

Hebrews

Chapter 4: **A Rest for the People of God**

February 8, 2026

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REVIEW:

Author:.....unknown, but not Paul

Readers' location:.....unknown

Readers' theology:.....now Christian but previously Jewish?? Gentile??

Date:.....unknown

This book of the New Testament reads more like a sermon than a traditional letter. The style is reminiscent of Hellenistic synagogue preaching, with which these newly converted Christians would be familiar.¹

Remember-

This letter was originally just that:

o n e l o n g l e t t e r .

There were no chapters, no verses.²

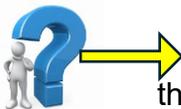
Thus, chapter 4 and chapter 3 flow together well.

CHAPTER 4

So our opening line reads, *“Therefore, since the promise of his rest still stands....”* which is the middle of the author’s thoughts begun in chapter 3.

Of all the books in the Bible, Letter to the Hebrews is THE driving pronouncement of the term “God’s rest.” [*katapausin* (Gk) = “to make to cease”]

How would you define “God’s rest?”



What do Bible experts think “God’s rest” means? Unfortunately, we can’t be certain; the term is used in a number of situations and with different meanings. However, there are two basic views among theologians regarding the use of “rest” here:³ It could be:

1. A future heavenly rest with God, which is attained at our death. **OR**.....

¹ Philo of Alexandria wrote in this same style, blending Jewish theology with Greek philosophy.

² The Bible’s chapters we use today were introduced in 1205. Verses didn’t appear until 1551.

³ Wycliffe, p. 1412.

2. A resting from one's labors during this life. This "rest of faith" puts us closer to God in our daily lives. This would be a Sabbath-rest. **OR**....

3. It may mean both.

"Entering his rest" (4:1) has nothing to do with conquering of the Promised Land in Old Testament times, because that had already been accomplished generations ago. And it does not simply mean "at death."

This is the peace and rest which are justified by faith.

Having faith in Jesus as the Christ and our Lord—that is the key to obtaining this rest promised by God. As Larry explained last week in his summary of chapter 3, "The peace of Christ is promised to the faithful, but not to the unfaithful."

[READ HEBREWS 4:1-2]



Let's back up.

TO WHOM IS OUR AUTHOR WRITING?

Chapter 4 begins by saying that God's promise of "entering into rest still stands...."

Q: Why "STILL stands"??

A: Even though the wilderness generation had hardened hearts and would not accept God, his offer of everlasting rest remains on the table IF one remains steadfast in faith.

This means that the readers of this letter (including us) must be careful **not** to:

- ❖ put blind faith in Moses' leadership alone;
- ❖ have any faith in the plethora of gods found throughout the Middle East region at that time; and
- ❖ rely on their own moxie and perseverance.

If the peace and joy of God is to be realized, each person must have faith in the one true God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This alone will bring the promised rest.

"What the Israelites [of the exodus from Egypt] failed to receive becomes available to those who believe in the good news of Jesus Christ."⁴

[READ HEBREWS 4:8-11]

4:9—"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."

The readers of Hebrews were probably recent Jewish converts to Christianity. They knew the traditions, ways, and laws of their people. Therefore, they most likely viewed the Sabbath as falling on Saturday, which was (and is) the seventh day of the Jewish week. **[READ GENESIS 2:3]**

"Though primitive Christians largely continued to keep the seventh day

⁴ Hayner, p. 70.



as a day of rest and prayer, the fact that the resurrection and coming of the Holy Ghost had taken place on the first day of the week soon led to the observance of that day (i.e., Sunday), to the exclusion of the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday.”⁵

4:13—We can't bluff our way into heaven. God knows our heart. His word (*logos*) is emphatic and all-knowing.

Jesus is our merciful high priest to whom we can turn when tempted by sin.

So far, this letter has successfully shown us that Jesus is superior to angels and the greatest heroes of the Old Testament. Now, the author turns his argument against the high priests of his day.

[READ HEBREWS 4:14-15]

Yes, Jesus has been tempted...much like us.

He can empathize. He is our friend and brother through whom we may find grace and mercy.

He is so much like us...but without sin.

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⁵ Oxford, "Sabbath," p. 1217. About 200 years before Jesus' time the Jewish rules became so strict that pious Jews allowed themselves to be killed rather than defend their lives on the Sabbath. (1 Macc. 2. 32-8).



Roman soldier's double-edged sword. (Heb. 4:12)

