

## The Book of Hebrews Study Guide

### 4:1-13

#### Entering God's Rest

v. 1 – This chapter begins with “therefore,” a word that creates linkage to the previous section in the form of a conclusion and application. In chapter 3, the author showed how lack of belief prevented the adult generation of the Exodus to enter the promised land, which he calls a place of “rest.” Now in this chapter he draws a parallel of those Israelites with the audience of his letter, and he gives a warning that a similar lack of belief will likewise lead to their failure of entering God’s rest.

The question, then, is what exactly does the author mean by “His rest?” In order to answer that question, we have to understand the connection between God and rest. Verse 4 points us in the right direction by quoting from Genesis 2:2. That passage tells us that after completing His work of Creation, on the seventh day God rested “from all His work which He had done.” So the fundamental elements of God’s rest are the completion of a great work by God and then ceasing entirely from that work, which means it doesn’t have to be repeated. Meanwhile the benefits of that work are enjoyed in an on-going manner. Or to put it another way, God’s rest means His work is done, but the benefits continue. Adam and Eve enjoyed the benefits of a personal relationship with the Lord, sovereignty over the earth, and life everlasting.

Adam and Eve were able initially to enjoy those benefits because God created them without sin, so their entry into His rest was a bit different than for the rest of humanity. But in order to remain in the state of rest that continued after the first Sabbath of creation week, they had to believe what God said to them, and to respond obediently to His commandment regarding their behavior. Had they done that, the benefits would have continued indefinitely, most notably, having a close relationship with the Lord. But when they disbelieved and disobeyed God, great changes occurred:

- The state of rest was literally broken (Gen 3:17-19 describes how Adam would have to begin working).
- The relationship was broken.
- And they were driven out of the physical place of rest.

That is the foundation to any subsequent passage in which God’s rest is the subject. God completes a great work that provides on-going benefits characterized as rest, and people enter into that rest through belief and responding faithfully to what God has commanded. The primary result is the benefit of an on-going relationship between God and people.

Just as in the previous chapter, here in chapter 4 the writer quotes from Psalm 95. He quotes verse 11 of that Psalm two more times in chapter 4 (vv. 3, 5), where he uses the phrase “My rest.” The words of that quotation were spoken by God, so it is a reference once again to God’s rest. In this case, the setting is the promised land. But the principles related to God’s rest are the same as in the Garden of Eden.

The great work of God was giving the Israelites the victory in the conquest of the land. And

the rest that resulted was having possession of a land described as “flowing with milk and honey” (Lev 20:24). The people entered into that rest by believing what God had said and responding faithfully. The benefit was a continuous relationship in the land of Israel between Adonai and the people.

In Hebrews 4, we can apply these elements concerning God’s rest in the same way.

- v. 2 – The great work of God referenced here is the Good News or the gospel (Gr. *euangelion*). Romans 1:16 tells us that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” According to 2 Timothy 1:10, the gospel brings “life and immortality.” And we know that these things are the result of Yeshua dying on our behalf. His death is the completed work of God that produces a state of spiritual rest.
- v. 3 – Just as in Genesis and Psalm 95, this verse shows that belief is the way that people enter God’s rest, in this case belief of the Gospel. Being consistent then, the result of entering God’s rest is having the benefit of an on-going relationship with the Lord, along with eternal life, forgiveness of sin, divine intercession and protection, access to the Father, spiritual gifts, rewards. These are all continuous benefits.

The words “we who have believed” are written in Greek in the form of an aorist participle, which is past action with continuing results. The past action is when we believe in Yeshua and His death as our atonement for sin. And the continuing results are those benefits we just mentioned. Thus the original language supports the point we have seen in the greater context. Just as God’s great work of redemption in the past does not need to be repeated, and that it creates results that do not end, when we believe in Yeshua, it is a one-time act of faith that never has to be repeated, and the benefits have continuing results that do not end. So we can see how God’s rest begins for us at the moment we believe in Yeshua, and continues uninterrupted throughout our lives, on into the Messianic kingdom to come, and ultimately without end in our eternal dwelling place.

- v. 6 – The author brings these principles regarding entering God’s rest into contemporary real-world settings. He was writing to a specific audience, but these words have a general application. “It remains for some to enter it” means that every community of believers tends to have some people who have not yet entered God’s rest. They participate but they aren’t saved.

And then he looks at the issue from a slightly different angle by saying that there are also people who have heard the gospel but they disobey God by not believing it. Perhaps it is a reference to two groups in a church or Messianic congregation where there are seekers who haven’t yet believed and people who are merely content in being religious and have no intent in believing.

- v. 7 – Either way, they presently are outside of God’s rest, and the writer quotes from Psalm 95:7 for the third time by emphasizing the importance of believing today. He seems to be making this kind of emphasis because it is human nature to keep putting off making a commitment, eventually to the point that we decide to refuse it altogether. This is consistent with the warning not to “harden your hearts.”

- vv. 8-9 – The writer contrasts two kinds of rest – the rest that came in Joshua’s day and what he characterizes as “a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” This is not a reference to

observing the weekly Sabbath. The people in Joshua's day and the audience of the book of Hebrews all were Sabbath observant, so there is no contrast. Remember, he has been discussing the concept of rest in the two contexts of creation and dwelling in the Promised Land. So in order to be consistent, his use of the phrase "Sabbath rest" is a reference to the Sabbath rest of God during the time of creation.

Distinctions are evident between the two kinds of rest in verses 8 and 9. The rest that people received in Joshua's day gave them physical rest that they had not enjoyed as a nation during 400 years of slavery in Egypt. It also gave them possession of land and the ability to worship Adonai. Although both of those things continued for a long time, they didn't endure perfectly. The nation lost them once and at the time of the writing of this letter, they were about to lose them again with the destruction of Jerusalem. So the rest of Joshua's day was temporal in nature.

On the other hand, the Sabbath rest of God during the time of creation was eternal in nature. His work never had to be repeated, and He never stopped resting from it. This point is illustrated by each of the first six days of the week of creation being delimited by the words, "there was evening and there was morning," which describes a beginning and an end to each day. But no such words are used for the seventh day. There was no limitation to God's rest—once He rests, it is eternal in nature. So the point is that we who believe in Yeshua have the privilege of entering into God's rest, described here as "a Sabbath rest for the people of God," and it is unending just as God's rest never ceases.

- v. 10 – This verse confirms that connection: "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."
- v. 11 – The author sums this discussion up by exhorting the recipients of the letter to make sure they enter God's rest—the kind of rest that always endures. And that come from believing in Yeshua.
- vv. 12-13 – Two important reasons are given for entering God's rest through faith in Yeshua—the Word of God and the eyes of God. The Greek term translated as "word" here is *logos*. In the New Testament, that term can refer to Scripture or to Yeshua (Jn 1:1,14). The descriptive phrases in v. 12 help us to determine what the Word of God means in this context.
  - It is living (NASB, NIV), quick (KJV, archaic for living), alive (CJB). Yeshua clearly is alive. But that term also applies to the written Word. It is not a dead book. It is a record of the life that God gives, both physical and spiritual. God said about his recorded words: "Do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you" (Prov 3:1-2).
  - It is active (NASB, NIV), powerful (KJV), at work (CJB). The Greek word *energes*, from which we get the English word energy, literally means, "by a work" and can be thought of as getting something done. It is translated in other places in Scripture as "effectual" (i.e. Jas 5:16). Once again, you can see how Yeshua is undeniably powerful and gets things done. He would not be deterred from His calling and He changes lives. God's written Word is also effectual, as these verses demonstrate:

“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11).

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16)

- “Sharper than any two-edged sword.” The original Greek conveys something rather remarkable. The word is *distomos*, which is made up of the words “two” and “mouth.” So it literally means two-mouthed, not two-edged. It is used several times in Scripture, including in the *Tanakh* where it uses the Hebrew word for mouth (*peh*). But it is common in Greek literature (i.e. Homer) for this word not to be taken literally. Instead it refers to a leading or front edge, similar to the way our mouth is on the front edge of our face. So a sword with two mouths or two edges has two sides that lead or penetrate. It’s an interesting term that adds a second layer of meaning, in that the written Word of God was originally spoken orally (from the mouth) by God or by prophets. The greater context of Scripture demonstrates that this term “two-edged sword” can apply to both the written Word and Yeshua:

“It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’” (Mat 4:4).

“Out of His [Yeshua’s] mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength” (Rev 1:16).

- “Piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow” is an interesting choice of terms. Notice that he makes a distinction between the soul and spirit, which is consistent with other passages (i.e. 1 Thes 5:23). Our soul is that inner part of who we are as a person that includes our mind, emotions and will. Our spirit is an even deeper dimension of our being that enables us to be aware of the existence of God and to discern things in the spiritual realm. That is where the Holy Spirit does the work of regeneration when we believe in Yeshua. Together with our physical body, our soul and our spirit is what makes each of us unique as a person. Notice also that it says joints, not just bones. Joints are the thickest, hardest parts of bone. Marrow is the soft, inner part. And this sword can cut through it all. There is no aspect of our lives, both spiritual or physical that it cannot penetrate, and can separate out issues related to the three aspects of our lives—body, soul and spirit.

How, then does the written Word do that? It provides answers to every aspect of our lives. It can “pierce” us when we read it and feel convicted. The same is true regarding Yeshua. He understood and taught about how our inner thoughts and motives lead to outward actions. And He demonstrated great discernment in the spiritual realm, like his encounter with the rich young man in Matthew 19, and when He told the Samaritan women at the well in John 4 that she had five ex-husbands and was living with another man, when naturally-speaking there was no way He could have known that. So once again, this description of the way a two-edged sword works applies to both Scripture and Yeshua.

- The same is true for the last phrase in verse 12 about being “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” When we read the Word of God, it makes it very clear where we stand before God, and it describes in detail what the

consequences are for disobeying Him, and the blessings or rewards for doing what He has said. That is judgment. But we need to recognize that the Torah, in particular, didn't not really address inner motivations. That was the superior manner of Yeshua. So when we turn to the Word of God for guidance in judging "the thoughts and intentions of the heart" it is really Yeshua that is the source. But in general, this description applies to the written Word of God and Yeshua as the *Logos* or Word.

- In verse 13, the identity of the Word seems to have a more narrow focus. Notice the pronouns—His and Him. Greek follows the grammatical rule regarding antecedents. An antecedent is the word that a pronoun refers back to. It usually is the subject of the previous sentence or a phrase at the beginning of a sentence. And the pronoun will always agree in gender and number with the antecedent. Here, the antecedent of the His and Him pronouns of verse 13 is the subject of verse 12—the Word of God, which is likewise in the masculine singular. So the way that we view verse 13 must also apply to verse 12.

Based on the vision-related actions of the subject in verse 13, it cannot refer to Scripture. Nowhere does the Bible associate any kind of vision with Scripture. But many places it refers to the Lord seeing and knowing all things. A similar passage to this verse is 1 Corinthians 4:5 that says about Yeshua: "Wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts." Yeshua matches the subject of both verses 12 and 13, which preserves the focus that has been on Him since the beginning of the book.

On the other hand, if you view verse 12 without context, you can see how Scripture also accomplishes what is described there. The written Word of God is potent in all of those ways. But it is impersonal. Yeshua is the ultimate subject who is not just alive and active, piercing and dividing, but capable of seeing within our very being.

With these thoughts in mind, we can see that the writer to Hebrews has been driving home the importance of believing in Yeshua. And he has been using figurative speech to emphasize that point. The terms God's rest, Sabbath rest and Word of God are all part of his theses, and all find their fulfillment in Yeshua. His point is that there are great consequences if we do not enter into God's rest, and if we fail to acknowledge His great, completed works of creation as the Sovereign Lord and the cross as the redeeming Savior, as well as ignoring how He knows everything about us. Thus, every element of this passage fits together with the purpose of demonstrating how important it is to believe in Yeshua with all that you are as a person.