

WARNING TWO (PART II): FEAR — LEST YOU MISS GOD'S REST HEBREWS 04:01–13

Introduction

This is a passage that should be preached to believers time and again. It is a passage that discusses the glorious promise of God's rest, but it is also a warning — a warning desperately needed by all: be careful — lest you miss God's rest.

- I. The warning: be careful — lest you come short of God's rest (v. 1).
- II. Reason 1: the gospel of rest has been preached (v. 2).
- III. Reason 2: God has declared that unbelievers shall not enter His rest (v. 3).
- IV. Reason 3: there is a rest and there has been since creation (vv. 3-10).
- V. Reason 5: a person can fall into disobedience (vv. 11-13).

I. Hebrews 04: 01 Warning: Be Careful; God's Rest

The warning is direct and forceful — be careful lest you should come short of God's rest. What is *God's rest*? What is the rest that is offered us in God? Look at the illustrations in verses 4-9 to see the meaning of the believer's rest. Rest does not mean inactivity. God has not been inactive since creation: He has been very active. He has been administering the universe and working out the salvation of man (cp. Jn. 5:17; Rom. 8:18). Therefore, when the Bible speaks of rest for the believer, it does not mean a state or life of inactivity for the believer. It does not mean that the believer sits and lies around or goes about relaxing and doing what he wants. It does not mean that the believer is freed from duty and responsibility. Contrariwise, the believer's rest means something far more meaningful and hopeful. In fact, it offers the most glorious hope imaginable to man.

1. There is the rest of satisfaction and pleasure with one's life and work. This is seen in God's rest after creation (v. 3-4). After God created the world, which took six days, He rested on the seventh day. As said above, this does not mean that God stopped all activity after creation. The very opposite is true: He has been looking after the universe since creation, and He has been very busy working out the salvation of men. This is not a rest of inactivity, of doing nothing. When Scripture says that God rested after creation, it means that God was pleased and satisfied with the work of creation. The job of creation was done and it was completed. There was a sense of completion and satisfaction within God; the sense of completion and faction rested within the soul of God. He was at rest and at peace with what He had done. Therefore, the believer's rest is a sense of completion, of satisfaction, of pleasure with his life and work. When a believer really believes and trusts God, he receives the rest of God, a deep sense of fulfilment with his life and work.
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Mat 11:29 *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Heb 4:3-4 *Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.”*

2. There is the rest of deliverance and of salvation. This is the rest of Canaan (v. 5-6). In the Bible...

- the promised land of Canaan is a type of heaven and of the eternal rest God has promised to believers.
- the enslavement of the Jews by Egypt is a type of the world's bondage and enslavement of man.
- the wilderness wanderings are a type of the daily struggles, trials, temptations and storms of life that a person has to pass through in this life.

Therefore, the believer's rest means the most glorious deliverance and salvation imaginable — so glorious that a person must not fail to secure this rest.

⇒ The believer's rest means the deliverance and salvation from the slavery and bondage of this world (Egypt), from its sin and death.

⇒ The believer's rest means the rest of conscience when one has ceased his struggle in the wilderness wanderings of life — the trials, temptations and storms of life.

⇒ The believer's rest means the rest of conquest and triumph while one is entering and conquering the enemies of the promised land of heaven — day by day.

Exo 33:14 *The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*

Psa 55:6 *I said, “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.”*

Psa 116:7 *Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you.*

Isa 30:15 *This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.*

Isa 28:12 *To whom he said, “This is the resting place, let the weary rest”; and, “This is the place of repose” — but they would not listen.*

3. There is the rest of a new day, of another day that shall be far better than this day — a day that will bring perfection and eternal life to the human soul (v. 7-8). It is the rest of confidence, of assurance, of knowledge, of hope, of perfect peace in the future. All the bondages and enslavements of this life have been conquered in Christ, even death. And there is now hope of eternal life — of heaven, of an eternal and perfect rest for the people of God.

Rev 14:13 *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour; for their deeds will follow them."*

Isa 14:3 *On the day the LORD gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage.*

The point is this: we can miss God's rest; we can come short of it. Israel did and we can. Therefore, we must be careful lest we miss it. The word *careful* means that we should be actively afraid and concerned lest we miss God's rest. The matter is of critical concern; it is a matter of life and death, of eternal life and eternal death.

Luke 1:50 *His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.*

Acts 10:35 *But accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.*

Phil 2:12 *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*

1 Pet 1:17 *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*

Psa 31:19 *How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.*

Prov 14:26-27 *He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.*

II. Hebrews 04:02 God's Rest has been Proclaimed

We can come short of God's rest because the gospel of rest has been preached. God's rest was preached to Israel — loudly and clearly. There was no excuse, for Israel knew about the glorious news:

- => There is a deep-seated rest that we can possess within our hearts, a satisfaction with our lives.
- => There is a rest of deliverance and salvation through the wilderness of this life — through all the trials and temptations and storms of life.
- => There is a rest of a new day — of perfection and of eternal life.

This gospel — the glorious message of God's rest — was preached to Israel, and it has been preached to us. But note the warning: the Word did not profit Israel. Why? Because Israel did not mix the Word with faith. They did not believe in the Word of God. They rejected the promise of God's Word that promised a rest to the soul of the believer.

Thought 1. The warning is clear: we must believe the Word, the gospel of God's rest, or else we shall miss His rest. And we must never forget: we are much more responsible because of Jesus Christ. God's own Son, One far greater than Moses, is the One who has brought us the message of God's rest.

John 3:36 *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*

Acts 10:36 *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*

Heb 3:12 *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*

Heb 4:11 *Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*

III. **Hebrews 04:03** *God's Rest is for the Believer*

We can come short of God's rest because God has declared that unbelievers shall not enter His rest. This verse is clear: the person who believes enters God's rest, but the person who does not believe does not enter. And the tragic fact is conclusive: God has sworn that the unbeliever shall not enter His rest. The unbeliever has no hope, nothing to look forward to in this life except trials, sufferings, emptiness, loneliness, disease, accidents, temptations and death — a life without permanent meaning, significance and purpose. He has nothing to look forward to in the future life except judgment, condemnation and alienation from God. God has sworn: the person who does not believe in His Son — that eternal rest, deliverance and salvation are in Jesus Christ — shall not enter into His rest. There shall be no peace, no deliverance, no salvation, no new day for the unbeliever.

John 3:18 *"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."*

John 3:36 *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*

John 8:24 *"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."*

Heb 3:12 *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*

Heb 4:11 *Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*

IV. *Hebrews 04:03–10 Rest, A Living Reality since Creation*

We can come short of God's rest because the rest of God actually exists. The truth of God's rest is a living reality, and God's rest has existed since creation. The gospel of God's rest is not a fabrication, not a false hope created by man's imagination. It is not an escape mechanism used by some to handle their fear of death. The rest of God is truth — it is a living reality that actually exists. Therefore if a person ignores, neglects or denies God's rest, he can miss it. As stated, man can enter God's rest; he can have an abundance of rest, an abundance of life in this world and an eternal rest and life in the next world. How do we know this? How do we know that God's rest is a reality, that it actually exists? There are five proofs.

1. The fact that God rested after creation proves that there is a rest for God's people (v. 4). God laboured and worked in creating the world and then He rested. He stood back and looked over His work and experienced the deepest sense of satisfaction and completion. The sense of satisfaction and completion *rested* in His soul. This clearly shows us that there is a rest of life and work, of satisfaction and pleasure with who we are and with what we do.
2. God's promise to Israel of the promised land (Canaan rest) is proof that there is a rest for God's people (v. 5-6; cp. Psa. 95:11). God's promise cannot fail. There was a rest for the people of Israel and they did not enter (v. 5). But note: the fact that God's rest existed and that He promised it to believers means that some must enter His rest. God's eternal rest does not exist to remain empty and to be void of people. Some must enter the Canaan rest of heaven. Since Israel did not enter, the only conclusion that can be drawn is this: God's rest still exists. Believers can still enter God's rest.
3. God's promise of a new day to David proves that there is a rest for God's people (v. 7; cp. Psa. 95:7-8). As verse seven says, it was a long time after Israel's entrance into Canaan when the Holy Spirit spoke through David saying, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts," but enter God's rest. God's rest still existed in the days of David; therefore, the *physical land of Canaan* could not have been the rest promised to Israel. God's rest is spiritual and eternal, the rest of man's spirit in this world and in the eternal world. God's rest still exists.
4. God's promise of *Another Day* even after the days of Joshua proves that there is a rest for God's people (v. 8-9; cp. Psa. 94:7-11). When Joshua led Israel into Canaan, the people did not enter the rest that the Holy Spirit was speaking about. If they had, then the Holy Spirit would not have said that the rest was still available in Psa. 95 which was written five hundred years later (Kenneth Wuest. *Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p. 87). Joshua did provide some rest to Israel (Josh. 21:44: 22:4), but it was not the complete fulfilment of God's promise. God's rest is spiritual and eternal, the spiritual confidence and security of peace and life, both now and forever. There remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God.

5. The rest of Jesus Christ from all His work proves that there is a rest for God's people (v. 10). This verse can equally apply to man and Christ. Most commentators apply it to man saying...
- when man enters God's rest, he no longer struggles through all the trials and temptations of life. He conquers and triumphs over them.

However, it seems that the author of Hebrews is proving the fact that there is a rest for God's people. And there is no greater proof than the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ after His work upon earth. When He accomplished the work of redemption and salvation, He entered His rest, the rest of the promised land of heaven — to abide in its glory and magnificence forever. It is the rest of Jesus Christ, His resurrection into God's eternal rest, that proves above all else that there is a rest for God's people.

Mat 11:29 "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for Your souls."

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Prov 14:26-27 He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

V. *Hebrews 04:11–13 Warning against Disobedience*

We can come short of God's rest because a person can fall into disobedience. Note three points.

1. First, a person must make every effort to enter God's rest or else he will fall into disobedience. The word "effort" (spoudazzo) means to endeavour, give all diligence, be zealous, strive eagerly, exert one's self and make haste. There is no place for sleepiness or laziness, complacency or lethargy. Unless a person labours with all diligence, he will fall just as Israel fell. And remember Israel's experience: the people would make an effort for a while and then fall back for awhile; make an effort again and then fall back again. Israel lived an up and down life, and the nation was not allowed to enter God's rest. There is no place for inconsistency, no place for living an up and down life — not in God's rest. Diligence — labouring every day — is an absolute essential. We must make every effort or else fall from God's rest as Israel fell.

Luke 13:24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."

1 Cor 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Phil 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

Col 1:29 To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

2. God's Word judges the heart (see *The Living Word of God*, Heb. 4:12). God's Word promises rest to those who believe. And note: His Word of promise is not a lifeless letter; it is not paper and ink. God's Word and His promise are living — they are a living reality. Four things are said about the Word of God and His promises.
 - a. The Word of God is "living" (zon): alive and living. The idea is that the Word of God is always alive and active; it is always working and quickening its message to the human heart. Therefore, God's word of rest is not a dead and meaningless promise; it is living and full of life to the heart of the believer.
 - b. The Word of God is "active" (energes): working, energizing, powerful. God's word of promise. His rest of salvation, is powerful. It is not dormant and inactive. It is actually active and working, energizing the heart of the believer.
 - c. The Word of God is "sharper than any double-edged sword." The word "sharper" (tomoteros) means to cut. It is penetrating and convicting. It does not leave a soul alone. The Word of God will not let a soul who hears it ignore God's promise of rest.

d. The Word of God is “penetrating” (*diiknoumenos*): to go through. It goes right through to the soul and spirit of man. It is the Word of God that takes man's earthly, soulish nature and separates it from the spiritual call and promise of God. It penetrates and separates a man's soul and spirit just as a sword pierces a man's joints and marrow.

⇒ It separates a proud soul from a humble spirit.

⇒ It separates a sinful soul from a righteous spirit.

⇒ It separates a rebellious soul from an obedient spirit.

⇒ It separates an unbelieving soul from a believing spirit.

e. The Word of God “judges the thoughts and attitudes [purpose] of the heart.” The word “judges” (*kritikos*) means to judge, to sift and analyse. “The Word of God is able to penetrate into the furthest recesses of a person's spiritual being, sifting out and analysing the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Kenneth Wuest. *Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p. 89).

God's Word sees whether a person believes or does not believe His promise of rest. God's Word actually sees through the thoughts and attitudes of a person.

Rom 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

2 Tim 3:16 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

Jer 23:29 *“Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”*

Heb 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

Jer 5:14 *Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says: “Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.*

3. God sees all things. He knows if we believe in Him and His promise of eternal rest or not. He knows if we are making a false profession or if we are truly following Christ.

Heb 4:13 *“And not a creature exists that is concealed from His sight, but all things are open and exposed, naked and defenceless to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do” (Amplified New Testament).*

Job 10:14 *If I sinned, you would be watching me and would not let my offense go unpunished.*

Jer 2:22 *“Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me,” declares the Sovereign LORD.*

Job 14:16 Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin.

Jer 16:17 My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes.

Ezek 11:5 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon me, and he told me to say: "This is what the Lord says: That is what you are saying, O house of Israel, but I know what is going through your mind."

Hosea 7:2 But they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before me.

Amos 5:12 For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

Luke 12:2 "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known."

John 2:24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.

1 Cor 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the LORD comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Num 32:23 "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out."

Eccl 12:14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. ■

HEBREWS 04:12 WORD OF GOD; BIBLE

*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. **Hebrews 04:12***

Scripture says several things about the Word of God being living and active (cp. Isa. 49:2).

1. The Word of God is the penetrating sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). It strikes and arouses an awareness of one's immortal spirit and judges one's thoughts and attitudes (Heb. 4:12).
2. The Word of God is the reflecting mirror of life (Jas. 1:22-25). It reflects and exposes the kind of person one is (Rom. 3:9-27).
3. The Word of God is the burning fire of conviction (Jer. 23:29). It burns and consumes the heart, the conscience of men (Jer. 5:14; Lk. 24:32).

4. The Word of God is the pounding hammer which crushes the hardness of man's heart (Jer. 23:29).
5. The Word of God is the reproducing seed of the new birth (1 Pet. 2:23). Man is spiritually born again by hearing and believing the Word (Rom. 10:17).
6. The Word of God is the nourishing food of the believer (1 Pet. 2:2-3). The believer grows and lives and is built up through the study of the Word (Mt. 4:4; Acts 20:32; Heb. 5:12-14).
7. The Word of God is the guiding light of the believer (Psa. 119:105).
8. The Word of God is the cleansing water of sanctification (Jn. 15:3; 17:17). God washes and cleanses His own, the church, through the use of the Word (Eph. 5:25b-26).
9. The Word of God is the measuring instrument by which one receives the approval of God (2 Tim. 2:15). □