

Hebrews 4
March 6, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

DEB: Age ranges [0-9yrs, 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59]

Q: May I get a show of hands of those who made their decision to proclaim Jesus as your Lord and Savior when you were “x” [put tally marks for each category]

Q: For those of us who made our decision by 19 yrs of age, who did you mostly rely on to introduce you to Jesus? [Parents]

Q: For those of you who made your decision from 20yrs old and later, who did you mostly rely on to introduce you to Jesus? [Parents? Pastor? Best friend?]

No matter how old you were when you made your decision for Christ, we all trusted key people in our lives who showed us that Jesus was the only One whom we should be putting our faith in. Each of us began our spiritual journey following Jesus. But then life happened!

Q: Do you remember the first time as a believer when you perhaps experienced “disillusionment” about your Christian faith? Maybe you asked, “Did I really sign up for this?” [Let people share]

My story: I made my decision for Christ at age 10. I experienced disillusionment in the faith when parents divorced when I was 13. Both of my parents are committed Christians. Dad was a deacon, he ministered to the persecuted Russian Christians and smuggled bibles to Russia. Mother taught young children as a Sunday School teacher, and she was an organist at her local church in her younger years. Both were Christ followers, but I could not understand “How could a ‘Christian marriage’ end in divorce?” If Jesus was truly at the center of their marriage, how did that happen? I still struggle with that question.

Transition: When we began our study of Hebrews, I told you that these Hebrew Christians were 2nd generation believers. [Reference Age Ranges on DEB] – I bet these Hebrew Christians made their decisions in these same age ranges. They learned about Jesus from their parents, who actually saw Jesus and His miracles. My guess is that many of them were more on the front end of their faith journey than most of us in this room. When they placed their faith in Jesus, they were told that “He was coming back ‘soon.’” But when that didn’t happen and they began to experience trials and persecution, the last thing they felt was spiritual rest. They became restless, discouraged, and disillusioned. At some level, we’ve all been there.

As we study chapter 4, pay attention to how the author tries to encourage these disillusioned Hebrew Christians. As we do so, **consider that all of us can enjoy spiritual rest found in our salvation by trusting key ATTRIBUTES of Christ that the author brings to the readers’ attention that we’ll see in the last half of this chapter.**

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 4:1-10]

V.1:

- Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

V.2:

- For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

V.3:

- 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.

V.4:

- For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.”

V.5:

- And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

V.6:

- It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.

V.7:

- Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

V.8:

- For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.

V.9:

- There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;

V.10:

- for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

Process Observations/Questions:

Observation: The phrase “enter God’s rest” shows up six times in these first ten verses. The author is trying to help these Hebrew Christians to work through their disillusionment about “entering into God’s rest” and what that means. Let’s make sure we understand what that phrase means:

OT View: God promised to bring His children into the Promised Land of Canaan. The Promised Land represented “rest” to a people who ended up wandering in the desert for forty years due to their rebellion. It was their destined spiritual inheritance as God’s chosen people. (See Deut 3:18-20; 12:9-11 if there are any questions that the promised land is paralleled with the word for inheritance – *klēronomia*)

NT View: The Canaan rest for Israel is a picture of the spiritual rest we find in Christ when we surrender to Him. When we come to Christ by faith, we find *salvation* rest (X-REF Matt. 11:28). When we yield and learn of Him and obey Him by faith, we enjoy *submission* rest (Matt. 11:29–30). The first is “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1); the second is the “peace of God” (Phil. 4:6–8). It

is by believing that we enter into rest (Heb. 4:3); it is by obeying God by faith and surrendering to His will that the rest enters into us.

Q V.1: According to the author, is the invitation to “enter His rest” an open or closed invitation? [Open]

Q: What mistake is the writer not wanting these Hebrew Christians to make? [He doesn't want them to forget that they are already “heirs” (1:14) and that their “inheritance” is already theirs. He doesn't want them to turn away from what is already theirs!]

the “gospel” was preached to us V.2: (lit., “we were evangelized” or “we were given good news”). But this good news does not always refer to the plan of salvation from sin. In some circles the word “gospel” has acquired a sense too technical and narrow to do justice to the writer's ideas here. What was preached to the Israelites of old was, quite clearly, God's offer of rest. This, of course, was “good news” for them just as it is for people now, but it is not exactly what is meant today by “gospel.” But as the whole context shows, his concern was with the good news about a future rest for God's people (cf. Heb. 4:10), not with the fundamental facts Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 15.

Q V.2: What does the author suggest must be exercised to enjoy the gift of spiritual rest? [Faith]

Q V.3: Have these Hebrew Christians already “entered into God's rest?” [YES - The writer's concern was not about their original faith in the past, but their perseverance in it (cf. 3:6, 14). Faith remains the prerequisite for entrance into rest, since it was to those who failed to exercise faith that God **declared** by **oath** they would not **enter** into His **rest**.]

Q V.4-5: With considerable enrichment of thought, the author then linked God's Sabbath-rest at the time of Creation with the rest that the Israelites missed in the desert. **God rested** when He finished His creative activity and this kind of experience has, ever since, lain open to people who also finish the **work** that is set before them (cf. v. 10). When, as with the nation in the wilderness, a task is left unfinished, of such it must be said, **They shall never enter My rest**.

Q V.6-7: What is the good news the writer offers in these two verses? [God renewed the offer (in Ps. 95) as late as the time of David. At that time **God again set a certain day, calling it Today**, thus presenting this opportunity to all readers of the psalm for whom the “Today” becomes their own “Today.” Already the writer had applied that “Today” to his readers (cf. Heb. 3:14–15)]

Q v.8-10: Joshua could not lead all the people into “God's rest” because of their unbelief. Likewise, the believer today cannot enjoy a fully satisfying Christian life unless he believes all the promises of God, and even then he looks forward to that perfect future rest.

Summary V.1-10: The argument in this section is given in several propositions: (1) God finished His work and rested, so that His rest has been available since Creation. (2) The Jews failed to enter into their rest, i.e. they failed to claim their inheritance as God's “heirs.” (3) Many years later (Ps. 95), God said that a rest was still available. That “today” is still here! This means that

Joshua did not lead all Israelites into their rest, because a rest still remains as long as it's called "Today."

[Read Heb 4:11-16]

V.11:

- Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

V.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.

V.13:

- Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

V.14:

- Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

V.15:

- For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

V.16:

- Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.12: The author wants the Hebrew Christians remember the power of God's Word:

- God's Word that is eternal is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword
- His Word penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

Q: Why do you think this was important for the Hebrew Christians to understand the power of God's Word? [It is able to discriminate successfully between what is spiritual in man and what is of the flesh (**it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit**), and does so even when mixed motivations are interwoven as closely as **joints and marrow**. The inner life of a Christian is often a mix of motivations that are both genuinely spiritual and completely human. It takes a supernaturally discerning agent such as the Word of God to sort these out and to expose what is of the flesh. The readers might think that they were contemplating certain steps out of purely spiritual motivations when, as God's Word could show them, they were acting unfaithfully as did Israel of old.]

Process: For the rest of this chapter, let's tag the ATTRIBUTES of Jesus that the writer highlights to help these Christians move through their own disillusionment:

Q V.13: What attribute do you see described in this verse? [God is omnipresent – nothing is hidden from God's sight. He sees it all! The author is reinforcing that God can see their motives and that someday they will stand before God to give an account!]

Q V.14: What attributes do you see described in this verse? [Jesus is the GREAT high priest; Jesus is the Son of God]

Q: Aaron and many others were “high priests,” but only Jesus was called the “Great high priest.” What makes Him “great?” [He has gone through the heavens (Aaron did not); Jesus was God (no other priest was God); He ministers from a heavenly tabernacle, not an earthly one.]

Q V.15: Because Jesus is the Great High Priest, what other attributes do you see emphasized? [He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He’s been tempted in every way, yet was without sin.]

Q V.16: What kind of throne does Christ sit on? [A throne of GRACE!]

Q: How are we to approach His throne of grace? [With confidence, a holy boldness, to receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.]

Q: So if you assembled these discouraged and disillusioned Hebrew Christians, how would you paraphrase today’s lesson to lift their spirits and help them to see what they already have?! [Let people attempt this.]

LOOK:

It’s a given that believers have “entered God’s rest” by proclaiming Christ as our Savior. As we learned in today’s lesson, if you ever get disillusioned about your faith walk, TRUST in Jesus’s attributes of being omnipresent, our great high priest, one who sympathizes with us in our weakness, one who is very approachable before His throne of grace and mercy.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 289–291). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Let us fear (vv. 1–8). Believers today may enter and enjoy their spiritual inheritance in Christ. We must be careful lest we fail to believe God's Word, for it is only as the Word is "mixed with faith" that it can accomplish its purposes. The argument in this section is given in several propositions: (1) God finished His work and rested, so that His rest has been available since Creation. (2) The Jews failed to enter into their rest. (3) Many years later (Ps. 95), God said that a rest was still available. That "today" is still here! This means that Joshua did not lead Israel into the true rest, because a rest still remains. (Note that the name "Jesus" in Heb. 4:8, KJV, ought to be "Joshua." "Jesus" is the Greek form of "Joshua.")

The Canaan rest for Israel is a picture of the spiritual rest we find in Christ when we surrender to Him. When we come to Christ by faith, we find *salvation* rest (Matt. 11:28). When we yield and learn of Him and obey Him by faith, we enjoy *submission* rest (Matt. 11:29–30). The first is "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1); the second is the "peace of God" (Phil. 4:6–8). It is by believing that we enter into rest (Heb. 4:3); it is by obeying God by faith and surrendering to His will that the rest enters into us.

Let us labor (vv. 9–13). "Give diligence" is a good translation of this admonition. Diligence is the opposite of "drifting" (Heb. 2:1–3). How do we give diligence? By paying close attention to the Word of God. Israel did not believe God's Word, so the rebels fell in the wilderness. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

In comparing the Word of God to a sword, the writer is not suggesting that God uses His Word to slaughter the saints! It is true that the Word cuts the heart of sinners with conviction (Acts 5:33; 7:54), and that the Word defeats Satan (Eph. 6:17). The Greek word translated "sword" means "a short sword or dagger." The emphasis is on the power of the Word to penetrate and expose the inner heart of man. The Word is a "discerner" or "critic." The Israelites criticized God's Word instead of allowing the Word to judge them. Consequently, they lost their inheritance.

Of course, God sees our hearts (Heb. 4:13); but we do not always know what is there (Jer. 17:9). God uses the Word to enable us to see the sin and unbelief in our own hearts. The Word *exposes* our hearts; and then, if we trust God, the Word *enables* our hearts to obey God and claim His promises. This is why each believer should be diligent to apply himself to hear and heed God's Word. In the Word we see God, and we also see how God sees us. We see ourselves as we really are. This experience enables us to be honest with God, to trust His will, and to obey Him.

All of this is possible because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. (The two "He's" in Heb. 4:10 refer to Jesus Christ.) God rested when He finished the work of Creation. God's Son rested when He completed the work of the new creation. We may enter into His rest by trusting His Word and obeying His will. We can do this as we listen to His Word, understand it, trust it, and obey it. Only in this way can we claim our inheritance in Christ.

Before Joshua conquered Jericho, he went out to survey the situation; and he met the Lord Jesus Christ (Josh. 5:13–15). Joshua discovered that he was second in command! The Lord had a sword in His hand, and Joshua fell at His feet in complete submission. It was this action in private that gave Joshua his public victory.

We too claim our spiritual inheritance by surrendering to Him and trusting His Word. We must beware of an evil heart of unbelief.

CHAPTER FOUR

GREATER THAN AARON THE HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 4:14–5:10

Moses did not lead the people of Israel into the promised rest; in fact, he himself was forbidden to enter the land. Joshua led them into their *physical* rest, but not into the promised *spiritual* rest (see Heb. 4:8). But what about Aaron, the first high priest? Is it possible that the Aaronic priesthood, with all of its sacrifices and ceremonies, could bring a troubled soul into rest?

The Hebrew Christians who received this letter were sorely tempted to return to the religion of their fathers. After all, any Jew could travel to Jerusalem and *see* the temple and the priests ministering at the altar. Here was something real, visible, concrete. When a person is going through persecution, as these Hebrew Christians were, it is much easier to walk by sight than by faith. Some of us have doubted the Lord under much less provocation than these people were enduring.

The central theme of Hebrews is the priesthood of Jesus Christ, what He is now doing in heaven on behalf of His people. Is the high priestly ministry of Christ superior to that of Aaron and his successors? Yes, it is; and the writer proves his assertion by presenting four arguments.

Jesus Christ Has a Superior Title (Heb. 4:14–16)

“Seeing then that we have a GREAT High Priest” (Heb. 4:14, emphasis mine). Aaron was a “high priest,” but Jesus Christ is the GREAT High Priest. No Old Testament priest could assume that title. But in what does our Lord’s greatness consist?

To begin with, Jesus Christ is both God and Man. He is “Jesus, the Son of God.” The name “Jesus” means “Saviour” and identifies His humanity and His ministry on earth. “Son of God” affirms His deity and the fact that He is God. In His unique person, Jesus Christ unites Deity and humanity, so that He can bring people to God and bring to people all that God has for them.

Not only in His *person*, but also in His *position* Jesus Christ is great. Aaron and his successors ministered in the tabernacle and temple precincts, once a year entering the holy of holies. But Jesus Christ has “passed through the heavens” (Heb. 4:14, literal translation). When He ascended to the Father, Jesus Christ passed through the atmospheric heavens and the planetary heavens into the third heaven where God dwells (2 Cor. 12:2). How much better is it to have a High Priest who ministers in a heavenly tabernacle than in an earthly one!

But there is another aspect to Christ’s position: not only is He in heaven, but He is *enthroned*. His throne is “the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16). The mercy seat on the ark of the covenant was God’s throne in Israel (Ex. 25:17–22), but it could never be called “a throne of grace.” Grace does not veil itself from the people. Grace does not hide itself in a tent.

Furthermore, the common people were not permitted to enter the holy precincts of the tabernacle and the temple, and the priests got only as far as the veil. The high priest alone went beyond the veil, and only on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). But *every believer* in Christ is invited, and is even encouraged, to “come boldly unto the throne of grace”! What a great throne it is because our Great High Priest is ministering there.

Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, is enthroned in heaven. Something else makes Him great: He is ministering mercy and grace to those who come for help. *Mercy* means that God does not

give us what we do deserve; *grace* means that He gives us what we do not deserve. No Old Testament high priest could minister mercy and grace in quite the same way. When an Israelite was tempted, he could not easily run to the high priest for help; and he certainly could not enter the holy of holies for God's help. But as believers in Jesus Christ, we can run to our High Priest at any time, in any circumstance, and find the help that we need.

Now because of the superiority of Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest, over Aaron, two important conclusions can be drawn. First, there is no need in giving up our profession just because we are going through testing and trial (Heb. 4:14). The word translated "profession" means "confession." These Hebrew Christians were tempted to give up their confession of faith in Christ and their confidence in Him (see Heb. 3:6, 14). It was not a matter of giving up their salvation, since salvation through Christ is eternal (Heb. 5:9). It was a matter of their public confession of faith. By returning to the Old Testament system, they would be telling everyone that they had no faith in Christ (see Gal. 2:11–21). This kind of unbelief would only bring reproach to Christ's name.

After all, the great purpose of salvation is the glory of God (see Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). It was the glory of God that so concerned Moses when Israel broke God's Law and made the golden calf (Ex. 32). God offered to destroy the nation and to begin a new one from Moses, but Moses refused the offer. Instead Moses interceded for Israel on the basis of God's glory and God's promise; and God spared the people, even though He disciplined them for their sin (Ex. 32:11–13).

The second conclusion is this: there is no need to go back because we can come boldly into the presence of God and get the help we need (Heb. 4:16). No trial is too great, no temptation is too strong, but that Jesus Christ can give us the mercy and grace that we need, when we need it. "But He is so far away!" we may argue. "And He is the perfect Son of God! What can He know about the problems of weak sinners like us?"

But that is a part of His greatness! When He was ministering on earth in a human body, He experienced all that we experience, *and even more*. After all, a sinless person would feel temptations and trials in a much greater way than you and I could ever feel them. Christ was tempted, yet He did not sin; and He is able to help us when we are tempted. If we fail to hold fast our confession, we are not proving that Jesus Christ has failed. We are only telling the world that *we failed* to draw on His grace and mercy when it was freely available to us.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 787-790). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

4:1. It follows from the tragic example of Israel that Christians should also take warning. This is true because **the promise of entering His rest still stands**. The NIV rendering of the last half of the verse is, **let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it**. This is possible, but the word "found" cloaks a difficulty in the underlying text, involving a word which usually means "to seem" or "to suppose." Some modern writers (Montefiore, *Héring*) prefer the meaning, "let us be careful that none of you suppose that he has missed it." Since the following context seems dedicated to demonstrating that God's rest is still open, this understanding is probably preferable.

The writer's concept of "rest" must not be separated from its Old Testament roots. The Septuagint includes notable passages where the word for rest (*katapausis*), in connection with

Israel's possession of the land, is clearly paralleled with the word for inheritance (*klēronomia*). Moses showed clearly (Deut. 3:18–20; 12:9–11) that for Israel their rest was their inheritance. In the same way it is natural to suppose that the term “rest” for the writer of Hebrews was a functional equivalent for a Christian's inheritance. That Christians are “heirs” he has already affirmed (Heb. 1:14) and will shortly do so again (6:12, 17; cf. 9:15). How exactly he understood their relationship to this inheritance will unfold as his argument proceeds. But the inheritance itself can hardly be divorced from his presentation of Messiah's kingdom and His “partners” share in that. If this needed explicit confirmation, it could be found in 12:28.

If, as just suggested, the writer was concerned that none of his readers would think they had missed their “inheritance- rest,” it is quite conceivable that he was confronting the problem of the delay in the Second Advent, which Paul himself had also already encountered at Thessalonica. The writer of Hebrews' later call to patience that the readers may “receive what He has promised” is followed by the assurance that “in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay’ ” (10:36–37). If this was God's concern, it was urgent to show that this promised “rest” is still available.

4:2. Here the writer said that **the gospel was preached to us** (lit., “we were evangelized” or “we were given good news”). But this good news does not always refer to the plan of salvation from sin. In some circles the word “gospel” has acquired a sense too technical and narrow to do justice to the writer's ideas here. What was preached to the Israelites of old was, quite clearly, God's offer of rest. This, of course, was “good news” for them just as it is for people now, but it is not exactly what is meant today by “gospel.” The Greek verb used, *euangelizomai*, was fully capable of having a nontechnical sense in the New Testament (cf. its use in Luke 1:19; 1 Thes. 3:6), but naturally the writer here did not sharply distinguish the “good news” about rest, which his readers had heard, from the “good news” to which the term “gospel” is more usually applied (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–4). But as the whole context shows, his concern was with the good news about a future rest for God's people (cf. Heb. 4:10), not with the fundamental facts Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 15.

As was already pointed out in reference to the Israelites, **the message they heard** (about rest) **was of no value to them, because** of their lack of **faith** (cf. Heb. 3:19). That is to say, through unbelief they failed to take advantage of God's offer of rest. So it follows that for the readers to profit from this invitation to rest, they had to exercise faith.

4:3. This is precisely what he then affirmed. The words *hoi pisteusantes* should be rendered “we who believe” rather than **we who have believed**. The writer's concern was not about their original faith in the past, but their perseverance in it (cf. 3:6, 14). Faith remains the prerequisite for entrance into rest, since it was to those who failed to exercise faith that God **declared** by **oath** they would not **enter** into His **rest**. This exclusion was definitive despite the fact that this rest had been established as far back as **Creation** itself.

4:4–5. With considerable enrichment of thought, the author then linked God's Sabbath-rest at the time of Creation with the rest that the Israelites missed in the desert. **God rested** when He finished His creative activity and this kind of experience has, ever since, lain open to people who also finish the **work** that is set before them (cf. v. 10). When, as with the nation in the wilderness, a task is left unfinished, of such it must be said, **They shall never enter My rest**.

4:6–7. But the failure of the Israelites did not nullify the truth **that some will enter that rest**, and accordingly God renewed the offer (in Ps. 95) as late as the time of David. At that time **God again set a certain day, calling it Today**, thus presenting this opportunity to all readers of the

psalm for whom the “Today” becomes their own “Today.” Already the writer had applied that “Today” to his readers (cf. Heb. 3:14–15).

4:8–10. But the readers were not to suppose that the promise of rest was realized in Joshua’s day. Here the author showed himself perfectly aware that the Old Testament might have been quoted to show that the **rest** had already been entered via the conquest of the land in Joshua’s time (cf. Josh. 22:4; 23:1). Probably it had been so quoted to his audience. But the writer’s rebuttal was simple and sufficient: if this had been so, **God would not have spoken later about another day**. The psalm which forms his text disproves the notion that the rest had already been entered and was no longer open.

Behind this argument lies the undeniable fact that the conquest in Joshua’s day did not lead to a permanent possession of the land. Such permanent possession of their promised inheritance had become for Judaism an expectation which would only be realized in Messiah’s kingdom. This at least was true in normative Judaism, whatever might have been true in some sectarian thought. It may be suspected that here the author confronted some form of “realized eschatology” which denied the futurity of such a hope. (Cf. the similar view of believers’ resurrection which Paul resisted, 2 Tim. 2:17–18.) If so, the Hebrews author regarded Psalm 95 as silencing such a distorted perspective. The rest—the messianic partnership—did indeed lie ahead: **There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.**

But it must now be said clearly that entering into **God’s rest** means resting from one’s **own work just as God did from His**. The statement is both a reassurance and an admonition. On the one hand it follows up the writer’s conclusion (Heb. 4:9) that there is such a rest to be entered. But on the other, it reminds the readers that this is only done by their getting to the end of their task just as did God in His creative activity. In the phrase “rests from His own work,” the author employed a kind of word play since the verb for “rest” also signifies “cease” which, against the backdrop of God’s own work, clearly suggests successful completion. This thrust is what the writer has had in mind from the beginning of the section. The readers need to model their lives after Jesus Christ who “was faithful to the One who appointed Him” (3:2) and must be careful to “hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first” (3:14; cf. 3:6). Only thus would they be able to rest from their works *in the joyful possession of their inheritance in the messianic kingdom*.

4:11. It follows logically from this that the readers should, along with the author (note, **Let us**), **make every effort to enter that rest**. Unlike the assurance which all Christians have that they possess eternal life and will be raised up to enjoy it in the presence of God (cf. John 6:39–40), the share of the companions of Messiah in His dominion over creation is attained by doing His will to the end (Rev. 2:26–27). The readers must therefore be warned by Israel’s failure in the desert and take care that they not follow Israel’s **example of disobedience**.

3. GOD’S WORD AND THE THRONE OF GRACE (4:12–16)

Having completed his exposition of Psalm 95 and Israel’s failure to enter rest, the writer brought this section of warning to a conclusion that is both sobering and comforting. God’s Word is a solemn instrument of divine judgment, but His throne is both gracious and merciful.

4:12. The lesson he had just taught from the Old Testament Scriptures was not a mere historical tale. Instead, as had already been made clear by much he had said, it was powerfully relevant to his audience. **For the Word of God is living (*zōn*) and active (*energēs*)**. Not only that, its penetrating power is greater **than any double-edged sword** and reaches the innermost being of a person so that **it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart**. In doing this, it is

able to discriminate successfully between what is spiritual in man and what is merely “soulish” or natural (**it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit**), and does so even when these often-contradictory inner elements are interwoven as closely as **joints and marrow**. The inner life of a Christian is often a strange mixture of motivations both genuinely spiritual and completely human. It takes a supernaturally discerning agent such as the Word of God to sort these out and to expose what is of the flesh. The readers might think that they were contemplating certain steps out of purely spiritual motivations when, as God’s Word could show them, they were acting unfaithfully as did Israel of old.

4:13. Let them not suppose, therefore, that their motives would go undetected for **nothing is hidden from God’s sight**. Instead, **everything is uncovered and laid bare before ... Him**. In saying this, the readers were reminded that, like all Christians, they would someday stand before the judgment seat of Christ where they **must give account** to God for their lives (cf. Rom. 14:10–12; 2 Cor. 5:10). If at that time their lives are seen to be marked by the kind of failure they have been warned against, the writer implied they will suffer loss of reward (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11–15). In this context the loss they suffer will be that of their inheritance-rest.

4:14. But this need not be so. On the contrary there is every reason to **hold firmly to the faith we profess** in view of the fact that the believers’ **great High Priest ... has gone through the heavens**. Only once previously (2:1–3:6) had the writer referred explicitly to the priesthood of Jesus, though it was implicit in 1:3, but now he was preparing to undertake an extensive consideration of that truth. But before doing so, he wished to suggest its practical relevance to his readers whom he exhorted to “hold firmly to the faith.” They had to know that the priesthood of their Lord offered them all the resources they needed.

4:15. The One who served as **High Priest** on their behalf had been where they were and had **been tempted in every way, just as they were**. Though unlike them He **was without sin** (cf. 7:26; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 3:5), never responding wrongly to any of His temptations (nor could He, being God), yet as a man He could feel their reality (much as an immovable boulder can bear the brunt of a raging sea) and thus He is able to **sympathize** (*sympathēsai*, lit., “to feel or suffer with”) **with their and our weaknesses**. It may indeed be argued, and has been, that only One who fully resists temptation can know the extent of its force. Thus the sinless One has a greater capacity for compassion than any sinner could have for a fellow sinner.

4:16. With such a High Priest, it follows that believers should **approach the throne of grace with confidence** (*parrēσίας*; cf. 3:6; 10:19, 35). In a book filled with lovely and captivating turns of expression, few excel the memorable phrase “throne of grace.” Such a conception of the presence of God into which beleaguered Christians may come at any time, suggests both the sovereignty of the One they approach (since they come to a “throne”) and His benevolence. At a point of contact with God like this Christians can fully expect to **receive mercy and find grace to help ... in ... time of need**.