

**Hebrews 4****Lesson 4  
Warning Not To Fail And Hold Fast****Outline****I. Warning Not to Fail as Israel Did** (vv. 1-13)

- A. *Let us fear lest we come short* (vv. 1-2)
  1. Since a promise remains of entering rest (v 1)
  2. Since the word preached to Israel did not profit them (v. 2)
- B. *There remains a rest to those who believe* (vv. 3-10)
  1. Seen in Psalm 95 (vv. 3, 5)
  2. Seen in the Sabbath rest (vv. 3b-4)
  3. Seen in the fact that Israel did not enter (vv. 6-9)
  4. Seen in the fact that one who enters ceases work (v. 10)
- C. *Let us be diligent lest we fall* (vv. 11-13)
  1. Just like Israel in their disobedience (v. 11)
  2. For God sees all and knows all (vv. 12-13)

**II. Hold Fast Because of Our High Priest** (vv. 14-16)

- A. *Jesus is our High Priest in heaven* (v. 14)
- B. *He knows our needs and problems* (v. 15)
- C. *He gives help in time of need* (v. 16)

**Key Verses that Summarizes the Chapter****Hebrews 4:11**

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

**Hebrews 4:14**

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

This chapter concludes the warning or admonition that began at 3:7. This is the second of the five warning sections. It would be helpful to take a moment to look back at the first part of this section (3:7-19).

### **Warning Not to Fail as Israel Did (vv. 1-13)**

The point of this section is to learn from Israel's example and not fail to enter as they did.

*Let us fear lest we come short* (vv. 1-2). Having stated that Israel did not enter because of unbelief (3:19), the writer urges his readers to fear (be watchful, cautious, careful) lest they come short of entering that rest. The fact that so many have fallen should cause us to fear.

**Since a promise remains of entering rest (v. 1).** In that Israel did not enter their rest, a promise remains to be fulfilled. This point will be developed more in verses 3-10.

**Since the word preached did not profit them (v. 2).** The gospel (good news of a promised rest) was preached to Israel of old just like the gospel (good news of a promised rest) is preached to us. However, the gospel did not profit them because it was not mixed with faith.<sup>1</sup> For the gospel to be of any profit we must add faith to what we hear.

*There remains a rest to those who believe* (vv. 3-10). These verses develop the thought introduced at verse 1: a rest remains for those who have believed<sup>2</sup> (v. 3).

**Seen in Psalm 95 (vv. 3, 5).** In proof of this point, an appeal is made to Psalm 95:11 where we are told that God swore to Israel they would not enter the rest in Canaan. The fact that some were refused rest because of unbelief (disobedience) suggests that some would receive rest if they believed (obeyed).

**Seen in the Sabbath rest (vv. 3b- 4).** Those who came out of Egypt did not enter rest "although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (v. 3b). The point is that God finished his work of creation and then rested. Thus, his rest that he offers to man has been available since then. Israel's failure to enter was not because God had not made it available.

Confirming his point just made, the author quotes Genesis 2:2 where it is stated that God rested on the seventh day. The Sabbath rest serves as a type of all the rest that would follow. The fact, that God entered rest suggests that he desires the same for his people.

**Seen in the fact that Israel did not enter (vv. 6-9).** From what was said in verses 3-5 the conclusion is drawn that there remains a rest that some must enter (v. 6). However, those

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- 1 The mixing may have reference to mixing or uniting with those who are believers. "The problem with the majority of people in the exodus generation is that they did not join themselves (they **were not united**), **in faith** to those few who did 'hear' God's word" (David McClister, *A Commentary on Hebrews*, 162).
  - 2 Since "believed" is past tense, it probably is a reference to the point at which they were converted. The point to be learned is that the promise of rest is held out to those who remain faithful, unlike Israel of old.

to whom that promise was first proclaimed (those who came out of Egypt) did not enter that rest because of disobedience (v. 6b).<sup>3</sup>

A question could be raised about those who did enter the Canaan rest under the leadership of Joshua. Did they fulfill the promise of rest so that such hope does not remain? The answer is no because David<sup>4</sup> spoke of "today" heeding the voice of God and entering that rest (Psa. 95:7-8). That was a "long time" after Joshua<sup>5</sup> lead them into the land. If that had fulfilled the promised rest, David would not have spoken of another day to come (v. 8). Thus, the writer concludes, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (v. 9).

**Seen in the fact that one who enters ceases work (v. 10).** "For" connects this verse to the previous thought: there remains a rest (v. 9). One reason for saying this is that one<sup>6</sup> who enters into rest ceases from his work just like God ceased his work when he rested.

*Let us be diligent lest we fall* (vv. 11-13). Since a rest remains to those who are faithful, we must be diligent<sup>7</sup> to enter that rest. If we don't, we will fall just like Israel in their disobedience (v. 11). Note the warning is to "anyone" (v. 11). Each of us need to take heed lest we fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

We must be diligent for God sees all and knows all (vv. 12-13). The word of God is living and powerful. Thus, any promise or warning is real! Being sharper than a two edged sword, it can pierce and divide soul and spirit as well as joints and marrow. The word of God can penetrate the innermost part of man and lay bare all that is there. That is explained in the last expression of verse 12. By his word, God discerns the thoughts and intents of man's heart. "God's Word is like a two-edged sword, sharp as a scalpel, discerning every twist and turn of the human mind. That is the essence of the writer's meaning here."<sup>8</sup>

The writer turns from the word to God himself (v. 13) and declares all things are open<sup>9</sup> to the eyes of the one to whom we must give an account.

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3 The KJV uses the word "unbelief." The NKJV and ASV use the word "disobedience." Compare this verse with Hebrews 3:19 where "unbelief" is used. Disobedience is a form of unbelief.

4 Hebrews 3:7 attributed this quotation to the Holy Spirit. Thus, David spoke by inspiration.

5 The KJV says "Jesus" (v. 8). This is a reference to Joshua (NKJV, ASV). The spelling is the same in Greek. The context also shows this is speaking of Joshua.

6 Some think the one who enters is a reference to Christ (cf. LBP). However the context points to the people of God (v. 9).

7 KJV says "labor." Diligence suggest that we exert every ounce of energy to enter that rest.

8 Daniel H. King, Sr, *The Book of Hebrews*, Truth Commentaries, 139.

9 "The idea at the root seems to be the bending back of the neck, and the last explanation, better than any other, suits the previous figure of the sword. The custom of drawing back the victim's neck for sacrifice is familiar to all Classical students... The victim's throat bared to the sacrificial knife is a powerful figure of the complete exposure of all created intelligence to the eye of him whose word is as a two-edged sword" (M. R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft).

## Hold Fast Because of Our High Priest (vv. 14-16)

The reader is urged to hold fast to the confession or profession that has been made (cf. 3:1). This is another way of saying be diligent (v. 11) or be faithful. This is possible because of the High Priest we have.

*Jesus is our High Priest in heaven* (v. 14). Our High Priest is Jesus, the Son of God (deity). He has ascended into the most holy place, heaven itself. What a contrast to the high priest under the Mosaic economy!

*He knows our needs and problems* (v. 15). Our High Priest can sympathize with our weakness because he became flesh (chapter 2) and was tempted<sup>10</sup> as we are, yet he did not sin. He understands our trials and struggles.

*He gives help in time of need* (v. 16). Since we have such an understanding High Priest, we should come boldly before the throne of grace.<sup>11</sup> What an honor that all Christians have access to the very throne of deity (cf. Eph. 2:13). "There is not merely grace on the throne, but the throne is altogether the throne of grace. It is grace which disciplines us by the sharp and piercing Word. It is grace that looks on us when we have denied Him and makes us weep bitterly. Jesus always intercedes: the throne is always a throne of grace. The Lamb is in the midst of the throne. Hence we come boldly."<sup>12</sup> We come boldly ("with confidence" ESV, NASV) because we understand the merciful God we are approaching.

In so doing we find mercy and grace in time of need.<sup>13</sup> As we strive to enter the rest that awaits us (v. 11) there will be problems and struggles along the way. There will be temptation and trials. Approaching God's gracious throne we will find mercy and grace that we need. We cannot make our journey toward heaven without the help of our High Priest. Raymond Brown said, "...prayerlessness is the root of all sin. When we do not give time each day to earnest and believing prayer, we are saying that we can cope with life without divine aid. It is human arrogance at its worst...to be prayerless is to be guilty of the worst form of practical atheism."<sup>14</sup>

Use of the Old Testament in this Chapter	
Verse in Chapter 4	Old Testament Reference
v. 3	Psalms 95:11
v. 4	Genesis 2:2
v. 5	Psalms 95:11
v. 7	Psalms 95:7-8

10 Tempted in all points simply means that he was tempted by all avenues of sin: lust of the flesh, lust of the eye and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17; Matt. 4:1-11).

11 The ASV and ESV have "draw near." The NIV: "approach."

12 Arthur Pink, *Exposition of Hebrews*, 220.

13 A. T. Robertson suggests that "in time of need" gives the idea of "'For well-timed help,' 'for help in the nick of time,' before it is too late" (*Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft & Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright (c) 1985 by Broadman Press).

14 As quoted by King, *ibid.*, 146-147.

## Questions

1. In what sense were the Hebrews told to fear and why were they to fear?
2. How was the gospel preached to Israel in the Old Testament (v. 2)?
3. How does Psalm 95 show that a rest remains for the people of God?
4. What does "although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" mean?
5. How does the Sabbath rest show that a rest remains for the people of God?
6. When Joshua led Israel into Canaan, did that fulfill the promise of a rest?
7. What does the word "anyone" (v. 11) tell us?
8. What point is being made by saying the word can pierce and divide soul and spirit as well as joints and marrow?
9. In what way is our High Priest (Jesus) superior to the high priest under the Mosaic economy?
10. How does Jesus being our High Priest relate to the warnings in the rest of the chapter?