

“R.I.P.”

Hebrews 4:1-11

Context: The second of five exhortations employs a series of rhetorical questions that refer to the calling and apostasy of Israel during the Exodus. These questions show that salvation is realized only by the remnant, who not only begin the journey of God’s call but live it out until completion. This passage declares Hebrew’s primary message that calls readers to remain faithful to Jesus and avoid the peril of apostasy. This is as necessary us in the present time as it was in the past, since we, like those in the faith community of that time, are prone to drift, particularly when persecuted by the secular world or wooed by fleshly trappings. Readers are called to cast off any weight or entangling sin by fixing their eyes upon Jesus, the initiator and perfecter of their faith (cf. Hebrews 12:1-3).

Life Principle: Rest is not found in death but in belief (cp. Hebrews 4:1).

1. Resting in belief – Hebrews 4:1-4

We are called to healthy apprehension in light of the example of how easily unbelief and disobedience came to the Israelite faith community, whose attitudes led to the penalty of loss of God’s promise of rest from the world’s sinful constructs. The place of God’s rest of a perfected life in a perfected creation is symbolized by the seventh day and already exists in time eternal. Entrance into rest necessitates hearing the Gospel of salvation and allowing it to blend with all our thoughts of how we view a life lived in faith.

2. Resting in obedience – Hebrews 4:5-11

A warning not to harden one’s thought and emotional life against the teaching of God’s Word is reiterated a third time. Entrance into rest transcends this material world by showing that Joshua’s entry into the promise land wasn’t it. God’s rest is again shown to be spiritual by the use of the completion motif of creation and God’s seventh day of rest. Emphasis on the beginning of entrance into that rest by faith each day comes again through Psalm 95:7. We are exhorted to be alert and eagerly enter into rest, as well as warned about the ease into which we can fall away from God’s promise by hardening our hearts to the persuasion of Godly obedience to God’s word.

For Further Study:

- Hebrews 4:2 & 11 exhorts the faith community to unite their faith with obedience to God's Word, for if they don't they will be denied eternal rest in God. Our doctrinal statement suggests the same notion (see our **doctrinal statement 'On Salvation'** under **what we believe**, footnotes 11-13 at http://www.gracepointfellowship.org/files/Doc_Stmnt.pdf). Again this leaves the question: "Are those who profess that they follow God eternally secure?" (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conditional_preservation_of_the_saints#Comparisons_to_Opposing_Doctrines). Our statement can be interpreted as either one of conditional security of the saints or a position of eternal security. What does uniting obedience to God's word with faith mean (cf. Hebrews 4:2)? Why did the Israelites of the Exodus fall short of such a uniting (cf. Exodus 15:22-27; 17:3ff; Numbers 14:1)? Why does Jerome appeal to a teleological approach?
- Hebrews 4:1 calls the community to co-mingle the fear of denial of God's promise of rest with faithful obedience to God's Word which can spare us from this penalty. Study Philippians 2:12-13; Romans 8:15; Hebrews 2:15; & 12:25-28. How is it possible to fear God properly without anxiety? When should we have anxiety, according to Hebrews 4:2? For a deep excursus on a healthy understanding of faith and fear, see Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, "Faith and Fear," volume IX, pp. 213-217.
- The focus of the exhortation is that of fear from the loss of entering into God's rest. As a **Bible study method**, look up the term "rest" (*καταπαυο*) in Vine's NT Dictionary <http://www2.mf.no/bibel/vines.html> . From what does the believer 'pause' or 'cease' (cf. Hebrews 4:9-10)? What is the lesson that the reader must grasp regarding Israel's denial of rest by God? What would that look like in your life?

Transformation exercise:

Meditate on Hebrews 4:2. Ask the Spirit to empower you to recognize and unite obedience to God's word with faith in at least one circumstance each day this week. Then rest in His power.