

The Great Promise of Rest

Text: Hebrews 4:1-3

Date: 3-17-24

God has given mankind an opportunity for rest, but there is a condition: belief in God is central to gaining a full inheritance.

I. The opportunity to rest (Heb. 4:1)

What is rest? This word (Greek: *katapausis*) means *to cease from work whereby action, labor, and work are discontinued*. Spiritually speaking, *rest* means “a change of state from activity or work to a cessation from work that results in a feeling of refreshing tranquility and an absence of tension or worry; especially that God provides”.¹

In the wilderness days this applied to the *rest of the Promised Land*. The Promised Land afforded both physical and spiritual rest through the direct hand of God’s provisions. Deut. 12:9-10. All the blessings, freedom, peace, and care would come from God’s hand in the Promised Land. The people could rest under God’s control.

Some options for the meaning of rest:

- Rest is a privilege
- Rest is not certain for all believers
- Rest is peace
- Rest does not mean trouble and trials disappear for we still live in a sin-cursed world.
- “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”.²
- Rest means stability and an anchoring in salvation.
- Rest is confidently trusting and resting in and upon God. Prov. 3:5-6 illust.
- Rest is blessing.
- Rest can only be offered by God and can be obtained through Christ alone. “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”.³
- Rest pertains to the spiritual life on this earth but has a complete fulfillment in the future kingdom and ultimately in eternity.
- Rest in this context though may equate to the future Second Coming of Christ and all of the inheritance of our future glorification.

Just as the Jews failed to obtain rest in the OT on account of unbelief, so will many millions never truly achieve rest for failure of not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet according to this passage so too will some believers fail to trust God and never fully realize the earthly rest of being in Christ.

- The writer declares that the *promise of rest still stands for this current generation of the church*. I think this refers predominately to believers. Of course, this also applies to unbelievers. The unbeliever today still has the possibility of rest if they believe in Christ.

¹ Brannan, R., ed. (2020). In *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Lexham Press.

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1983). *Hebrews* (p. 96). Moody Press.

³ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1983). *Hebrews* (p. 97). Moody Press.

- The writer declares that the believers *should fear*. This is not a fear of being afraid of condemnation. This is a reverential awe which is produced through recognition of God's amazing attributes and all that He has and will accomplish for us.
- The writer declares a reiteration to these Jewish believers. Perhaps the believers had thought they had missed the Second Coming. The writer assures the readers that the *promise* was still coming. So hold fast. Fear God. Trust Him. The promise is still in place.
- And for those unbelievers this would be a warning of missing out on the inheritance.

Explanation/ any of you should seem to come short of it:

- The idea of *should seem* (Greek: *dokeo*) means *to think, to suppose*. Taken at face value the definition would indicate that the writer desired to reassure the fearful believers who *thought* they might miss the rest.
- The second idea places the emphasis on *seem* as *be judged* or *be found* which serves as a warning to the readers that some may have been *found* who missed the promised rest.

Application:

- The promise remains! Jesus is coming again. We will gain our inheritance.
- It is not too late! For those believers, even though their nation had killed their Messiah, He was alive and at work (Heb. 1:1ff). They needed to believe and trust in God's promises. We need to do the same today. We may wonder: when is He coming? Scoffers say the same thing. The truth is He is Coming Again.
- For the unbelieving who are in church, there was still time to trust Christ because it wasn't too late.
- Rest is coming! You may say well, if I don't believe it, then that won't change it. And you would be correct. But your life will be torn apart in doubt and despair. Your spiritual life will crumble in this unbelieving world.
- Rest remains and it is important that we trust God for it now because it brings stability, encouragement, and hope.
- Christ is sufficient and so is Christianity. The Hebrew believers did not need to go back to Judaism in hopes that they might find their rest in the old ways. No, Christ alone is all the rest they need for their lives.

Conclusion: One could take the verse as a warning that just as the OT generation missed the rest of the Promised Land; therefore there were some in the Hebrew's day that also were in danger of missing the rest on account of unbelief. Here rest would apply to either a lack of earthly peace/blessing or future heavenly rewards. The other main option would be that the promise of rest was still available and that the believers should fear God knowing He will keep His promise as they go through trials. It was not too late for they had not missed the Second Coming and all the rest that Christ will provide in their future inheritance.

Personally here is my view: The rest ultimately refers to the totality of our future inheritance. Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the *heir of all things* (1:2). At that time all of His enemies will be made subject to Him (10:13). The time of the fulfillment where Christ is made heir of all things is at His Second Coming. We will partake of being *heirs* in the future salvation (1:14). Although clearly not yet, one day the believer will have his rightful dominion back again (2:8) based on the finished work of Jesus Christ. Just as the OT children failed to gain their inheritance because of unbelief and disobedience, some believers will fail to achieve all of their potential inheritance in the future. This does not mean a loss of salvation but of reward. Rewards for faithfulness are mentioned multiple times in Hebrews (6:11-12; 10:35-36; 11:6, 26, 39). The future kingdom is mentioned in the book as an important topic (1:8; 12:28) with the key applicable verse found in Isa. 11:10. Over and over in the hall of faith chapter, the emphasis is placed on a future inheritance (11:10; 13; 16; 26-27; 39).

For the believer, this verse (4:1) indicates the promise of rest is still on the table and still to come. Therefore, let us seek to enter into that rest (4:11). While there may be some part of rest attached to earthly salvation, the main rest that the writer of Hebrews points to is our complete spiritual inheritance beginning with the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ and lasting for all eternity. Either the writer is reassuring the believers that Christ is still coming and the inheritance will be obtained or warning that unbelief may face loss of rewards/part of the inheritance in the future.

II. The particulars of rest (Heb. 4:2-3)

****By faith**

Believers can hear the good news of the promise of our future inheritance. But, it will not help them to live rightly, exercise endurance and patience, and will not profit us on this earth if we fail to trust God and do not believe Him. The main point of the writer is that the believing church would turn to God, hear His promise for rest, and believe His word. It is then and only then we will fully experience His rest now and in the future. In order to profit now from this invitation to rest, we must exercise faith.

****God's rest**

It is a serious matter to both believe and to not believe. God had planned rest from the beginning. This is a quote from Ps. 95:11. Despite the truth that God's work was done from the foundation of the world, and that He had made the promise in anger to not give rest to the OT generation, those who appropriated by faith in God would enter into His rest today. Rest was available since the beginning of time and was based on the rest God Himself enjoyed. The rest offered for the OT generation was no more than a symbol or type of rest and was forfeited for lack of trust.

The author now states that believers can enter into God's rest. Certainly, there are aspects of God's rest on this earth – blessings and peace. But the ultimate consummation, our inheritance, is yet to come.