, the barrier which separated them from Him. He sent His Son to do just that, to provide again for man's rest in His Creator. Through Christ's death men are again offered life. **Rest is another name for life, life as God meant it to be.**

➤ **The Good News explains God's REST!**

- Plan with Power
- Promise with Purpose
- Person with People
- Perpetual with Permanence

See the progression of *God's good news & rest:*
(see the Past... Present... Future...)

***** Ten progressive types of biblical rest *****

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Creator rest | Triune God |
| 2. Creation rest | Adam & Eve & Purity |
| 3. Corrupted rest | Satan & sin & sinners |
| 4. Canaan rest | Moses & disobedient unbelief |
| 5. Conquest rest | Joshua & promise & power |
| 6. Continuation rest | David & hope |
| 7. Christ's rest | Jesus the Lamb & His arrival |
| 8. Calgary's rest | Jesus the Lord & His cross (finished!) |
| 9. Christian rest | Believers, their Christ & their cross |
| 10. Completion rest | Jesus the Lion & the Church forever |

Nothing brings better rest than KNOWING you are redeemed!

Restore ("rest – store") to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. - Psalm 51:12

Let's PRAY!

Entering with Urgency

Hebrews 4:3-10

In verse 3 the author once again quotes from Psalm 95:11, on which he has been basing his argument since Hebrews 3:7. “They will not enter my rest” resoundingly condemns the wilderness generation for its failure to trust the promises of God and enter his Sabbath rest. While Psalm 95:11 convicts the wilderness generation for its unfaithfulness, the author of Hebrews uses it to reiterate **a great theme of this passage: those who *believe* enter God’s rest.** In fact, the end of verse 3 affirms the availability of that rest to all generations—even the wilderness generation—since God’s rest started at the foundation of the world, a notion the author grounds in verse 4 by drawing from the creation narrative. Since the seventh day of creation, the opportunity to join God in his rest remains.

The repetition of Psalm 95:11 in verse 5 emphasizes the urgency of entering God’s rest. When a biblical author repeatedly returns to the same issue, it is most likely because the hard-heartedness of sin-prone people requires the repetition. Only one thing can satisfy the restlessness of the human soul—the “rest” of God. And the only way we can access God’s rest is by faith in Jesus Christ, the One who secures God’s rest for believers through his death and resurrection. **If we reject the promises of the gospel, then we will die in the wilderness.** But if we trust in its promises and in the God who makes them, we will enter God’s rest. This is a message stubborn sinners need to hear over and over again.

In **verses 6 and 7** the author brilliantly applies what he said previously, as the words “therefore, since” indicate. These verses **are also rich with theological and hermeneutical treasures**. The author affirms both David’s authorship of **Psalm 95** and the historicity of the events surrounding the wilderness generation. **Moreover, just as David did for his original audience, the author of Hebrews applies the significance of the wilderness events to the current situation of his congregation.**

In other words...

Psalm 95 simultaneously condemns the wilderness generation for its disobedience and invites its original hearers to respond to God’s promises in faith, which the author of Hebrews picks up and applies to his own audience.

Furthermore, just as David urged his original hearers to respond to God in faithfulness “today,” so too does the author of Hebrews urge his readers to respond to God in faithfulness “today.”

***** See 5 generations of this good news...*** - JDP**

- God in creation account (perhaps to Adam)
- God to Moses & Moses to Exodus Jews
- God to David & David to Jews “in Canaan”
- God to Hebrews’ author & author to Jew/Church

➤ God to me & now me to YOU!

David's words to the Israelites in his own time are just as valid and urgent now. God has appointed today for us so that we might respond to his call in faith and not harden our hearts. We cannot presume upon tomorrow. Today may be the only day we have left. But as long as you have today, you have an invitation to faith.

Joshua's name in verse 8 can seem somewhat unexpected. However, once we understand the context of [Psalm 95](#) and the theological rationale of the author, the introduction of Joshua at this point in the argument no longer seems strange at all.

Until this verse, the author has essentially given his readers a biblical theology of Israel's disobedience. **Psalm 95 anchors his biblical theology because it both rehearses the story of Israel's disobedience and provides God's interpretation of those events.** As we have seen, [Psalm 95](#) specifically focuses on Israel's rebellion against God and against Moses in the wilderness—a rebellion that kept them from entering the promised land.

Moses, however, did not lead the people into the promised land. His successor Joshua did that, which is why the author introduces him in [verse 8](#). The author has already demonstrated that Christ is superior to the angels and Moses. Now he must demonstrate that Christ is superior to Joshua.

As the writer notes, **even though Joshua led the people of Israel into Canaan, he did not lead them into God's "rest."** Even in Canaan the people of Israel continued to rebel against God. When the people of Israel journeyed across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, they did not journey into rest; they simply moved from one place to another. **Thus Psalm 95**, written by David long after the events of the conquest, still speaks of a Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God.

How do we enter this Sabbath rest? The whole letter of Hebrews tells us: by believing in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath.

Joshua led Israel into the land, but Jesus leads his people into God's true eschatological rest. **Verse 10 elaborates** on this. **We rest from our works and enter God's rest when we trust in Christ. We no longer have to live our lives trying to "prove" our righteousness before God.** Instead, **we "rest" from that labor because Christ has already proved that righteousness on our behalf.**

Like John 3:16, Hebrews 4:10 powerfully captures the message of the gospel in a single verse.

The gospel is not morality. The gospel is not external religion. Nor is it a seven-step program for obtaining a better life.

The gospel is the message of Christ's accomplishments on our behalf so that we might "rest" from our works by trusting in his work.

When we trust in Christ's work, we rest from trusting our own.

Excursus: Hebrews and the Inspiration of Scripture

I have noted several times throughout this commentary how unashamedly clear the author of Hebrews is regarding his high view of Scripture. As we saw in [Hebrews 3:7](#), the author often introduces Scripture with the words "the Holy Spirit says," even when the Scripture he's quoting comes from a historical person (David in this case). Such instances demonstrate that **the author of Hebrews wholeheartedly believes Scripture's ultimate origin is God himself.**

Hebrews 4:7 gives us another important example of the author's theology of Scripture. The author believes the words of [Psalm 95:11](#) ultimately come from God, but he does not ignore the fact that they also come "through David." Thus, the writer of Hebrews simultaneously affirms the divine and human authorship of the Bible.

God speaks in Scripture, but he speaks through certain individuals. B. B. Warfield called this the "concurvive" theory of inspiration (*Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 95).

The apostle **Peter** speaks about the divine and human authorship of Scripture in **2 Peter 1:21**: *“No prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* God used real, historic people with peculiar vocabularies and personalities to write the Bible, but he also providentially “carried them along” so that they would write exactly what he intended. Article VIII of the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (which makes a series of affirmations and denials about the doctrine of Scripture) states the doctrine this way: “We affirm that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.”

Amazingly, God used the personalities, writing styles, experiences, and life situations of the human authors in order to accomplish the production of an “inscripturated” text; **men, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote God’s Word.** This does not mean the authors passively entered trances as they composed Scripture. Nor does it mean God merely dictated the words to them. **The authors actively engaged in the composition process, yet God carried them along in such a way that everything they wrote was exactly what he intended; Scripture is the actual word of God.**

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary

God Rested

“So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (Gen. 2:3).
- Genesis 2:1-3

The amount of space devoted to the creation of mankind, as well as the dominion granted to us by God Almighty, demonstrates that humanity is the crowning jewel of the Lord’s creation. Being made in His image (Gen. 1:27), we have a worth that far surpasses anything else God has made, and we have an authority to manifest His sovereign reign shared by nothing else He has created (v. 28). Today’s passage tells us that, **having completed His creation of the universe, God rested on the seventh day of the creation week and set it apart as holy (2:1–3)**. At first glance, this seems a bit strange to us because, after all, **the Lord omnipotent does not grow tired and should not need to relax after working long hours (Isa. 40:28)**.

Genesis 2:3 gives us insight into the nature of the Lord’s rest. **This verse does not say God ceased all activity on the seventh day; instead, He only “rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”** On His Sabbath, God no longer performs the labor of the preceding six days in which He created all things by His word. **However, He continues to uphold all things, and, upon Adam’s fall, He began His sovereign work of redemption (3:14–15, 21)**.

Moreover,
as there is no morning and evening on the seventh day,
God’s rest is eternal and He therefore sustains us
even today... (1 Cor. 1:4–9).

Later on in Scripture we see that God’s rest on the seventh day is the pattern for our own Sabbath (Ex. 20:8–11). **Just like the Lord, we are to cease one day a week from our creative labor**. Reformed evangelicals legitimately debate about whether this may include recreation such as playing games and other more “active” forms of rest. However, **all generally agree we are to set one day in seven apart as holy and engage in public worship and rest from the ordinary**.

Because of Jesus’ resurrection on the first day of the week, the Sabbath is now celebrated on the Lord’s Day (Rev. 1:9–11). Though we must glorify God in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31), on Sunday we should be especially concerned to celebrate our accomplished redemption and look forward to its completed application in the eternal Sabbath awaiting the people of God (Heb. 4:9–10).

Coram Deo

How do you spend your time on Sundays? Are you attending a church where you can worship and fellowship with other believers? Do you spend a restful day with your family and friends, or do you

labor in ways that are best kept for other days of the week? When was the last time you visited someone in need? Take some time today and plan to visit someone this Sunday after you worship with your local congregation.

Passages for Further Study

Deut. 5:12–15

Isa. 58:13–14

Jer. 17:19–27

Matthew 12:1-8

Exhortation to Enter God's Rest (4:1-13)

Hebrews 4:1-13 continues the thought of the previous chapter. The author uses a threefold lexical *inclusio* which serves to give coherence to 3:12-4:13: *apistia* ("unbelief") occurs in 3:12,19; *eiselthein... katapausin* ("entering rest") occurs in 4:1,5; and *apeitheia* ("disobedience") in 4:6,11. Words in the semantic domain of faith (3:12,19; 4:2,3) and obedience (3:18; 4:6,11) serve to tie the sections together as well. The quotation of Ps 95:7-11 also provides cohesion since it is used in 3:12-19 as a warning based on history and in 4:1-11 as a word of promise and encouragement, with the intent of garnering an obedient response from the readers. From a rhetorical standpoint, Wills sees a threefold pattern connecting 3:7-4:11:

3:7-18 Exempla

3:19 Conclusion

4:1	Exhortation
4:2	Transition
4:3-8	Exempla
4:9-10	Conclusion
4:11	Exhortation

Wray suggested that Heb 3:1-6 provides a thesis statement about the faithfulness of Jesus, and Heb 3:7-4:13 serves as an "extended proof/sermon illustration of faithfulness 'from the opposite.'" She further noted that [Hebrews 11](#) provides "extensive examples of faithfulness from a positive perspective, yet with the same conclusion as [Heb 3:7-4:13](#), i.e., 'all of these died without having received the promise.'"

There is a clear shift to the topic of "rest," marking [4:1](#) as the beginning of a new section. Where it ends is the topic of debate. Some carry it all the way to [v. 16](#). Lane concluded the section with [v. 14](#). The NIV and most commentators conclude the section with [v. 13](#). Ellingworth concluded it with [v. 11](#) and Bruce with [v. 10](#). From a discourse perspective, [4:14](#) is probably the beginning of a new unit since it is parallel with [10:19](#), which also begins a new unit. Both units begin with *oun echontes* ("therefore having"). **A clear *inclusio* occurs in vv. 1 and 11 with the repetition of the hortatory subjunctives "let us fear" and "let us make every effort" and the semantic concept of "entering the rest." The unit is given cohesion by the repetition of the semantic**

concept of "entering the rest" in vv. 1,3a,3b,5,6,10,11. The unit is further subdivided by two paragraphs: vv. 1-5 and vv. 6-11, both formed by *inclusios*: the concept of "entering rest" in v. 1 and v. 5, and the concept of "not entering because of disobedience" in vv. 6,11. In both of these sub-paragraphs, part of Ps 95:7-11 is quoted.

Building on [Heb 3:6-19](#), the focus in [4:1-11](#) is the need for perseverance, while the development of the "rest" motif in [4:3-10](#) is semantically subordinated to it. [Hebrews 4:1-2](#) functions as a transition and summary of [3:7-19](#) and [4:3-13](#).

[4:1 Verse 1](#) is introduced by *oun*, indicating a conclusion based on the preceding verse. The events of the exodus generation are now applied to the readers' present situation. The verb translated "to be careful" is emphatic by word order. The NIV's translation is too weak for the seriousness which the verb itself, as well as the context, evokes. Lane translates it "let us begin to fear." By the use of *mēpote*, ("lest," but untranslated in the NIV) the author indicates a sense of possibility. Though the Greek present participle translated "still stands" is passive, it is translated in an active sense by the NIV, with the meaning that the promise is still being offered. The present tense indicates time concurrent with the main verb. It is better to take the participle as temporal rather than causal. The promise is not the "rest" but rather

entrance into it. The key term in [Heb 4:1-11](#) is *katapausis* ("rest"). It is sometimes given an interpretive translation that represents the theological perspective of the author. For example, both Hughes and Lane translate it as "heavenly rest." Given the ambiguity of the term in this context, it is much better to utilize the translation "rest."

The author's use of *dokē* ("seems," left untranslated in the NIV) used with an impersonal subject indicates that this word tactfully softens the force of the following infinitive "to be found" to avoid any specific statement that any of the readers have or will miss out on the promise. Westcott takes it in just the opposite sense of intensification, while Delitzsch and Laansma combine both senses. Others take the verb to be used in a forensic sense of "be judged to be." Koester noted the verb "can also refer to a person's own thoughts... and this seems appropriate here since the warnings have to do with attending to one's thoughts ([3:12,13](#); [4:1](#)), which are exposed to God ([4:12-13](#))."

The Greek perfect infinitive "fall short" is translated by Lane as "to be excluded." Another possible meaning, gleaned from the papyri, is the notion of "coming too late," a translation adopted in the Jerusalem Bible. The perfect tense indicates the sense of an abiding state existing at the time expressed in the verb "be found." Guthrie, following Hughes, noted the perfect infinitive suggests one who is not a Christian in that he has never entered the rest of God. This is contextually problematic since the author describes his readers as believers and is warning them, as believers, of an impending danger.

The first question that comes to mind is what exactly are the readers to fear? Four possibilities are offered: (1) that the "rest"

was promised to Israel, who has missed it by becoming Christians; (2) that they have missed the opportunity; (3) disobedience: "let us be fearful of disobeying"; or (4) failing to enter the rest. The context seems to favor the last view.

Another issue concerns the relationship of the participle translated "still stands" to the noun "rest." Three possibilities exist: (1) temporal, "while it is still standing"; (2) reason, "since it... still stands," as in the NIV; or (3) concessive, "although." There is little difference in meaning between the first two. The concessive view seems unlikely.

What exactly does the author have in mind when he warns of the possibility of falling short? Lenski wrongly took it to mean that one who is Jewish has lost God's rest by becoming a Christian. Dods likewise missed the meaning when he interpreted it to mean that one thinks he was born too late and thus has missed the promise. Many take it to refer to the time of the final judgment when one will miss the eternal rest of heaven. None of these options seems likely.

The concept of promise is prominent in Hebrews. The author speaks about promises made to Abraham ([6:12-17](#); [11:9-17](#)). Believers are heirs to God's promises which are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus ([8:6](#); [10:23,36](#); [11:39-40](#)). The promise of the land and "rest" which the rebellious exodus generation forfeited according to [Numbers 14](#) was renewed for their children in [Num 14:31](#). The author skillfully uses [Psalm 95](#) to show that the promised rest is still available to his readers as well. Ellingworth helpfully pointed out several "general statements" which can be made about the use of "promise" in Hebrews: (1) the act of promise and the content of the promise are closely related; (2)

Hebrews refers exclusively to God's promises; (3) no difference in meaning exists between singular and plural forms of "promise"; (4) no distinction in meaning is discernible with and without the article; (5) Old and new covenant are somehow connected because of the promises made to the fathers and to believers in the New Testament; (6) a variety of verbs are used to connote having or receiving the promises.

Lane noted the debate in early second-century Judaism about whether God's oath of [Numbers 14](#) and [Psalm 95](#) implied exclusion of the people eschatologically in the day of final redemption, and he suggested the possibility that the readers were familiar with this through previous association with the Hellenistic Jewish synagogue. His suggestion, however, is merely speculative.

[4:2 Verse 2](#) begins with *kai gar*, "for we also," which places emphasis on the connection with the preceding thought. The point is not to contrast the exodus generation with the present readers. The *kai gar* serves to connote two things: (1) it states the promised rest is still available to the readers; and (2) it indicates the supporting reason for the exhortation in [4:1](#) to be careful.

"The message they heard" does not refer to "the gospel," but to the promise of rest. This genitive phrase in Greek has been understood in three different ways: (1) as a qualitative (descriptive) genitive-"the heard word"; (2) as an expression of the recipient and the event-"the message they heard"; and (3) in apposition to "word"-"the word, that is, the message." This message is said to be "of no value," that is, of no profit or benefit.

The periphrastic perfect indicative *esmen euēngelismenoi*, ("we also have had the gospel preached to us,") focuses on the lasting effects of the readers hearing the message, while the aorist of [v. 6](#) ("had the gospel preached") refers to the wilderness generation's hearing. Ellingworth noted the close relationship between *euangelizomai* and *epangelia* here and in [Acts 13:32](#), both of which occur in a context where *euangelizomai* may refer to acts as well as words. The phrase "just as they did" is emphatic and links one generation of God's people (Old Testament Israel) with another (New Testament Christians).

There is a textual issue regarding the participle translated "combine." Is it masculine accusative plural or masculine nominative singular? UBS⁴ reads accusative plural with a "B" decision. The nominative singular is read by Hughes, Bruce, and the NIV. If the singular is correct, the reference would be to the "word" combining with faith in the listeners. If the plural is correct, the reference would be to people of the exodus generation joined with the readers of the epistle.

The passive participle is translated in the active voice in the NIV, "combine [it with faith]." If the nominative singular is the correct reading for the participle, then the dative *tē pistei*, "with faith," is instrumental. The participle indicates the reason why the word did not profit the people: the word was not combined with faith in the hearers. "Those who heard" is ambiguous with respect to their identity. Does it mean Joshua and Caleb or current believers? Most likely the meaning is current believers. Something similar to this is expressed in [Heb 11:40](#), where Old Testament saints are not "perfected" apart from their Christian counterparts. Koester thinks the ambiguity serves the author's

argument in stressing the similarities between his readers and the exodus generation. "Those who heard" carries the connotation of paying attention to by obeying. Grässer rightly stated that faith is the proper response to a promise. It is in this sense that those who believe have entered God's rest in a proleptic sense. [Hebrews 4:2](#) harks back to [2:3-4](#). What was the message which the Exodus generation heard? It was the announcement of Caleb and Joshua concerning the land.

[4:3 Verse 3](#) is introduced by *gar* and can indicate the grounds for the preceding statement, or according to Moffatt, the grounds for the statement in [4:1](#). The NIV translates it as "now" to show transition to the next point. The participle translated "we who have believed" identifies the subject of the verb "enter," with the aorist tense specifying the preceding act of faith as that which enables entrance into the "rest." The verb "enter" is emphatic by word order since it is first in the sentence. The significance of the present tense verb "enter" is the key interpretive issue in this verse. Is the rest to be entered into something available in this life or is it future when one arrives in heaven? It can be understood to imply their entrance into rest is certain at some point in the future, probably heaven. More likely, however, it indicates that they were in the process of entering the rest. It may be that the concept of rest in this passage connotes both a future expectation and a present reality. Miller took the present tense as iterative, "with each believer, in consequence of his faith, entering in." According to Guthrie, no specific statement is given as to when or where the rest is entered.

This statement is followed by "just as," which introduces the grounds for the preceding thought and shows that this quotation

corresponds to the preceding quotation in [Heb 3:11](#). The quotation is introduced by the perfect verb *eirēken* ("has said"), and most consider "God" as the subject (as in the NIV). The quotation begins with "as," which may introduce a comparison with what follows or a consequence of what precedes. The phrase "they shall never enter" accurately renders the Greek idiom, which (lit.) reads "if they shall enter," indicating strong negation.

The author rounds out the statement in [v. 3](#) with the clause "and yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world." This is a concessive clause making the point that the "rest" was certainly available to be entered, and although God's works were completed and the rest available, yet they did not enter into it. The expectation was that they should have entered. The NIV uses "creation" to render the Greek "foundation of the world," which is preceded by the preposition "from" and gives a temporal orientation as to when the "work" was finished.

[4:4](#) *Verse 4 introduces the grounds for the conclusion of v. 3.* In a way reminiscent of [Heb 2:6](#), the author's quotation formula is indefinite but not uncertain as to the location of the quotation as the passage was well known. Again, most take the subject of the verb "he has spoken" to be God, but Bruce argued that the subject should be "scripture" since the quotation from Genesis is narrative in terms of discourse genre and not direct address by God. "Day" is supplied in virtually all translations as the Greek reads (lit.) "concerning (about) the seventh." The quotation is taken from [Genesis 2:2](#) and affirms God rested after he finished his work of creation.

4:5 Verse 5 begins, literally, "and in this again." "This" can refer to the same subject matter being discussed in a second quotation, or it may refer to the present passage quoted in [Heb 4:3](#). The difference is negligible. However, **with reference to the meaning of "again," four options can be noted.**

Ellingworth took it to mean the author is making a second point. Lünemann interpreted it to mean the author is repeating a quotation in the sense of "in the same passage again." Morris took it to mean the warning is being repeated in another passage. Alford understood it in the sense of "on the other hand," meaning the following passage quoted in [v. 5](#) explains the preceding one in [v. 4](#). Miller suggested that the purpose of this quote is not to show that the "rest" was not entered into, that is, it is not drawing a contrast between the "rest" and the exodus generation's relation to that rest, but rather **its purpose is to continue the identification of the "rest" back then with the "rest" available now.** Following Dods, she pointed out the emphasis in [v. 5](#) is on "my." **This verse reinforces what was stated in [Heb 4:3](#).**

4:6 The *epei oun* which begins [v. 6](#) (lit. "since therefore") is not reproduced in the NIV, where *epei* is left untranslated and *oun* is translated "therefore" but placed at the beginning of [v. 7](#). This is not altogether problematic since [v. 7](#) is actually the conclusion which is introduced by the *oun* in [v. 6](#). *Epei* connects [v. 6](#) closely with [v. 5](#) as introducing the conclusion to the preceding argument and/or implication of it. Ellingworth said it introduces two conditions: the continued availability of God's rest, and the failure of the exodus generation to enter it. **Verses 6-7 make the point that some will enter, although others**

formerly did not enter. "Disobedience" is the reason those in the wilderness generation did not enter the "rest."

The statement in **v. 6** harks back to what was stated in **4:1** and forward to the summary statement that is made in **4:9**.

4:7 In v. 7, the author now made clear from the Old Testament quotation of Psalm 95, that his readers have opportunity to enter God's rest "today." Psalm 95, taken in connection with the quotation of **Gen 2:2**, indicates that the rest is still available up to the time of the author's day. This is brought out by the statement, "when a long time later he spoke through David." **The promise of rest was still available in the time of David, hundreds of years after the exodus generation's failure to enter the rest.**

The phrase "through David" is interpreted in one of two ways. Either God spoke by David as his instrument, or the reference is to the book of Psalms which is attributed to David even though he is not the actual author of all of the Psalms. **The "today" in the quotation should be connected with the prohibition against hardening the heart rather than with the "hearing."**

The phrase "as was said before" refers to the writer's own previous use of the quotation. The use of "again" could be construed with "said," but it is perhaps better to take it as modifying the verb "set." **The repetition of "today" in both the quotation formula and the quotation indicates the prominence of the availability of God's rest. The contrast**

here is not between Israel and the church, but between the wilderness generation and the author's generation.

The final period of salvation history has been inaugurated by the appearance of Jesus (1:1-2).

During this present time, entrance into "rest" remains a possibility.

Wray noted a chiasm in [4:2-7](#) that highlights the author's focus on the theme begun in the prologue that God has spoken.

A the good news came to us just as it did to them
B but the word they heard did them no good because [\(4:2\)](#)
they were not united in faith with those who have heard
C the faithful enter into the rest
D They shall not enter into my rest [\(4:3\)](#)
E the work was finished from the foundation of the world
F For [God] has spoken... [\(4:4\)](#)
É God rested on the seventh day from all his works [\(4:4\)](#)
D They shall not enter into my rest [\(4:5\)](#)
C It remains for some to enter into it
B those who formerly received the good news did not [\(4:6\)](#)
enter because of disobedience
A saying through David so long afterward, as was said [\(4:7\)](#)
previously

"Good news" (*euangelizomai*) occurs in Hebrews only in [4:2](#) and [4:6](#). The author links this concept

with that of "promise" in 4:1 such that 4:6 provides a restatement of 3:19-4:1 according to Wray:

So we see that they were

A unable to enter because of unfaithfulness Therefore,
let us fear, lest, (3:19)

B while the *promise*

C to enter the rest remains... (4:1)

Ĕ received the *good news*

Á did not enter because of disobedience (4:6)

The phrase *di' apistian* ("because of unfaithfulness") in 3:19 is also parallel with *di' apeitheian* ("because of disobedience") in 4:6. Thus, the good news is denned by the "promise" to enter in [Heb 4:1](#).

4:8 Verse 8 is connected to the previous verse by *gar* which introduces a contrary to fact condition and serves as the grounds for the preceding argument. **The sense is "If Joshua had given rest... [which he didn't], God would not have spoken... [which he did]."** The semantic relationship expressed by the conditional is perhaps best construed as giving the grounds and then drawing an inference: **if Joshua had given them rest (ground), God would not have spoken about another day (inference).**

According to many, the author intends no parallel between Joshua and Jesus by the use of *Iēsous*, which can be rendered both "Jesus" and "Joshua." Others believe there is some connection or play on words intended by the author in the sense

that the reference is primarily to Joshua, but secondarily to Jesus. Given the author's penchant for wordplay, together with his many quotations and allusions to Deuteronomy, the latter option is best. For the author of Hebrews, like Deuteronomy, it is clear that Joshua is never the ultimate agent of the anticipated rest for the people of God. Allen has perceptively noted that Joshua's name in Greek is never the subject of the verb *katapauō* in the LXX of Deuteronomy. "When the verb is used transitively, specifically in relation to the gift of the land, the subject is always *kurios*, and there is no human mediator. Hebrews' proposition that Joshua 'never rested' Israel (Heb 4:8) is entirely correct, for that task was never assigned to him; it remained a divine prerogative (Deut 3:20; Josh 1:13; 22:4; 23:1).'"

The Greek text does not make explicit the one who "would not have spoken." It would seem the speaker is God, with the imperfect tense indicating repeated speaking. Hewitt understood the speaker to be the Holy Spirit. "Later" is (lit.) "after these things," which probably means after the entrance into Canaan.

4:9 The conjunction *ara*, "then," beginning v. 9 is better translated "consequently" by Lane. Miller translated it "we may safely infer, then," to bring out the inferential aspect of the conjunction. Just how far back it reaches is difficult to decide.

The author now leaves the term *katapausis* and inserts *sabbatismos*, translated here usually as "Sabbath rest." Many believe the author of Hebrews coined

the term *sabbatismos* since it occurs nowhere in Greek literature prior to Hebrews and this is its only occurrence in the New Testament.

Others point out two facts that mitigate against this: the noun occurs in the writing of Plutarch and several times in Christian literature after and independent of Hebrews. Lane took it as "Sabbath celebration," giving a more precise description of the promised rest. Ellingworth said the main distinction between *sabbatismos* and *katapausis* "appears to be that they denote respectively temporal and spatial aspects of the same reality." Some have suggested that *katapausis* and *sabbatismos* are semantically equivalent. Hofius concluded that *sabbatismos* refers to an eternal Sabbath celebration of believers in the eschaton, where the priestly people of God praise God around his throne.

Wray offered a critique of this equation, arguing that while this may be logically deduced from what we know of the sparse use of this term in Plutarch and Justin Martyr, we have no clear statement within the text of Hebrews itself or the rest of the New Testament as to its intended meaning. She notes that two clues within the text itself identify the author's use of *sabbatismos*. First, the parallel between [Heb 4:6](#), *apoleipetai tinas eiselthein eis autēn*," where the antecedent of *autēn* is God's rest in [4:5](#), and [Heb 4:9](#), *apoleipetai sabbatismos tō laō tou theou*, makes it clear that the author equates *sabbatismos* with God's "rest." Second, it is clear that [v. 10](#) serves to provide a further explanation/ amplification of [v. 9](#).

However, *contra* Wray and Attridge (who takes the same position), *katapausis* is not redefined as a *sabbatismos*, but both are certainly related. Bateman rightly called the equation of the two terms "an erroneous assumption" and accepted Laansma's interpretation of *sabbatismos*. However, Bateman's agreement with DeSilva that there is no allusion to an earthly millennial kingdom in Hebrews can be challenged. It would be better to say that there is no *overt* reference to an earthly millennial kingdom in Hebrews. As we have seen in [Hebrews 1-2](#), it is possible there is an allusion to such a millennial kingdom. In reference to DeSilva's comment, Bateman is correct to point out that though he agreed with DeSilva, this is not to say there is no earthly millennial kingdom to come in the future.

Guthrie suggested the author may have had a specific Sabbath rest in mind, which he drew from [Lev 16:29-31](#); [23:26-28,32](#). In these passages the Sabbath command to "do no work" is associated with the high-priestly offering on the Day of Atonement, a theme the author takes up vigorously in [8:1-10:18](#). The immediate statement in [4:14](#) about the high priesthood of Jesus supports this connection. Thus, **according to Guthrie,** **"the Sabbath that remains for God's people is a new covenant Day of Atonement Sabbath in which they are cleansed from their sins."**

The concept of "rest" is mentioned no more in Hebrews, but the concept of "entering" is common: [Heb 6:19-20](#); [9:12,24-25](#); [10:19-20](#).

Jesus has entered into heaven itself so that we may have confidence to enter now according to [10:19-25](#).

This is crucial to the understanding of the epistle and the meaning of "rest." The "rest" for the believer is surely an eschatological rest, but that is not the focus nor the meaning in Hebrews. Whatever the rest is, it is available now and not only in the future when believers get to heaven.

4:10 Verse 10 begins with *gar* indicating the grounds for referring to God's rest as a Sabbath rest in the previous verse. "Anyone who enters" indicates action at the same time as the main verb "he has rested." It could refer to believers entering the rest in this life. Some argue that the time of entering is not in focus, that finishing one's works allows a complete appropriation of God's rest. Lane viewed the aorist tense in *katapausen* as proleptic: "what is enunciated as a consequence of the condition... is expressed as if it had already come to pass, the condition being regarded as fulfilled." Porter took the aorist to be a timeless aorist, where the author appears to be expressing a "definitional tautology," and translates *"for one who enters into his rest, indeed he himself rests from his work."*

What is the antecedent of "his" preceding "rest"? There are two possibilities: (1) God and (2) "Jesus." The vast majority of commentators and translators rightly choose the former. The phrase "ceased from his works" is taken by some to indicate eschatological rest in heaven, a definite possibility. It is better not to make this inference since the works are not defined or described. If this is what the writer meant, he did not explicitly say so. The final two words in the verse, "from his," refer to

God's works rather than believers since the preceding *autou* "his" before "works" refers to believers.

4:11 Some begin a new discourse unit here. More accurately, the **UBS⁴text takes v. 11 to conclude the paragraph begun in 4:1.** **"Therefore" introduces a conclusion by way of exhortation.**

Spoudazō is translated "let us make every effort." The idea is "to push on with something zealously." It is likely an ingressive aorist, *with the sense of "let us become zealous."*

The author included himself with the readers. The purpose for the effort is to enter the rest.

The aorist active subjunctive of *piptō*, "to fall," is translated "to perish" by Lane, with Zerwick and Grosvenor. Ellingworth took it to mean "destruction," as in [3:17](#) (cf. [Num 14:29](#); [1 Cor 10:10](#); and *parapiptō* of [Heb 6:6](#)). It is emphatic by word order. Some take this "falling" as everlasting destruction. Some think the writer has in mind the Israelites whose bodies fell in the wilderness. Contextually, this seems unavoidable. As we have already seen, the exodus generation that died in the wilderness is nowhere in the Pentateuch or in Hebrews said to have perished eternally.

The *hina* clause, "so that," can be taken as negative purpose of the preceding exhortation, or as negative result. The former is illustrated by Miller: "if you don't push on to enter, you will

fall." The latter is illustrated by Lane: "otherwise, one of you might perish." The phrase "by following their example of disobedience" can be taken in one of four ways: (1) it is taken by the NIV as meaning in imitation of Israel's unbelief; (2) by means of the same kind of disobedience as Israel's disobedience; (3) to fall into so as to be in the same kind of unbelief as Israel; (4) to perish in the same manner because of unbelief. The latter two options are the least likely. Of the former two options, the difference between them is negligible, but perhaps a slight edge should be given to option (1) since the author used the word "example." Semantically this clause is an illustration by comparison. **Vanhoye made the interesting observation that the author always uses plurals in speaking of Christians' access to God (4:3,11a; 6:19; 10:19,22; 12:1; 13:13), and singulars when speaking of the possibility of falling away (3:12; 4:1b,11b; 10:29; 12:15).**

Looking at 4:1-11 as a whole, there are five possible meanings of the concept of "rest".

- (1) God's creation rest ([Gen 2:2](#)).
- (2) Israel's Canaan rest (Joshua; [Psalm 95](#)).
- (3) The Christian's spiritual rest (victory thru obedience).

(4) Millennium rest ([Heb 4:9](#)).

(5) Heavenly rest.

It is clear that even within the context of these 11 verses, several of the above meanings can be discerned. No doubt (1) and (2) are used. It is likely that (3) is also used. Some premillennialists see a reference to (4) in light of [Heb 2:5](#), while many interpreters view the concept of "rest" in a primarily futuristic way as in (5). Options 1 and 2 do not apply to the readers of the epistle or to Christians today. The difficulty is choosing between the final three options.

The context of vv. 1-11 makes it difficult to choose between a strictly present or a strictly eschatological meaning. Choosing one over the other leaves something unexplained in the verses. The best approach is to see a reference to both. Such a dualism is not unknown in the New Testament. It is reflective of the "already/not yet" tension that pervades the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels as well as what we find in Paul's Letters.

I have treated this issue more thoroughly below when discussing the theological implications of this passage.

4:12-13 **The entire section is concluded in vv. 12-13.** Wray wrongly read the structure of verb plus *oun* as indicating a new section, but this does not begin until v. 14.

Hebrews 4:12-13 can still be read as an amplification of the warning in 4:11.

Verse 12 begins a new paragraph according to the UBS⁴Greek text and the NIV. The use of *gar*, "for," serves to indicate the reason for seeking to enter God's rest: nothing escapes God's notice and he will judge unbelief.

Many have suggested a hymnic background/structure for these verses, but the smooth transition coupled with the use of *logos* ("word") indicates the author's own composition. **The phrase *ho logos tou theou*, "the word of God," is found in Hebrews only here and in 13:7** and can have two interpretations. The majority of the church fathers and medieval theologians saw it as referring to Jesus the Son. Since the Reformation, the phrase has usually been interpreted as the written Word of God. In this latter interpretation, the genitive is subjective and the reference includes both Old and New Testaments. Lane noted "the word of God" must have specific reference to the text of Scripture extensively cited in 3:7-4:11, especially Ps 95:7-11. While this specific text is certainly included, it would seem that the phrase cannot be restricted to this, but given the immediate and broader context of the entire epistle, must include God's spoken or written word, including

his word expressed through Jesus. Dunn believed that the identification of the "word of God" as the gospel was so firmly established in Apostolic Christianity that the equation of Christ with the Word "does not seem to have occurred" to the author. For him, the word of preaching is personified and identified with Christ because the gospel is the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Dunn compared the Lukan concept of "the word" as representing the gospel and not a hypostatization of Christ. He surveyed the power of the word preached in several Pauline texts and concluded that [Heb 4:12](#) is in this same pattern. For him, there is "no inherent logic" in the New Testament author's own understanding of their experience or in the language they used to describe it "which made it necessary for them to push the concept of the word beyond that of the (impersonal) power of God to that of a hypostatization or divine being." This perspective is difficult if not impossible to square with the Prologue of John's Gospel where Jesus is described as the "Word" of God.

The best argument for interpreting *logos* in [4:12-13](#) as Jesus the Word in a Johannine sense is made by Swetnam. The evidence is actually quite strong. First, it was virtually the only view during the time of the church fathers and the Middle Ages, with Chrysostom being the sole dissenter during the time of the fathers. While tradition cannot be the *sine qua non* of interpretation, such unanimity is certainly significant. Second, the immediately preceding and following contexts support this interpretation. Although there are parallels within the New Testament to the sword imagery, such as [John 12:48](#), the immediate context makes this interpretation more difficult ("oddly exaggerated" is Swetnam's phrase). In [Heb 4:2](#) the good

news is called the "word of hearing" (NIV "the message they heard"), and it seems contextually odd for the author to use *logos* in a threatening tone. There is also the difficulty of seeing two meanings of *logos* ("word" and "account") within the confines of two verses. [Hebrews 4:14](#), connected by *oun*, closely links "since we have a great high priest." with the preceding *logos* (though it is true the *oun* could be reaching back to the total section of [4:1-13](#)).

Third, from a lexical perspective, it makes more sense to translate *machaira* as "knife" rather than "sword," given what is stated in the remainder of [v. 12](#). Also, the use of *gar* which introduces [v. 12](#) may refer back to the main clause of the preceding sentence and not the purpose clause to which it is immediately joined (as is the case in all other such constructions in Hebrews). The point of the author would be this: although the exodus generation failed to enter rest, Christians will succeed because of the work of Jesus, the Logos, in their lives. The use of *zōn* ("living") to qualify "word" implies personality. Nowhere else in Hebrews is this word used to describe non-personal life, but it is used four times of God, twice of Jesus, and five times of human life. The introductory *kai* in [v. 13](#) is best seen in an adversative sense where the author changed the subject from Jesus in [v. 12](#) to God in [v. 13](#). [Verse 12](#) is taken in a positive way, while [v. 13](#) is the negative counterpart. In [Heb 4:12](#), Jesus as the Word is the "agent of interior change in man." In [4:13](#) he appears as an intercessor with God, so Swetnam translated:

"And yet no creature is hidden before him, but all things are bare and exposed before his eyes, with whom on our behalf is the Word.... The Word is "with" God to act as one who pleads with

God in favor of Christians who sin. This is why 4,14 follows logically from 4,13 with no break in the thought when it speaks of the 'high priest'... and why 4,15-16 speaks about the sympathy of the high priest and the importance of turning to him for mercy."

A final argument in favor of taking the "word" in [4:12](#) to refer to Jesus is the connection of these verses with the prologue, [Heb 1:1-2](#) to form an *inclusio*. It is likely that [4:14](#) is the beginning of a new major section of the epistle. The author began in the prologue with the statement "God spoke" in one who is a Son; now he concludes this section with a reference to God's "Word," the Son, in [Heb 4:13](#).

G. Smillie has recently taken up the case that *logos* at the end of [v. 13](#) corresponds to the first use of *logos* in [v. 12](#). He noted that both uses are articular in form and bracket [Heb 4:12-13](#). The usual interpretation of the final phrase in [v. 13](#) is "as an idiom from the language of the business world: 'to whom we must give account.'" To attribute such diverse meaning of the same word in the short confines of two verses is

uncharacteristic of a writer who demonstrates the literary sensibilities of our author that he would,... bring the pericope to a close using *ho logos* as the very last word in a figurative expression with a meaning having little to do with the principle theme of the discourse.

How are we then to translate this final clause? Part of the answer depends upon the syntax of *hēmin*, whether it is an indirect object, "concerning whom is the word to us," or a dative of means, "to whom is the word by us." Smillie rejected the former as too

contrived and redundant, but thinks the latter has promise, "indicating some sort of reciprocal responsibility towards God on the part of those addressed by his word."

Smillie examined all the places in the New Testament where *logos* is used in the sense of "to render account" with the following conclusions: (1) *logos* is linked with some form of the verb *didōmi* "to give" when this meaning is intended; (2) *logos* is anarthrous (with one exception) in this idiom; and (3) *logos* always appears in the accusative case. In light of this, he found it difficult to see the meaning in [Heb 4:13](#) as "render account" since no form of the verb *didomi* (or any other verb) is present, *logos* is articular, and it is in the nominative and not the accusative case.

If, as Smillie suggested, the author was engaging in word play in the double use of *ho logos*, then perhaps a colloquial rendering such as "towards whom the word is [now] up to us" contributes towards capturing the author's meaning as well as his means of verbalizing that meaning. Hughes offered a similar translation: "He to whom the Word has been given shall be required to give a word in return." Finally, Smillie mentioned how this interpretation of the phrase harmonizes well with [Heb 4:14](#) where we read: "let us hold firmly to the faith we profess (*homologias*, NIV "faith we profess)." "Confession" is cognate with "word" in Greek, and both "are invitations to affirm or profess the word the readers have heard."

Those who interpret *pros hon hēmin ho logos* as "to whom we must give an account," rely on the similar uses found elsewhere in Scripture such as in [Luke 16:2](#) and [Heb 13:17](#). This interpretation is likewise grammatically feasible and harmonizes

well with the entire section of [3:7-4:11](#) and the conclusion of [4:12-13](#).

In summary, Swetnam found the interpretation of *logos* as Scripture in [Heb 4:12-13](#) exegetically difficult for four reasons. First, the terminology is inconsistent: the change from *logos* as "word" in [v. 12](#) to *logos* as "account" in [v. 13](#) is "bizarre." Second, the imagery is inconsistent. The shift from the penetrating power of the word in [v. 12](#) to that of a sacrifice or wrestling hold in [v. 13](#) is problematic. Third, the description of a "sword" for the image of sacrifice or wrestling hold is inconsistent. Fourth, the language is inconsistent. If *logos* refers to Scripture in [Heb 4:12-13](#), it is difficult to account for the connector *oun* "therefore" in [v. 14](#), since there the high priest theme is brought back into play, but there is no reference to this theme in [4:12-13](#). Both Attridge and Ellingworth interpreted the conjunction in [v. 14](#) to be resumptive of the thought which has been interrupted since [3:7](#). Swetnam noted there is no explanation for why the author would do this if this is what he has done.

But Swetnam veered into less secure territory when he connected the *machaira* in [v. 12](#) with the double-edged knife of circumcision used by Joshua in [Josh 5:2](#) and then took it to refer to the knife of sacrifice used by Abraham in [Genesis 22](#). This "two-edged" knife alludes to the two functions of circumcision ([v. 12](#)) and sacrifice ([v. 13](#)). That [v. 13](#) should be so interpreted is, according to Swetnam, confirmed by the use of *pros ton theon* "before God" in [v. 13](#) connected with Jesus' high priestly role in [v. 14](#) and his intercessory role in [v. 16](#). For Swetnam, [Heb 4:12](#) sums up [3:7-4:11](#), "which discusses the spiritualized

promise of land, i.e., God's rest, and prepares the way for the following part, about Christ's priesthood." The author was implicitly indicating "why entrance into the spiritualized land of God's rest is possible: Jesus, who is equal to God, is able to effect the spiritual circumcision of the heart needed for such an entrance."

Returning to the rest of [v. 12](#), the theme of "living" here ascribed to the Word of God and first introduced in [3:12](#) occurs six more times in Hebrews ([7:8,25](#); [9:14](#); [10:20,31](#); [12:22](#)). The forefronting of "living" at the beginning of the clause is emphatic by word order. By the use of "living and active," the author denoted that the Word possesses the power to effect its own utterance. It possesses an energizing power that renders it always effective in accomplishing its purpose. One is reminded of [Isa 55:10-11](#), where the word will not return void but will accomplish God's purpose. In addition, the word of God is emphatically compared to a "double-edged" sword in its power to penetrate the depths of the human soul.

The term here translated "sword," *machaira*, sometimes has the technical meaning of a surgeon's knife or the knife used by the priests to slaughter and carve sacrificial animals. Michaelis argued that the context forbids the translation of "sword" and instead the image drawn is that of a knife used by a priest or butcher, or possibly a surgeon. The priestly usage may be in view in [Luke 22:38](#). Surgeon's knives were sometimes two edged while ordinary knives were not usually so. How fitting would be such imagery if it came from the pen of Luke the physician? If the translation of *machaire* is the "knife" used by

the priest to slay the sacrificial animal, then the thought of the passage has greater coherence.

How are we to interpret the division of soul and spirit and the joints and marrow? Ellingworth summarized the four possible meanings. First, the reference could be to a tripartite division of soul, spirit, and body along the lines of [1 Thess 5:23](#). Second, the division could be between soul and body on the one hand, and between joints and marrow on the other. Third, the division is between each of the four mentioned entities. Fourth, the meaning could be along the lines of "within soul, within spirit," and "between joints and marrow." Spicq inferred from the similarity of this passage to what is said in Philo of the Logos dividing human faculties as proof of Philo's influence on Hebrews. But as is generally agreed, Williamson has shown that such is not the case.

Another interpretive issue has to do with whether "joints and marrow" are to be understood literally or figuratively. Most likely a metaphorical sense is intended where the sword or knife of Scripture pierces deep within our bones to probe, even dividing the marrow within.

The meaning of "laid bare" has been debated since early times. Two views are most likely. It may picture a wrestler using a choke hold on his opponent's neck, or the neck of the sacrificial animal laid bare for the knife. Given the overall context, the first option seems more likely. The word connotes the picture of total exposure and utter defenselessness. If the "word" of God in [4:13](#) refers not to Jesus but to the spoken/written word, then the use of "eyes of him" would be a personification of the word. It is probably better to see a shift from the spoken/written word of

[4:12](#) to God or Jesus in [4:13](#). Lane noted the correlation with this passage and what was stated in [Num 14:43-45](#) where the exodus generation fell by the sword when they tried to enter Canaan in disobedience to God's word. The readers are threatened by the sword of the word of God, exposing their thoughts and rendering them defenseless before God.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS.

We are now in a position to consider the theological implications of [Hebrews 4:1-13](#). It seems prudent to note at the outset that the focus on "rest" serves to emphasize the author's contention, initiated in the prologue, that there is continuity between the people of God under the old covenant and under the new covenant. He consistently explained the new covenant in the light of the old covenant. The use of Psalm 95 and the focus on "Today" indicates God, who spoke to the fathers by the prophets, is still speaking today.

A few still champion some form of Käsemann's thesis that the author of Hebrews drew the motif of *katapausis* from antecedents in Philo rather than from the Old Testament, which led to its entry into Christian Gnosticism. For Käsemann, the author of Hebrews used [Psalm 95](#) merely in an attempt "to anchor in Scripture a speculation already in existence." However, the majority of scholars tend to agree with Hofius who convincingly argued that the concept of "rest" is found in Jewish thought and is specifically the point of [Psalm 95](#).

Although most English commentators like Lane, Ellingworth, and Laansma agreed with Hofius's critique of Käsemann's thesis, they were not necessarily in agreement with Hofius's thesis that the "rest" in [Hebrews 3-4](#) refers to God's resting place in the heavenly temple where Jesus has already entered as a forerunner and where believers will enter and share in an eternal Sabbath celebration around the throne of God.

Two of the most recent studies on the concept of "rest" in [Heb 3:7-4:11](#) are by Wray and Laansma. Laansma, in an evaluation of Wray's *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, correctly chided her for suggesting that the author of [Psalm 95](#) made a "hermeneutical leap" by shifting God's promise in [Num 14:22-23](#) from the land to "rest." This is neither a leap nor one performed by the psalmist. The psalmist wrote from within an established tradition which characterized the land as "rest."

He also disagreed with Wray's conclusion against Hofius, who argued that the term *sabbatismos* is neither identical in meaning nor interchangeable with *katapausis*. Hofius took the meaning to be "the eternal sabbath celebration of salvation, i.e., the perfected community's before God's throne." On the contrary, Wray took *sabbatismos* as being equivalent to God's rest. But Hofius's evidence is solid and makes good sense in the context of Hebrews, especially when read in the light of [Heb 12:22-24](#).

Hofius argued extensively that "rest" in [Ps 95:11](#) means "resting place" and that *katapausis* in its spatial usage is a technical term for the temple in the LXX. Laansma, however, concluded from [Ps 95:11](#) and from the use of *katapausis* in the LXX that it is not tenable to identify in a simple fashion God's "rest" with the temple. He did note "that this noun is used in such a way

throughout the LXX that a reader of the Greek would doubtless have a tendency to associate it closely with the temple."

Laansma and Wray also differed over the spatial nature of the concept of *katapausis*. Wray took it in a non-spatial sense while Laansma considered *katapausis* to mean "resting place". Finally, whereas Wray thought the "rest" motif is dropped after [4:11](#), Laansma believed that this theme is deeply embedded in the imagery used throughout Hebrews. Wray's study is, according to Laansma, "methodologically flawed" in that she attempts "to work over a *theological theme* in terms of a specific *vocabulary*." In spite of this, however, Wray's work is helpful, particularly in its rhetorical analysis of the pericope.

According to [Heb 3:7-4:11](#), God both promised and provided a rest for the people of Israel in the exodus generation. Those who disbelieved and disobeyed did not enter God's Canaan rest. Joshua, Caleb, and the younger generation that believed did enter Canaan rest according to [Exod 33:14](#); [Deut 3:20](#); [5:32-33](#); and [Josh 23:1](#). But the promise was not exhausted at this time. [Psalm 95](#) indicates the rest was still available some four centuries after its initial promise and provision, implying that "rest" means more than just entrance into the land of Canaan. Such an enlargement of the scope of the original promise was what occurred when Abraham originally received the promise of land and posterity, but the promise was not exhausted in his descendents. **It was expanded to include all believers in Christ as [Gal 3:16,22,29](#) make**

clear. Whatever the "rest" is in Hebrews, it is distinguished from the land as well as the Sabbath.

The promised land is not equivalent to the promised rest for our author. **Moses is twice presented as a model of faithful service to God in Heb 3:2-5 and Heb 11:23-28, yet he along with the wilderness generation failed to enter the promised land before he died. On the other hand, Joshua is identified in Heb 4:8 with the people who failed to enter the rest, though he himself did enter the land and led in the conquering of Canaan.** Joshua's name is absent from the Hall of Faith in [Hebrews 11](#), although there is mention of the fall of the walls of Jericho, which of course occurred under Joshua's leadership.

In Heb 4:8, we are justified in interpreting the "rest" messianically. When Joshua led the people into Canaan, God gave the people "rest." Yet that was not the final extent of the rest which God had in mind, hence the statement in [Psalm 95](#) and our author's argument which he builds upon this fact. Contrary to Bruce and many others who take the same approach to [Heb 4:9](#), the "rest" is not only what believers enjoy in heaven. That will indeed be "rest," but that is not what the author is suggesting here. Hofius has proven **there is a clear eschatological dimension to this metaphor of "rest."** **But**

this is not the whole story. The author's goal is to inspire faithfulness in the Christian community today.

Hebrews 4:9 is attempting to stir believers on to serve the Lord faithfully while still on the earth. "In Heb 3:3 and 3:14, the relationship of the faithful to Christ is described, not as a possession, but as participation, a participation which must be maintained."

Miller is correct when she said: "It is not the non-fulfillment of the promise that is the point but its non-fulfillment *where unbelief prevails*, and that the promise is not exhausted by past appropriations or non-appropriations."

To make the Old Testament concept of "rest" in the land of Canaan symbolic of heaven alone is problematic for both Calvinists and Arminians on a number of fronts. First, that the exodus generation was barred from entry because of their disobedience is contradictory to the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer. Second, the exodus generation had to work to obtain the inheritance in Canaan, which does not square with the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Third, out of the entire exodus generation, only two men who were over 40 years of age entered the promised rest, Joshua and Caleb. Are we to assume that all of those who died in the wilderness were not a

part of God's covenant people, Israel, and thus were eternally lost? Moses himself did not enter the Promised Land because of his own disobedience. Surely no one would think to suggest that he was therefore eternally lost.

Carter made the interesting point that the notion that rest is only referring to heaven may be "a carryover from certain aspects of **Roman Catholic theology, according to which there is not and cannot be any certainty of salvation in the present life.**" Since the author's purpose was to bolster commitment and perseverance in the lives of his hearers, it would seem better to see the "entrance" into the "rest" as being in some sense a present reality for believers.

Thus, **it seems best, given all the evidence, to understand the "rest" to have a threefold dimension: the present time, a state entered at death, and that which is experienced by the believer at the eschaton. The already/not yet eschatology of the author makes this interpretation likely.** It is difficult to limit the rest to a location or specific point in time. **Genesis 2:2 as used by the author indicates God's rest is open ended.** The "rest" must be seen as a present reality and not only as a reality at death or in the eschaton. Guthrie raised a salient question: **how could the readers seem to have fallen short of the rest now if it lies entirely in the future?** In that case, all Christians would be "short" of it. Barrett's conclusion perhaps stated it best: "The 'rest,' precisely because it is God's, is both present and future; people enter it, and must strive to enter it. This is paradoxical,

but it is a paradox that Hebrews shares with all primitive eschatology."

The typological parallel is not between the earthly land as "rest" in the past and the heavenly land as "rest" in the future. Rather, the true typology which the author focused on is that between the two communities, his own and the exodus generation, both of which were confronted by the same word of God. *The "rest" described here is not a "sedating" of human life, a spiritual "retirement," an invitation to quietism, a period of idleness, or immobility as a life style.*

Is *katapausis* a place or a state? Those who take it as a place include Käsemann, Hofius, Weiss, Grässer, and Ellingworth. Attridge and Lane took it as a state, but Attridge said it might be a place. *Sabbatismos* is not so much a locale, but a Sabbath celebration. Laansma concluded "The *katapausis* is construed as a locale as God's own resting place, where he celebrates his own Sabbath.... The salvation thereby described comes to them also as a promise, the promise that they will enter into God's resting place."

Is *katapausis*, "rest," present or future? Those who take it as a present realization point to the present tense of *eiserchomai* in [Heb 4:3](#) and the eschatological outlook of "already/not yet" throughout the epistle. Laansma summarized the points made by those who take it primarily in a futuristic sense, although allowing for the present as well. His arguments include the following: (1) the imagery of [Psalm 95](#) suggests a *corporate*

entrance into the rest, implying a future entrance; (2) the *katapausis* comes to us as a promise, which suggests future hope; (3) the demand to "strive" to enter the rest appears to place the reader before rather than in the act of entering; (4) if the rest is present, the "works" of [Heb 4:10](#) would seem to be interpreted as something along the lines of "self-justifying works" or "dead works," but this is unlikely since Christians are not in the present at rest from their works; (5) the exhortation as a whole is related to the Parousia contextually in [3:14](#). However, in light of [Heb 6:4-6](#) and [12:22-24](#), Laansma was uncomfortable restricting the meaning to an eschatological rest: "It does seem strange that elsewhere in the epistle he would think in such vivid terms of a present participation in the heavenly world, but think of entrance into the same place *qua katapausis* as only an eschatological-future event." Laansma summed up his discussion on the nature of *katapausis*:

The common use of the word *katapausis* for a 'resting place,' its present usage and context, and the strong testimony in Jewish literature for an other worldly or future resting *place* cumulatively tilt the balance of probability in favor of taking it straightforwardly here as 'resting place.'

The local meaning is probably the best interpretation of the "rest" throughout the entire passage. The connection between *katapausis* and *sabbatismos* is that *God's resting place is where he enjoys his ongoing Sabbath celebration. "It is in this place that the people of God will ultimately rest from their works... and thus join in the sabbatismos (4,9-10)."* Only on the seventh day, when we enter God's

eschatological *sabbatismos*, will we be, as Augustine said, "ourselves."

Scripture speaks, according to Turretin, of a threefold "sabbath:"

(1) **a temporal sabbath which included a weekly day**, an annual time **every seventh year** when the land was to remain uncultivated, and **the year of Jubilee which was the forty-ninth year**;

(2) **a spiritual Sabbath**, which included cessation from sinful works during their lives; and

(3) **a heavenly sabbath where we rest eternally with God.**

Related to this "sabbath" rest, Scripture also speaks of a threefold "rest" in [Heb 4:1-11](#):

(1) **God's creation rest**;

(2) **Israel's Canaan rest**; and

(3) **a Christian's spiritual and eternal rest**, which Turretin apparently takes to include two aspects:

(a) the **spiritual rest Christians can enjoy now in this life**, and

(b) **eternal rest in heaven.**

Turretin noted the "rest" in [Hebrews 4](#) cannot refer to creation rest or Canaan rest as these have already passed away. The phrase in [v. 3](#), "although the works were finished since the creation of the world," eliminates creation rest and the statement in [4:8](#) that Joshua did not lead the people into "rest" obviates Israel's Canaan rest as the meaning. This leaves only one alternative, the conclusion of [4:9](#), that there remains a rest available which is different from both God's creation rest and Israel's Canaan rest.

It may be that the author chose to use the unusual word *sabbatismos* in [4:9](#) to indicate that the rest which he intends is not the same as creation rest or Israel's Canaan rest.

Is it conceivable that the "rest" of [Heb 4:10](#) may have reference to a millennial fulfillment? Although the majority of commentators do not think so, several have made this case. Buchanan's analysis of this section, particularly [Heb 4:8-11](#), challenges the assumptions made by many about the spiritual nature of the rest. He criticized those who make the assumption that God's promise of rest is a purely spiritual and a purely eschatological matter. For example, Buchanan noted F. F. Bruce rejected a millennial interpretation of the rest on the grounds that

such is an importation of a concept alien to Hebrews, then went on to chide Bruce for importing his own alien concept, namely, a spiritualizing of the rest. Likewise, Dillow has made the case for understanding the "rest" in [Heb 4:9](#) to be a reference to a future millennial reign of Christ on the earth: "The writer is evidently setting before his Christian readers the hope of an inheritance in the land of Canaan which was made to Israel." He continued:

As Christian believers they will have an inheritance in the land of Canaan in the consummation of the present kingdom if they make every effort to finish their course.... That we should make "every effort" to do this proves that entrance into heaven is not meant. Otherwise a salvation by works is taught!

Dillow drew the conclusion that the content of the inheritance spoken of in [Hebrews 3-4](#) is the millennial land of Canaan. The inheritance-rest is participation with Christ in his millennial reign. "Consistent with its usage throughout the New Testament, the inheritance (rest) must be earned... Not all Christians will make that effort or will make equal effort, and those distinctions will be acknowledged by Christ... during the millennial kingdom."

The theme of "promise" in [Heb 3:7-4:13](#), which is identified specifically as "entering into rest," reappears in chaps. 11-12. Here it is identified as the promise of a "heavenly city." It is not clear whether the author made or intended his readers to make the connection between the concept of "rest" and the "heavenly city." There is nothing overt in the text which makes this connection. It is, however, possible that the author had such a connection in mind.

The rest is related to the redemptive work of Christ. When believers cease from their works, they enter rest. The crucial question then is what are these works? It would seem from the immediate context as well as that of the entire book that these "works" are "works of consecration, the faith and obedience required to establish and maintain covenant relationship with God." This rest is not a ceasing from works of self-righteousness, or from works understood as the requirements of Judaism. Neither is in view in our passage.

Spiritual rest is ongoing maturity and perseverance, a community ethic, made possible by faith and obedience.

The failure to reach the "rest" in [Heb 4:1](#) is the consequence of the warning given in [3:12](#).

We may also conclude, based on [3:1-4:13](#), that the concept of faith for the author of Hebrews includes Jesus as the object of faith in a soteriological sense, and not merely an ethical category of steadfastness based on Jesus' faithfulness as some of suggested. Jesus is both the object of faith in a soteriological sense as well as the model of faith in a practical sense. This is demonstrated well by V. Rhee from the meaning of *homologia* ("confession") in [Heb 3:1](#), which includes both the apostleship and high priesthood of Jesus; the meaning of "our courage and the hope of which we boast" in [Heb 3:6](#), where the object of our hope is the high

priesthood of Jesus; and the references to God's word in [3:7-4:13](#). Disobeying God's voice (the word of God) is equivalent to failing to receive the message of salvation; the exhortation to "take heed" to God's word simply means to believe the message of salvation in Jesus.

Another theological issue, which is actually hermeneutical in nature, is how much the author's treatment of Old Testament Scripture in [Heb 3:7-4:13](#) resembles rabbinic midrash. Leschert examined this issue thoroughly and has drawn a number of conclusions. The author's view of the inspiration of Scripture and his application of it to his readers' situation is similar to Jewish midrash. Yet he did not find hidden meanings in Scripture or wrest a text from its context, as is evident from his careful exegetical use of [Psalm 95](#) in the light of [Numbers 14](#). The author's use of the midrashic technique *gezerah shawah*, in joining [Ps 95:11](#) with [Gen 2:2](#), has long been noted by commentators. It is also possible that the technique *Dabar ha-lamed me-inyano* was used, where the meaning is established by its context. Leschert concluded that when it comes to midrashic style, there is nothing "intrinsically illegitimate" and "we have not detected any use of midrashic methodology or presuppositions in this section of Hebrews which distorts the meaning of the OT."

Eschatologically, [Heb 3:7-4:11](#) is in line with other New Testament authors who consistently take the perspective that the coming age somehow has already begun with the advent of Christ, and thus the two, in a sense, overlap. Sometimes this view of the two ages is presented in linear and historical terms (horizontally) and

sometimes in more spatial terms such as heaven and earth (vertically).

For the author of Hebrews, the last days began with the first coming of Jesus ([Heb 1:1-2](#)) and culminate in the second coming ([9:23-28](#)).

As Laansma well noted, the author of Hebrews placed more of the emphasis on the "vertical" perspective, especially in chaps. 8-12. Why does the author do this? Laansma speculated this is his rhetorical strategy for dealing with the problem of the present sufferings of the church in light of the new covenant salvation which is going to effect ultimate deliverance from such sufferings. All present appearances to the contrary, this new covenant salvation, about which the Scriptures spoke, is the only salvation there ever has been and that will ever be.

In light of the available evidence, it seems best to conclude that the author of Hebrews is not dependent upon Philo, Gnosticism, or Jewish apocalyptic for his theology of rest in [Hebrews 3-4](#). He was "a serious student of the OT who is drawing out of the text what he believes to be embedded in it." [Hebrews 3:7-4:11](#) presents a distinctly Christian interpretation of the Old Testament.

Another theological implication of these verses has to do with progressive creationism. The inclusion of [Gen 2:2](#) in [Heb 4:4](#) paves the way for the argument that the creative days of [Gen 1](#) are not to be understood as literal 24-hour days, but rather as successive epochs of perhaps millions of years. Since God's rest is equated with the seventh day of creation, and his rest extends

from the completion of creation until now, then this seventh day is, according to progressive creationists, obviously not a 24-hour day. If the seventh day was not literally 24 hours in length, then neither are the other six.

But there are problems with this reasoning. When one considers the grammar of [Gen 2:2](#) in the LXX and what is stated in [Heb 4:4](#), the most that can be said is that God rested on the seventh day. Nothing is said as to whether this rest in some way continues to the present time, nor is there any indication as to how long the rest lasted if it is not still somehow in progress. All that can be said for sure is that God rested from his creative work in the past. If the aorist tense is ingressive, as is likely, the focus is on the inception of the rest, not on the duration of it or whether it corresponds to the seventh day. There are no exegetical grounds for suggesting that the seventh day of creation is still in effect.

In drawing the discussion to a close, **the author of Hebrews clearly thought the first generation of Jewish Christians found themselves in a parallel situation with their exodus generation counterparts.**

Forty years of wilderness wandering was the lot of the exodus generation prior to entrance into the land.

From the crucifixion of Jesus until the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans was also a period of forty years.

Both groups lived in what might be called the "formative" years of a new movement of God in their midst. Whereas the exodus generation benefited from the leadership of Moses and Joshua, now the new people of God have a leader who is far superior, namely Jesus. To fail to respond to him in faith would have disastrous consequences as in the wilderness failure of the exodus generation.

If Hebrews was written during the turbulent times of the Jewish War (A.D. 66-70), and specifically toward the end of that period, it is not unlikely that the author reflected upon the watershed event of the exodus generation at Kadesh Barnea and used it typologically or analogically with his present generation of Jewish Christians. The "today" which the author takes up from [Psalm 95](#) is invested with ultimate significance.

Structurally, [Heb 4:13](#) concludes the first major section of the epistle, which is bracketed (i.e., an inclusio) by God speaking in a Son in the prologue and speaking in his Word in [4:12-13](#).

Theologically, [v. 13](#) indicates something else as well. Christ's high priesthood, which plays such a key role in the epistle, actually develops out of the

revelation of Jesus as "Son." **He is able to be "high priest" because he is first a "Son."**

From an overall discourse perspective, we can now see how the author has very carefully made the case that Jesus is exalted above angels and Moses because of his high-priestly office and mediatorial work. If we remember that the entire discourse unit of [1:5-4:13](#) is bisected into two sections with the second section beginning in [3:1](#), we are able to discern a parallel structure developed by the author between these two sections. Christ is superior to the angels in [Heb 1:5-14](#), and he is superior to Moses in [3:1-6](#). The exhortation in [2:1-4](#) is paralleled by the exhortation in [3:7-19](#). In [2:5-18](#), Jesus raised humanity beyond the status of angels, and in [4:1-13](#) he did what Moses and Joshua failed to do: bring his people into true "rest." He is our high priest who helps us in [Heb 2:17-18](#), and he is again the same in [Heb 4:14-16](#).

- The New American Commentary

Entering God's Rest ([Hebrews 4:1-13](#))

[Hebrews 4](#) continues the warning to informed but unresponsive Jews that began in [3:7](#). These Jews not only knew the basic truths of the gospel but had even renounced Judaism. Still they did not trust in Christ. The warning, of course, applies to anyone who is hesitating in committing himself fully to Jesus Christ, and can be summarized: "**Do not harden your hearts** like Israel did in the wilderness." The Israelites had left Egypt, but they often longed to go back. They refused to trust the Lord completely and, oppressive and disappointing as it was, the old life still had an appeal. They halted at the crucial point of decision. Consequently, they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land and into God's **rest**. So it is with many who are drawn to Jesus Christ. Unbelief forfeits rest—that is the writer's thought.

The Meaning of Rest

The English rest and the Greek word (*katapausis*) that it translates here have similar meanings. The basic idea is that of ceasing from work 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 freedom from whatever worries or disturbs you. Some people cannot rest mentally and emotionally because they are so easily annoyed. Every little nuisance upsets them and they always feel hassled. Rest does not mean freedom from all nuisances and hassles; it means freedom from being so easily

bothered by them. It means to be inwardly quiet, composed, peaceful. To enter God's rest means to be at peace with God, to possess the perfect peace He gives. It means to be free from guilt and even unnecessary feelings of guilt. It means freedom from worry about sin, because sin is forgiven. God's rest is the end of legalistic works and the experience of peace in the total forgiveness of God.

Rest can mean to lie down, be settled, fixed, secure. There is no more shifting about in frustration from one thing to another, no more running in circles. In God's rest we are forever established in Christ. We are freed from running from philosophy to philosophy, from religion to religion, from life-style to life-style. We are freed from being tossed about by every doctrinal wind, every idea or fad, that blows our way. In Christ, we are established, rooted, grounded, unmoveable. That is the Christian's rest.

Rest involves remaining confident, keeping trust. In other words, to rest in something or someone means to maintain our confidence in it or him. To enter God's rest, therefore, means to enjoy the perfect, unshakeable confidence of salvation in our Lord. We have no more reason to fear. We have absolute trust and confidence in God's power and care.

Rest 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. In the new relationship with God, we can depend on Him for everything and in everything—for support, for health, for strength, for all we need. It is a relationship in which we are confident and secure that we have committed our life to God and

that He holds it in perfect, eternal love. It is a relationship that involves being settled and fixed. No more floating around. We know whom we have believed and we stand in Him.

The rest spoken of 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.

Two other dimensions of spiritual rest will not be found in a dictionary—the Kingdom rest of the Millennium and the eternal rest of heaven. These are the ultimate expressions of the new relationship to God in Christ, the relationship that takes care of us in this life, in the Kingdom, and in heaven forever.

[Hebrews 4:1-13](#) takes us more deeply into this truth by teaching four things about God's rest: its availability, its elements, its nature, and its urgency.

The Availability of Rest

Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. ([4:1](#))

Therefore refers, of course, to Israel's unbelief and consequent failure to enter God's Canaan rest. As illustrated by her experience, not trusting in God is something to be feared. Jesus warned, "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to

kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" ([Matt. 10:28](#)). Only God has the power to commit a person to hell. If He is not believed, He is the One, the only One, to be feared.

The Christian has no need to **fear** in the sense meant here. "Do not be afraid, little flock," Jesus said, "for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom" ([Luke 12:32](#)). The only kind of fear a Christian should have is that of reverential awe ([1 Pet. 2:17](#); [Rev. 14:7](#); and others). This is the fear of respect and honor, not the fear of condemnation or fear in the sense of terror, of which this text speaks.

But to be lost and face eternal separation from God is cause for the most extreme fear. Few, however, who are lost feel such fear. Even many who have heard the gospel and recognize its truth do not have this fear. So the writer urges them, pleads with them, to be afraid of what they are doing and of what they are facing.

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. When Israel was in the wilderness, those who refused to believe were not allowed to enter the Promised Land. But God did not forsake Israel as His chosen people. The Jews who refused His Son, who mocked Him and crucified Him, were not allowed to enter God's heavenly rest. But God did not forsake Israel even then. Many Christians, unfortunately, believe that God no longer has a plan for Israel as a nation or even as a people—that His chosen people now is the church. There is no promise left for Israel, and she will have no restoration or future kingdom. This

is the view of amillennialism, common today even among evangelicals. Some argue that, because of what the Jews did in the Old Testament in unbelief, and even more importantly because of what they did to Jesus Christ, as a nation and as a distinct people they forfeited every promise of God.

But God's promise to Israel still stands. One of the clearest passages that shows Israel is still in God's economy and that God is still working with her is in [Acts 3](#). Shortly after Pentecost Peter said to a group of Jews just outside the Temple: "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life" ([vv. 14-15](#)). But after this strong and seemingly final indictment, he concludes by saying, "It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" ([vv. 25-26](#)). Even though they had killed the Prince of life, the very Son of God, they were still children of the unconditional covenant God had made with Abraham. So the writer of Hebrews could say to them, "a promise remains of entering His rest." Rest is still available. What marvelous grace!

A more accurate translation of the last part of [Hebrews 4:1](#) 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.

In his younger manhood Mel Trotter was as debauched as can be imagined. His children were starving because he spent his money on alcohol. His little girl died of malnutrition when she was about four. The neighbors gave enough money to buy her some new clothes and a casket to be buried in. In the middle of the night Trotter broke into the mortuary, took the clothes off his dead child, and exchanged them for a drink. Not long afterward, however, Jesus Christ reached down and changed his life, and he became one of the great preachers America has known.

As long as a person has opportunity to decide, he *can* decide. A person is never too far gone for God to deal with him. As long as his heart is sensitive to what the Spirit is saying, as long as he can hear God's call, he has time to be saved. God's rest is still available. Only God knows how long that is for each person.

The Elements of Rest

God's rest, His salvation, is based on three things: personal faith, sovereign decree, and immediate action.

Personal Faith

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My

rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. ([4:2-3](#))

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 no 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**.

It is tragic that hell is going to be populated with people who will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" To which Jesus will reply, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" ([Matt. 7:22-23](#); cf. [Luke 13:26-27](#)). Their knowledge and their work was not united with faith. Jews prided themselves on the fact that they had God's law and God's ordinances and God's rituals. They were especially proud to be descendants of Abraham. But Jesus warned that true children of Abraham believe and act as Abraham did ([John 8:39](#)). Paul reminded his fellow Jews that "He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God" ([Rom. 2:29](#)). Spiritually, an unbelieving Jew is a contradiction in terms.

If you run a red light and a policeman pulls you over and starts to give you a ticket, you do not show him your copy of the state driving laws as your defense. You do not try to establish your innocence by telling him you have read the booklet many times

and know most of the regulations by heart. Far from making you innocent, this would make you all the more responsible for living up to the laws and all the more guilty for breaking them. Knowing the law is an advantage only if we obey it. "For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law," Paul says, "but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision" ([Rom. 2:25](#)).

Being a true Jew under the Old Covenant was not a matter of having the law but of obeying it. Being a true Christian under the New Covenant is not a matter of knowing the gospel but of trusting in it. Having a Bible, reading it, knowing it, taking it to church every Sunday, and even teaching from it do not make us Christians. Only trusting in the One to whom it testifies makes us Christians. "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life," Jesus warned, "and it is these that bear witness of Me" ([John 5:39](#)). The issue is not knowledge or work, but faith. Paul was happy and thankful for the Thessalonian Christians not simply because they accepted the gospel as the Word of God, but because they believed it ([1 Thess. 2:13](#); cf. [2 Thess. 2:13](#)). This signifies whole life commitment to the Lordship of Christ.

Both the positive and 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.

Our Rest Is God's Rest

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.*

When God had finished the creation, He said (briefly paraphrasing Gen. 2), "It's done. I've made a wonderful world for man and woman. I've given them everything earthly they need, including each other, for a complete and beautiful and satisfying life. Even more importantly, they have perfect, unbroken, unmarred fellowship with Me. I can now rest; and they can rest in Me."

For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works." (4:4)

Sabbath rest was instituted as a symbol of the true rest to come in Christ. That is why the Sabbath could be violated by Jesus, and completely set aside in the New Testament.

When the true Rest Land came, the symbol was useless.

"Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:16-17).

Adam and Eve were completely righteous when they were created. They walked and talked with God as regularly and as naturally as they walked and talked with each other. They were at rest, in its original and its fullest sense. They relied on God for everything. They had no anxieties, no worries, no pain, no frustrations, no heartaches. They did not need God's forgiveness, because they had no sin to be forgiven of. They did not need His consolation, because they were never grieved. They did not need His encouragement, because they never failed. They only needed His fellowship, because they were made for Him. This was their "rest" in God. God completed His perfect work and He rested. They were His perfect work and they rested in Him.

But something terrible happened. When Satan began to impugn God's word and integrity and love, Adam and Eve chose to believe Satan. They trusted him rather than God. And when they lost their trust in God, they lost His rest. And from that time until now, man apart from God not only has been sinful but restless.

The entire purpose of the Bible and the entire working of God in human history have one theme: bringing man back into His rest.

To accomplish that, God had to remove the barrier to their rest, the barrier which separated them from Him. He sent His Son to do just that, to provide again for man's rest in His Creator. Through Christ's death men are again offered life. Rest is another name for life, life as God meant it to be.

Even the people who lived before Jesus were saved on the basis of what God was going to do through His Son. Christ bore sins past and future, and through Him God's rest has been available to anyone who believes.

Those who sinned while wandering in the wilderness not only forfeited Canaan, unless they exercised personal faith in God sometime during the forty years, they also forfeited eternal life—of which Canaan was only a symbol.

Divine Decree

And again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest." Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience. ([4:5-6](#))

Rest still remains. Why? Because God could not cut it off. That would mean He started something that was not worth completing. But He does not do such things. God did not establish rest for mankind for nothing. The rest He has provided, someone will enter: **It remains for some to enter it.** When man lost God's rest, God immediately began a recovery process. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, some would be brought back in. He created man for fellowship with Himself, and His plan would not be thwarted, either by a rebellious archangel or by disbelieving mankind. By divine decree, therefore, there has always been a remnant of believers, even among mostly disbelieving Israel. "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" ([Rom. 11:5](#)). The way of God's rest has always been narrow, and only a few, relative to all of mankind, have ever found it. But some must enter into it, because God's purpose must be fulfilled. By

sovereign decree He designed a rest for mankind and some, therefore, are going **to enter it**.

The second element of rest mentioned here is God's sovereign decree. It is mentioned second, but it came first. Without God's decree, man's faith would be futile and worthless. We are saved by two things: God's will, expressed in His sending His Son to save men; and our will, expressed in our trust in His Son to save us. We can be saved because He planned to save us before the world was created. That is predestination, or election. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him," and, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" ([John 6:44](#), [65](#)). **Personal faith is necessary before God can apply His redemption to us. Yet our personal faith is effective because the Father has first drawn us to the Son. Because God *wants* us to be saved, we can be saved. Only disobedience keeps us out.**

Immediate Action

He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." ([4:7](#))

The third element of rest is immediate action. 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. This is why **Paul said, "*Now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation'"*** ([2 Cor. 6:2](#)).

When God looked down on the civilization He was ready to drown, He said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years" ([Gen. 6:3](#)). In other words, *a person has no more than his lifetime to believe God*. The average life expectancy today is much less than 120 years; and, of course, none of us has a guarantee of living even until the average. God limits the time for salvation. This is God's today, right now—the only day, the only opportunity, we can be sure of.

The Nature of Rest

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. ([4:8-10](#))

It Is Spiritual

The rest spoken of here is not the physical rest of Canaan. That was only a picture. "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that." *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. Many cults promise their followers happiness, wealth, and health in this life. The Bible does not.

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.*

Some of God's most faithful believers are the busiest, the hardest working, and sometimes even the most afflicted people imaginable. Yet they are in God's salvation rest.

It Is for Israel

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. The gospel "is the power of God for

salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" ([Rom. 1:16](#)). 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.

It Is Future

For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. ([4:10](#))

God's rest is also future.

In his vision on Patmos the apostle John heard these beautiful words from heaven:
"Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them'" ([Rev. 14:13](#)).

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.

The Urgency of Rest

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. ([4:11-13](#))

The need for God's rest is urgent.

A person should diligently, with intense purpose and concern, secure it. It is not that he can work his way to salvation, but that he should diligently seek to enter God's rest by faith—lest he, like the Israelites in the wilderness, lose the opportunity.

God cannot be trifled with.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword,...and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. In the immediate context this verse means that the readers who are hesitating in trusting Christ, who are even considering falling back into Judaism, had better be urgent and **diligent** in seeking to enter God's rest, because the Word of God is alive.

It is not static, but active—constantly active.

It can pierce right down into the innermost part of the heart to see if belief is real or not.

So the Word of God is not only saving and comforting and nourishing and healing, it is also a tool of judgment and execution.

*In the day of the great judgment His Word is going to penetrate and lay bare all hearts who have not trusted in Him. The sham and hypocrisy will be revealed and no profession of faith, no matter how orthodox, and no list of good works, no matter how sacrificial, will count for anything before Him. Only **the thoughts and intentions of the heart** will count.*

God's Word is the perfect discerner, the perfect *kritikos* (from which we get "critic"). It not only analyzes all the facts perfectly, but all motives, and intentions, and beliefs as well, which even the wisest of human judges or critics cannot do.

The sword of His Word will make no mistakes in judgment or execution. All disguises will be ripped off and only the real person will be seen.

The word translated open had two distinct uses in ancient times. It was used of a wrestler taking his opponent by the throat. In this position the two men were unavoidably face to face. The other use was in regard to a criminal trial. A sharp dagger would be bound to the neck of the accused, with the point just below his chin, so that he could not bow his head, but had to face the court. Both uses had to do with grave face-to-face situations. When an unbeliever comes under the scrutiny of God's Word, he will be unavoidably face-to-face with the perfect truth about God and about himself.

In light of such certain and perfect judgment and of such beautiful and wonderful rest, why will any person harden his heart to God?

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Hebrews.

Christ Is Greater in the Rest He Gives

(Heb. 3:7-4:13)

This long section is the second of the five exhortations in this epistle. In the first exhortation ([Heb. 2:1-4](#)), the writer pointed out the danger of *drifting* from the Word because of neglect. In this exhortation, he explains the danger of *doubting* and *disbelieving* the Word because of hardness of heart. **It is important that we understand the background of this section, which is the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and their experiences of unbelief in the wilderness.**

To begin with, *we must understand that there are spiritual lessons in the geography of Israel's experiences.* **The nation's bondage in Egypt is an illustration of a sinner's bondage in this world.**

Much as Israel was delivered from Egypt by the blood of lambs and the power of God, so a sinner who believes on Christ is delivered from the bondage of sin ([Col. 1:13-14](#)). Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God" whose death and resurrection have made our deliverance from sin a reality.

It was not God's will that Israel remain either in Egypt or in the wilderness. His desire was that the people enter their glorious inheritance in the land of Canaan. But **when Israel got to the border of their inheritance, they delayed because they doubted the promise of God ([Num. 13-14](#)).**

"We are not able" wept the ten spies and the people.

"We are able with God's help!" said Moses, Joshua, & Caleb.

Because the people went backward in unbelief instead of forward by faith, they missed their inheritance and died in the wilderness.

It was the new generation that possessed the land and entered into their rest.

What does Canaan represent to us as Christians today? It represents our spiritual inheritance in Christ ([Eph. 1:3](#), [11](#), [15-23](#)). It is unfortunate that some of our hymns and Gospel songs use Canaan as a picture of heaven, and "crossing the Jordan" as a picture of death. **Since Canaan was a place of battles, and even of defeats, it is NOT a good illustration of heaven!**

Israel had to cross the river by faith (a picture of the believer as he dies to self and the world, [Rom. 6](#)) and claim the inheritance by faith. They had to "step out by faith" ([Josh. 1:3](#)) and claim the land for themselves, just as believers today must do.

They are "out of Egypt" but they are not yet "in Canaan."

With this background, we can now better understand one of the key words in this section—*rest* ([Heb. 3:11](#), [18](#); [4:1](#), [3-5](#), [8-11](#)). The writer mentioned two different "rests" found in Old Testament history: (1) *God's Sabbath rest*, when He ceased from His Creation activities ([Gen. 2:2](#); [Heb. 4:4](#)); (2) *Israel's rest in Canaan* ([Deut. 12:9](#); [Josh. 21:43-45](#); [Heb. 3:11](#)). But he saw in these "rests" illustrations of the spiritual experiences of believers today. **The Sabbath rest is a picture of our rest in Christ through salvation ([Heb. 4:3](#); see [Matt. 11:28](#)).** **The Canaan rest is a picture of our present rest as we claim our inheritance in Christ ([Heb. 4:11-13](#); note the emphasis on the Word of God).**

The first is the rest of salvation; the second is the rest of submission.

But there is a third rest that enters into the discussion, that future rest that all believers will enjoy with God. "There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God" ([Heb. 4:9](#)).

This word for rest is the Greek word *sabbatismos*—"a keeping of a Sabbath"—and this is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. When the saints enter heaven, it will be like sharing God's great Sabbath rest, with all labors and battles ended ([Rev. 14:13](#)).

We may diagram these rests in this way:

<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
God's Sabbath rest	Salvation rest	Heaven
Israel's Canaan rest	Submission rest (victory in Christ)	

With this background of Israel's history and the "rests" involved, we may now examine the passage itself. The writer gives a threefold admonition.

Let us take heed ([vv. 7-19](#)).

Take heed to what? To the sad history of the nation of Israel and the important lesson it teaches. The writer quotes from [Psalm 95:7-11](#), which records God's response to Israel's tragic spiritual condition. God had delivered His people from Egypt and had cared for them, revealing His power in many signs and wonders. Israel saw all of this and benefited from it, but the experience did not bring them closer to God or make them trust Him more. **All that God did for them did not benefit them spiritually. In fact, just the opposite took place: they hardened their hearts against God!** They put God to the test and He did not fail them; yet they failed Him.

*The heart of every problem is
a problem in the heart.*

The people of Israel (except Moses, Joshua, and Caleb) erred in their hearts ([Heb. 3:10](#)), which means that their hearts wandered from God and His Word. They also had evil hearts of unbelief ([Heb. 3:12](#)); they did not believe that God would give them victory in Canaan. **They had seen God perform great signs in Egypt. Yet they doubted He was adequate for the challenge of Canaan.**

When a person has an erring heart and a disbelieving heart, the result will also be a hard heart.

This is a heart that is insensitive to the Word and work of God.

So hard was the heart of Israel that the people even wanted to return to Egypt! Imagine wanting to exchange their freedom under God for slavery in Egypt! Of course, **all this history spoke to the hearts of the readers of this letter because they were in danger of "going back" themselves.**

God's judgment fell on Israel in the wilderness at Kadesh Barnea. That entire generation was condemned to die, and only the new generation would enter the land. God said, "They shall not enter into My rest" ([Heb. 3:11](#)). But what message does this bring to a believer today? No believer today, Jew or Gentile, could go back into the Mosaic legal system since the temple is gone and there is no priesthood. But **every believer is tempted to give up his confession of Christ and go back into the world system's life of compromise and bondage. This is especially true during times**

of persecution and suffering. The fires of persecution have always purified the church because suffering separates true believers from the counterfeit. True believers are willing to suffer for Christ and they hold firmly to their convictions and their confession of faith (see [Heb. 3:6, 14](#)).

We are not saved by holding to our confession. The fact that we hold to our confession is proof that we are God's true children.

The Jews had not been out of Egypt long when they began to provoke God ([Ex. 16:1ff](#)). After He supplied bread for them, they complained about a lack of water ([Ex. 17:1-7](#)). Moses called that place "Massah and Meribah" which means "provocation and trial." These same words are used in [Hebrews 3:10](#).

The emphasis in Hebrews is that true believers have an eternal salvation because they trust a living Saviour who constantly intercedes for them. But the writer is careful to point out that this confidence is no excuse for sin.

- Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Confident (Hebrews).

Theological CONTEXT: **Hebrews 3:1-19 (NASB)**

¹ Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;

² He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.

³ For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.

⁴ For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later;

⁶ but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

⁷ Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, ⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, ⁹ WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. ¹⁰ "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; ¹¹ AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

15 while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."

16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?

17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:1-13 (ESV)

1 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.

2 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.

3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works."

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

6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,

⁷ 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."

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

⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,

¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

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

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:1-13 (NASB)

¹ Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

² For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

³ For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

⁴ For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS";

➤ Rest & FOUNDATIONS

○ What is this rest?

- Assurance vs. Insurance (no "cheap grace")
- Completion vs. Exhaustion! (all the work is done)
- Revelation vs. Regulation (blessing vs. testing)
- Satisfaction vs. Scheduling (Saturday or Sunday!)
- Declaration vs. Denomination (worship vs works)

- Awe-inspiring vs. Simple-Announcement (wow/now)
- Type/Shadow vs.
- Foretaste vs.
- What were “all His works” (see last week)

⁵ *and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST."* ⁶ *Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,*

➤ Rest & FAILURE (to rest)

- What is NOT rest?
- What is unrest?
- What causes unrest? (...faces & fruit of unbelief)
- What does unrest look like?
- Now tie ALL these back to “unbelief & disobedience”
- NOTE: in O.T., N.T. & today... this failure happened & happens, in spite of the fact that THE gospel (A. Plan with Power; B. Promise with Purpose; C. Person with People) has been shared...
 - People push away the Light because they prefer the dark & darkness... - Jesus

⁷ *He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."*

➤ Rest & FIXES

- Pay attention
- Listen
- Repent
- Surrender/soften
- Believe (biblically: receiving the miracle gift of grace)

⁸ *For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.* ⁹ *So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.*

➤ Rest & FUTURE

¹⁰ *For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.*

➤ Rest & FINALITY

- Finality & Security go hand & hand...
- Insecurity & Unbelief also go hand & hand...
- God's promises bring peace to His people! – JDP
- Rejecting God's promises bring unrest to religious people. – JDP
- Perverting God's Word creates corrupt worship and false, cheap,

¹¹ *Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.*

¹² *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* ¹³ *And there is no creature hidden from His*

sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

3:1-6

- K. Real vs. Religious “church”
- L. Consider Jesus:
 - a. Apostle
 - b. High Priest
 - c. Christ (center of our confession)
 - d. Faithful
 - e. Builder of our “oikos”/Church
 - f. God (Christ is Creator/Builder of all)
- M. Rest & FACTS

3:7-11

- A. Quoting Psalm 95:7-11
- B. Contextualizing Hebrew’s “Warning #2”
- C. Do NOT disconnect from Christ/Church (“rest”)

3:12-17

- A. Explicit “Warning #2”
- B. Shocking “confrontation of contemplation”
- C. Direct & indirect responses are called for...
 - a. Listen to God & His WORD

- b. Remember God & His WRATH
- c. Encourage/exhort God's people with your WALK
 - i. BE persistent & persevere as an ambassador!
 - ii. Bring God's truth in love
 - iii. Clarify & apply God's gospel-standards
- D. Rest & FOREWARNING

3:18-19

- A. Disobedience & unbelief are married/unified
- B. Disobedience & unbelief are contextualized
- C. Disobedience & unbelief are root of "un-rest"
- D. Rest & un-rest FORMULA/FORMULATION

4:1 Hold On 16: *let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest*

- Rest & FEAR

4:2 Hold On 17: *the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.*

- Rest & FAITH

4:3 Hold On 18: *although His works were finished from the foundation of the world*

- Rest & FINISHED works of Creator & Crucified Christ

Hold On 19: Don't Disconnect From Our Rest

*** This (and ALL biblical) “good news” is grounded in God’s grace & glory, as revealed & received thru Jesus, THE Christ!

*** In a similar way, this Scripture passage (and ALL biblical) exhortations & warnings are designed to develop greater Christ-likeness in a disciple’s worship, walk, work, & witness.

Biblical “rest” has 3 phases...

1. Past
2. Present
3. Future

Creation Rest – God & Adam

Corrupted UNrest – Satan & Sin

Canaan Rest – Moses & Israelites

Conquest Rest – Joshua & David

Christ’s Rest - Jesus, the Lamb of God

Calvary (His cross... “It is finished!”)

Christian (our cross... “If has begun...”)

Completed Rest - Jesus, the Lion of Judah! (Alpha & Omega!)

***** The reason for the Sabbath *****

Colossians 2:16ff = “Sabbath = a shadow”

Sabbath “rest” = a “saving relationship”

Stop trying to shake hands w/ God’s shadows

See God’s order in creation... finished/rest

***** “Come To Me.... I will give you Rest...” (2X)

*** Rest for...

Worship

Walk

Witness

Warfare

Works...

*** Rest from:

Worry

Wounds

Warts

Warfare

Works...

*** Security produces & protects rest!

Without Security it's impossible to rest...

You can't rest standing on a trap door

Biblical rest = union with God

- No one can take it
- No one can break it
- No one can forsake it (aka “spiritual Suicide”)
- Too many fake it
- Too many take it for granted

Rest = Heaven!
Unrest = Hell!

See the progression of God's good news:

PLAN... with Power
PROMISE... with Purpose
PERSON... with People

Sabbath is ultimately defined by the Savior!

*** See the both/and of biblical typology:

- A. Abe & Isaac sacrifice
- B. David & Goliath
- C. Noah & the Flood/Ark
- D. Leviticus Feasts/Festivals
- E. Moses & the Exodus
- F. Genesis 3:15
- G. Amos & his role as unexpected sent-one

(Hold On 20). STRIVING...

Components & Characteristics of "Striving for His rest"

- Truth (defining definitive definitions!)
- Love (Christ-like vs. "cultural" love)
- Warfare (striving requires fight/armor wearing)
- Faithful Obedience (Luke 14:27... cross-carrying)
- Ekklesia (see John 6:44! – all others = "self")
- Koinonia (see John 17! – all others are fakes)
- Homothoomadon (see Acts 2! – passion validates)

- Beatitudes! (striving in action & on display...)
- Fruit of the Spirit... (this is the “fruit of God’s rest”)
- Take every thought captive
- Think on good things
- Fear not! & Fear now!
- Go and make disciples (soldiers/athletes/farmers)
- 5 stages of life cycle (E)
- Live a life worthy of your calling
- You come back to life
- You witness
- You confront false teachers
- You call out the wolves
- You feed, lead, & protect the sheep/family
- You pray
- You forgive
- Love the LORD your God with ALL!
- Love your neighbor as yourself!
(ALL...least/widows/orphans/prisoners...)
- Remain confident in Christ
- Proclaim/Evangelize
- Persevere
- Finish
- Repent
- Believe

- Persecuted
- Suffering
- Walking by faith
- Sacrificing
- Surrendering

- Learning
- Broken/Breaking
- Fluid
- Studying God's Word
- Hoping
- Resisting the devil...
- Hard living (per Jesus)
- Holding On!
- RESTING

Joshua = child of rest

Caleb = child of rest

Disciplined Warriors = children of rest!

*** Don't be timereess (Pilgrim's Progress)

*** Nothing brings better rest than KNOWING you are redeemed! - JDP

*** Lord, restore to me the joy of my salvation...

(= restored rest)

*** The year of reverence is the way of rest!

*** "I rest my case..." = rest/finished

*** Sabbath = trusting in God for our peace, provisions, & completeness. The emphasis and meaning was faith/trust-

centric vs. chronological & day-driven. - JDP

*** Similarly, the “7th day” was never about Saturday...
evidenced by Revelation’s reference to Sunday as “the Lord’s
day.” - JDP

*** The calendar merely wraps the Sabbath day in a week,
while the Church’s disciples witness to the Savior’s Sabbath
when we walk, work, & worship with both, divine reverence
& daily rest. - JDP