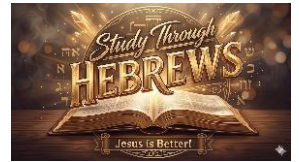




Entering Into God's Rest (Heb 4:1-11)



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4:1-2 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.

This text follows immediately on the heels of the author's last statement at the end of Chapter 3:
"So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief" (Heb 3:19).

Consequently, the entire adult generation under Moses—with the sole exceptions of Joshua and Caleb—failed to enter into God's rest, because of unbelief.

Following this sobering historical reality, the author makes what may have been a surprising declaration to his original audience—and potentially to modern readers as well: ***"Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands..."*** This statement is striking on three distinct levels:

1. **The Owner of the Rest:** The author explicitly calls it **"His rest"**—implying that it is God's own rest, Yahweh's rest.
2. **The Scope of the Promise:** The promise of entering this rest was originally given to the ancient Hebrews. This demonstrates that God's objective was always greater than merely securing an earthly piece of real estate; it was an invitation to walk by faith and enter into divine fellowship.
3. **The Ongoing Availability:** The opportunity to enter into **"His rest"** offered to the Israelites who left Egypt in 1450 BC still stands and remains open today.

As you consider these points, the question you may have is: **What precisely does Scripture mean by "His rest"?**

First, I believe it is the very rest that Jesus promised to all who come to Him:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28, ESV).

The Puritan theologian John Owen defined this rest across several dimensions:

- Peace with God
- Freedom from the slavery of sin
- Deliverance from the burdens of the Levitical law
- Freedom to worship in Spirit and in truth
- The very rest that God Himself enjoys

While all of these are true, for me, two primary takeaways from this text appear to be:

- First, this rest has both a current and future dimension.
- Second, the writer of Hebrews is fundamentally pointing believers toward entering into the very rest that God Himself enjoys.

Crucially, this promised rest is **not** a life free from trials, tribulations, or worldly problems.

Consider the Apostle Paul: he had certainly entered God's rest, yet his life was marked by relentless labor and immense hardship. As he chronicled:

24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was

adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Cor 11:24–28, ESV).

The promise of rest is neither inactivity nor a guarantee of a trouble-free existence. Rather, the promise is of entering His rest and it is indeed good news to learn that the door to enter that rest remains open.

The expression "**still remains**" utilizes the Greek perfect tense, indicating a past action with continuing results—meaning the ability to enter God’s rest remains actively available. The author is no longer referring strictly to geographical Canaan, but to the spiritual reality that Canaan represented.

Building on this, the author issues a vital warning: ***“let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.”***

- **Let us fear:** Let us be alert, sober-minded, and deeply concerned.
- **Failed to reach it:** Literally, to come short, miss out, or fail to obtain the goal.

The opportunity to enter God’s rest is open, but the possibility of missing it is just as real today as it was for the nation under Moses.

The author pivots from historical exposition to direct application, warning his first-century hearers—and believers today—that some among us might fall short due to the exact same pitfall that stumbled ancient Israel: unbelief.

Vs 2a - For good news came to us just as to them... With the conjunction "**For**" (or *since*), the author makes a remarkable declaration: The original audience had heard ***“good news.”***

Now when we read this, we need to ask what does this mean, in what way(s) did the Old Testament saints hear good news?

How can "good news" be said to have been delivered to Old Testament figures like the generation of the Exodus?

God promised to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and into a land flowing with milk and honey.

This promise originated with Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, and was reaffirmed to the nation at Horeb:

*6 “The Lord our God said to us in Horeb, ‘You have stayed long enough at this mountain.
7 Turn and take your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negeb and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.
8 See, I have set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them.’ (Dt 1:5–8, ESV).*

When Moses sent the twelve spies into Canaan, ten returned with a discouraging report driven by fear.

Yet Joshua and Caleb responded in faith:

6 And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. 9 Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” 10 Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones...” (Nu 14:6–10a, ESV).

Despite this divine promise and the faithful urging of Joshua and Caleb, the congregation chose rebellion and unbelief.

The critical takeaway is this: Old Testament believers did not possess the full revelation of the finished work of Christ in historical detail, but they **did** receive a **divinely authorized proclamation** from God that **demand**ed a **faith-response**.

While the specific details of special revelation became progressively brighter throughout redemptive history, the mechanism has always been the same. It has always required hearing God's word and responding in obedience and trust, just as Abraham believed God, “*and he counted it to him as righteousness*” (Gen 15:6).

The Exodus generation heard the declaration, understood it, and consciously chose defiance.

The second half of **verse 2** highlights the tragedy: “... ***but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.***”

The message was **declared** and understood, but it brought no **profit** because it was not embraced by faith.

The Greek word translated as benefit is **ὠφελέω (ōpheléō)**, it means to **profit, help, or to give an advantage**. Without faith, the good news cannot work to a person's advantage.

Faith—**πίστις (pistis)**—is the indispensable currency of the kingdom. Without it, without faith, no one across any era of redemptive history, can please God:

6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb 11:6, ESV).

APPLICATION: Hearing Is Not Enough: Sitting in a Sunday School class, listening to sermons, or intellectually agreeing with biblical truths does not secure spiritual rest.

Just as the Israelites heard God's promises but perished in the wilderness due to disobedience, modern believers must actively internalize and apply God's word through trust in the finished work of Christ.

Vs 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.

Here, the author groups himself and his hearers together: *“for we who have believed enter that rest.”*

Notice the shift in tense and pronoun. The phrase **"who have believed"** uses the Greek aorist tense of πιστεύω (*pisteuō*)—indicating a decisive, completed act of faith that carries **ongoing, eternal consequences**.

Those who have exercised faith are described as actively entering (*present tense*) **God’s rest** right now!

The rest available to believers today is the exact same rest promised to ancient Israel—the very rest that only a tiny minority (like Joshua and Caleb) embraced by faith.

The promise offered during the Exodus remains valid and open. The author claims that all who believe in his day, enter into that divine rest, experiencing it as a present reality with eternal dimensions.

Lastly, and I want us to see this. The author connects God resting on the seventy day, with the offer of rest in the Promised Land.

4:3b As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’

The author pulls forth another quotation from Psalm 95:11 to underscore the alternative: the sobering reality of exclusion.

The great majority of the Exodus generation failed to enter because of cumulative unbelief and rebellion, beginning at Rephidim and culminating at Kadesh Barnea when they flatly rejected God’s message and His plan.

Their persistent unbelief provoked God to swear in His wrath: *“They shall not enter my rest.”*

Last week, I called you to imagine God stepping into the Comic Courtroom in Heaven, and declaring with an oath, *“They shall not enter my rest.”* It is important to understand that God made this declaration, not because of a particular law they broke, but rather because of their persistent **unbelief**.

4:3c although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Without immediate context, this phrase can catch a reader off guard. God swears an oath of exclusion, and then the writer abruptly adds, *“although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.”*

What works could possibly be referenced here? Looking back to Scripture, the only logical reference is the creation account in Genesis 2:1–2:

1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, (Ge 2:1–2a, ESV).

Here the author is tying together two distinct texts: Psalm 95:11 *“They shall not enter my rest”* and Genesis 2:2 *“God finishing His creation work, before the foundation of the world.”*

At first glance, why the preacher is bringing these two points together **remains a mystery**, but it serves to set the stage for how he will unpack **God's Sabbath rest in the verses that follow**.

As you consider this verse, it seems that the author is deliberately linking human salvation-rest back to the original Sabbath rest of Genesis.

This seems to be hinting that God had been waiting for humanity to join Him in that rest since creation week. **Wrap your head around that!**

Vs 4-5 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."

Here, the author solidifies his second quote, confirming that his earlier reference to *"works finished from the foundation of the world"* directly points back to Genesis chapter 2.

On day six, God completed the works of creation, and then the author notes that He (God) has spoken somewhere about the seventh day: *"And God rested on the seventh day from all his works."*

First, we should understand God's resting as pointing to completion not inactivity. God was still holding the universe together by His power, God was still superintending and directing in accord with His will. He was very active, but He rested on the seventh day, the work of creation being complete.

Second, the *"somewhere"* the author refers to is the creation account, specifically incorporating the language from Genesis 2:2:

2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. (Ge 2:1-2, ESV).

Then, he immediately places it side by side with the warning from **Psalm 95:11**: *"They shall not enter my rest."*

When we connect these two texts, a profound theological realization emerges: The **"His rest"** the author has been talking about is none other than the very rest that God entered into following creation week.

This validates John Owen's fifth definition from earlier—that the ultimate rest is the rest that God Himself enjoys.

The rest that is promised and received by faith is not a cessation from physical labor; it is something **infinitely more profound**.

It involves entering into God's presence, being positionally seated in the heavenlies right now, and eternally dwelling in that divine fellowship while we look forward to the final heavenly city (Heb 11:16; Heb 12:22–24).

DO NOT MISS THIS: To place faith in God's Son is to enter into God's rest, a rest that was prepared before the foundation of the world.

Untethering Rest from Earthly Circumstances: Because God's rest is rooted in His completed work rather than human effort, our inner peace should not fluctuate with our daily output.

We can experience God's Sabbath rest in the middle of intense stress, project deadlines, and life turbulence because it is anchored in a finished, divine reality.

CONSIDER: In Genesis 2 each day, 1-6 ended the same:

"And there was evening and there was morning, the xxth day."

Yet day 7 simply reads:

2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 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. (Ge 2:2-3, ESV).

Some note this as a sign, that God's rest was designed to be entered into by man.

Vs 6-7 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."

Returning to the line of thought established in verse 1, the author reminds us: ***"Since the promise of entering His rest remains open, and some will enter into this rest."***

To pause and summarize the theological timeline so far:

1. God established His rest at the culmination of creation week.
2. Sin interrupted man entering into God's rest.
3. He invited the wilderness generation to enter into that rest.
4. They failed to do so because of unbelief and disobedience.
5. Despite their failure, **the door to enter into God's rest was not closed.**
6. We see this hinted at during the creation week itself.
7. The author of Hebrews declares it to be so. The promise of entering His rest remains open, and (by faith) some will enter! This is the gospel; this is the good news!

The writer highlights a crucial parallel: those who previously received the good news in the desert failed just as people can fail today.

Furthermore, the writer links unbelief and disobedience as two sides of the same coin—what a person truly believes directly dictates how they behave.

Those who failed in the wilderness missed out due to a lack of faith (Heb 4:2) which is characterized by active disobedience (Heb 4:6).

In **verse 7**, the author provides definitive proof that the door to God's rest is still open, we need to follow his logic: ***"... 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."***

When did this happen, and through whom?

God spoke through **David** in Psalm 95. Since David lived around 1000 BC, the phrase **"so long afterward"** spans roughly 500 years from the time of the wilderness generation under Moses, to the penning of Psalm 95.

Consider the rich flow of Psalm 95:

- “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!” (v. 1)
- “Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving...” (v. 2)
- “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!” (v. 6)
- “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...” (vv. 7b–8a)

If the **Holy Spirit** prompted David to write those words 500 years *after* the wandering generation had already perished in the wilderness, **what does that prove?**

It proves with absolute certainty that **the opportunity to enter His rest was still available and the door was still open in 1000BC**. The author of Hebrews quoting and bringing it forward means that the opportunity to enter His rest was still available in roughly 65AD. Which means the opportunity to enter God’s rest is still open **“today”**.

Naturally, a first-century Hebrew listener might raise an objection at this point: *“Wait a minute, Joshua eventually led Israel into the Promised Land, and that later generation and subsequent generations must have received their rest. Why are we still talking about an open door?”*

Like an insightful pastor anticipating the congregation's questions, the author (the preacher) addresses this exact objection in the verses that follow.

APPLICATION: No matter how much time has passed since biblical times—whether 500 years to David's era or 3,000 more years to the present day—**God's invitation to enter His rest has never expired**.

But it is an officer that comes with and date stamp **“today.”**

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

As we trace this history, Moses led the people out of Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land, but he was barred from entering because he struck the rock at Kadesh (Numbers 20) instead of speaking to it as Yahweh commanded.

Because of that sin, God raised up **Joshua** to lead the nation into the Promised Land.

It is worth noting an incredible linguistic link: **Joshua and Jesus are the exact same name**. Joshua is the English form of his Hebrew name, while Jesus is the English form of His Greek name.

Beyond sharing a name, Joshua serves as a profound Old Testament type—a living picture of Christ. Just as Joshua led the nation of Israel into the Promised Land, Jesus ultimately leads His people into true, eternal rest.

As you think of this let me say, Jesus is the One who is Lord of the Sabbath, and Jesus is the One who said, come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you **rest!**

Hear the author's sharp logical point *Vs 8*: ***"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on."***

The conclusion is undeniable. The physical land of Canaan was a magnificent picture, a type of God's rest, but it was **not** the rest itself.

If simply conquering and settling the Promised Land had provided humanity's ultimate access to God's eternal rest, God would never have inspired David to speak of ***"another day"*** roughly 500 years later.

The very existence of Psalm 95:7–11—written centuries *after* Joshua led the second generation into Canaan—proves that the true, ultimate rest was still future and open.

CONSIDER THIS: David warned people who were already living physically inside the Promised Land: ***"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..."*** This demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that God always intended something **infinitely greater** than **earthly real estate in Canaan**.

When you and I read Psalm 95 today or here in Hebrews, a brand-new day dawns; God provides us with our own personal **"Today."**

As C.H. Spurgeon powerfully noted regarding this very concept, and I quoted last week, but it is worthy of quoting again:

"Every command of Christ bears the date today. If a thing is right, it should be done at once; if it is wrong, stop it immediately. Whatever you are bound to do, you are bound to do now."

Vs 9-10 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.

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

Now consider the writer of Hebrews is a Jew, who was raised observing the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not an end within itself but rather, like we see here the Sabbath pointed to a greater reality, namely entering into God's rest, **realized by the rest we find in Jesus**.

This point brings the writer to the logical and indeed obvious conclusion: **So then...**

Here the logical conclusion. If Joshua did not secure the promised rest. Then there remains a **"Sabbath rest"** for those who have entered God's rest.

The Greek word translated **"Sabbath rest"** is **σαββατισμός (sabbatismos)**, it is a hapax legomenon, in that it is only used here in the entire New Testament.

Cockerill in his commentary says this could be rightly translated as a **sabbath celebration** and he builds the case that it is a joyous picture of celebration.

Further he writes: *"Thus 'Sabbath celebration' describes the nature and quality of that 'rest' without detracting from the fact that it is identified with and to be fully experienced in the yet-to-be-entered 'heavenly homeland' (11:16)"*

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

Both verbs (*entered* and *rested*) are in the Greek aorist tense, pointing to a decisive, completed reality.

There are two primary ways theologians interpret this verse, and both hold deep truth:

1. **The Present Cessation from Self-Effort:** This view applies the text to the *here and now*. When a person exercises faith in Jesus, they cease from trying to earn their salvation through religious performance. They rest from their own "works," just as God rested from His.
2. **The Ultimate Eschatological Rest:** This view holds that believers enter God's ultimate Sabbath rest at the culmination of their earthly pilgrimage—initially at death and fully at the return of Christ (Heb 9:28; 12:25–29).

Cockerill champions this perspective: *"Just as God entered his rest at the culmination of creation, so believers enter God's 'Sabbath rest' at the culmination of their earthly pilgrimage, initially at death and finally at the return of Christ (9:28; 12:25–29)."*

Contextually, **"there remains a Sabbath rest"** (vs 9), **"whoever has entered God's rest has also rested..."** (vs 10), **"let us therefore strive to enter that rest"** (vs 11) seem to best support option 1.

Also, the author elsewhere in the epistle, discusses these efforts he calls **"dead works"**, religious striving that can never justify a sinner.

I Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (Heb 6:1, ESV).

14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Heb 9:14, ESV).

C.H. Spurgeon captured this present application powerfully:

"It is finished. I am no longer going to do my own works, I have done with them; I now trust the finished work of Christ, and that gives me rest."

While both are Biblically true, contextually it seems the first option best fits the context.

APPLICATION: Trying to earn God's favor through good deeds, church attendance, or moral perfection is spiritually exhausting. Entering God's rest means laying down the heavy burden of "self-salvation" and fully trusting the finished, all-sufficient work of Christ.

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

Drawing all of his historical warnings and theological arguments together, the author issues a compelling exhortation: ***"Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."***

First, Notice the plural pronoun used by the author: ***"Let us..."***.

Spiritual perseverance is a community project. We need to encourage one another in our Sunday School classes, small groups, and churches so that no one falls away by the same disobedience that doomed Israel in the wilderness.

Remember what we saw last week:

13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb 3:13, ESV).

Notice also the verbs used here: **strive** and **enter** are both in the aorist tense in Greek, pointing to a decisive, wholehearted, and intentional response.

When modern believers who hold firmly to salvation by grace alone hear the word "**strive**," it can sometimes trigger an instinctive theological red flag. We immediately remember that salvation is a free gift of God, "*not a result of works, so that no one may boast*" (Eph 2:8–9).

But the author is not advocating for works-based righteousness or trying to earn our way into heaven.

Instead, he is issuing a call to radical perseverance, urging believers to aggressively press into faith and through the power of the Spirit, refuse to drift away.

Scripture frequently uses this exact kind of energetic language to describe the active nature of genuine Christian faith:

- "*Strive to enter through the narrow door...*" (Luke 13:24)
- "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...*" (Phil 2:12)
- "*Run with endurance the race that is set before us...*" (Heb 12:1)
- "*Strain forward to what lies ahead...*" (Phil 3:13)
- "*Fight the good fight of the faith...*" (1 Tim 6:12)
- "*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith...*" (2 Cor 13:5)

This is a call to reach out to Christ continually by faith, actively guarding against the spiritual apathy that leads to unbelief and disobedience.

C.H. Spurgeon captured this heart perfectly in his reflection on these verses:

"Let us not repeat the story of unbelieving Israel in our own lives. Let us not live and die in the wilderness, but let us go in and take possession of the promised land, the promised rest, in the power of the Holy Spirit."

To which we must always add: **Let us do so entirely by faith in the finished work of Jesus!**

Guarding Our Hearts Against Unbelief: Just as those of the Exodus generation fell due to a hardened heart, modern believers must regularly examine their spiritual posture. True striving looks like daily repentance, feeding on God's Word, and anchoring our trust completely in Christ rather than our own strength.

The first lesson I learned as a new believer: Earthly Success Is Not Ultimate Rest: Achieving career milestones, financial security, or physical comfort (our modern versions of a "Promised Land") can never satisfy the deepest longing of the human soul.

True rest is found exclusively in a relationship with God through Christ, not in earthly circumstances.

In fact, those earthly things always leave us unfulfilled. In Christ, we find complete fulfillment.