



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

HEBREWS

Lesson 4

In our lesson last week, the writer of Hebrews quoted from Psalm 95, speaking of the Israelites who were cursed by God and died in the desert. There is no real break between chapters 3 and 4; the exhortation and admonition of 3:12-15 is simply expanded in 4:1-11. In 4:1 we get our first hint that the promise of rest given to Israel meant much more than simply entering the Promised Land. Is the promise that the Israelites forfeited because of unbelief still available to us today? We will soon find out!

Chapter 4 talks all about rest. I like rest, don't you? Often we think of rest as doing nothing or taking a vacation. In fact, Webster's definition of vacation is "taking a break from work or studies for rest." Or we think of rest as sleeping. Webster also defines sleep as simply "rest." Although our bodies need physical and emotional rest, it doesn't always come with peace. We can be "rested" and yet still be "restless."

In our chapter this week, the rest we will be discussing is a spiritual rest, the rest that only comes through faith in Christ. As I studied and prepared to write this lesson, I found it rather confusing to translate. But although the translation is difficult, it is not hard to understand. If you get confused as you look at each word or verse, take a step backward to get a grasp on the full meaning of the text. Like I said, it's hard to translate, but simple to understand. I will try my best not to make it even more difficult!

I like what Augustine said concerning rest. He said, "Our souls remain restless until they find their rest in Thee." In other words, we have a God-shaped void that God gives us, that only He can fill.

First Day

1. Read Hebrews 4:1-16. Observe and list the facts you find. List the repeated words, phrases, or thoughts.

2. What is the main thought or topic of this chapter? Give it a title that reflects that thought.
3. Does the author identify with the readers? How?
4. How would you break this chapter into sections?
5. Can you tell the mood or tone of the writer?
6. Who is "us" and who is "them"?
7. How many times is the phrase "let us" used in this chapter? What is he asking "us" to do?
8. As you read through the chapter, what are your first thoughts? What immediate application do you see for yourself?

See you tomorrow, ladies. Remember to always begin in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to give you understanding and wisdom as you study His Word. It's a spiritual book; we need "spiritual" eyes!

Memory Verse of the Week: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."
Hebrews 4:16

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. Isn't it a great one?

1. Read Hebrews 4:1-16. Let's camp out a bit in verses 1-2. The Israelites were promised God's rest. Is that promise still valid for us today? Or did they "use it up"?

The word "therefore" looks back to the quotations from Psalm 95, as well as forward to those of us who are reading it now. The writer is tying the past and present together. He emphatically uses the example of the wilderness experience so the readers will learn for their own lives what "not" to do. Remember that for 40 years, Joshua and Caleb watched their friends and family die because they were the only two men of faith that had confidence in God's word and knew that they would one day enter the Promised Land. While the others were feeling grief and sorrow, they could rejoice because they had a confident hope!

2. Kistemaker says that "The message in 4:1 can be summarized in three words: fear, promise, and failure. What does he mean? How is this true?

The author writes with a heart of a pastor, warning them that, unless they are careful, they could miss it or "fall short" of it. The expression "fall short" is thought to have been taken from the sports arena; it conveys the meaning of being left behind in the race and thus failing to reach the goal. He doesn't want to see any of them fall into the same sin as those in the wilderness.

3. What sin is he referring to? (3:19 and 4:2)
4. Does he take the sole responsibility in preventing this, according to verse 1?

Kistemaker writes, "To be concerned with one's own salvation is commendable; to pray for one's fellow man is praiseworthy; but to strive for the salvation of everyone within the confines of the church is exemplary. We should be constantly looking for spiritual stragglers."

5. Philip Hughes said, "There is no attitude more dangerous for the church than that of unconcern or complacency." In regard to the paragraph above, what does he mean?

6. What's your attitude toward the "spiritual stragglers"? Are you concerned for them? Is your heart grieved when you witness complacency? Do you allow that grief and concern to move you into action?

Although God promised them that "rest" He was not obligated, in a sense, to fulfill that promise if faith was lacking. Therefore, the promise is conditional to our response in faith.

7. What was preached to both of "them"? Why was it received by one and not by the other? What "key" thing was missing?

Some think it's odd to say that the same "Gospel" preached to the Israelites in the wilderness is the same which is preached today, the Gospel of Christ. But no distinction is made in the two uses of the "Gospel." Stedman wrote, "Paul also states in 1 Corinthians 10:3 that 'They drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.' This implies an understanding on the part of some, at least, that the event they experienced, the sacrifices they offered, the ritual they fulfilled, were all designed to teach them truth about a Redeemer who was, to the eyes of faith, their ground of atonement with God, though He had not yet appeared in history. Of course these same elements could be experienced mechanically, without faith, and were thus meaningless as far as personal salvation was concerned."

8. What does Hebrews 11:6 say about this? What does this tell us about the teaching of "universalism," which means that everyone is already saved by virtue of Christ's death and that God will reveal that to them at the end, no matter how they lived? (Also read Romans 10:16-17)

The emphasis of verse 2 is on the faith that wasn't shared. During the entire time the Israelites had the Good News preached to them, they refused to accept it in faith. Their refusal was not a momentary reaction but a continuous rejection of God's written and spoken Word. God's promise was fulfilled only in those who accepted His Word in faith, demonstrating a true faith in God. That's the only way to gain entrance to God's eternal rest!

Tomorrow we will be looking closer at what kind of "rest" the author is talking about. But for now, let's look at two truths that William Barclay finds in these verses:

(1) A word, however great, is of no avail unless it becomes integrated into the person who hears it. There are many different kinds of hearing in the world. There is indifferent hearing, disinterested hearing, critical hearing, skeptical hearing, cynical hearing. The hearing that matters is the hearing that listens eagerly, believes, and acts. The promises of God are not merely beautiful pieces of literature; they are promises on which a man is meant to stake his life and dominate his action.

(2) In the first verse the writer bids his people beware lest they miss the promise. The word we have translated *beware* literally means to fear. This Christian fear is not the fear which makes a man run away from a task, nor the fear which reduces him to paralyzed inaction; it is the fear which makes him put out every ounce of strength he possess in a great effort not to miss the one thing that is worthwhile.

9. What kind of "hearer" are you? When you read His Word, do you read it and listen eagerly and purposefully, or do you listen with doubt, fear, and lack of trust?
10. Are you using every ounce of strength to pursue the Great Lover of your soul and remain faithful to the end?

Third Day

Hope you're working on your verse!

1. Read Hebrews 4:1-16. Then go back to verses 1-10. How many times is "rest" mentioned?
2. In verse 3 does the author say we enter His rest now or in the future? What tense does he use?
3. Who exactly enters that rest? (Acts 4:32; 16:31; Romans 10:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13)
4. The author quotes from Psalm 95 again in verse 3. Why do you think he says it again?

I have read so many explanations of the kind of "rest" that is spoken about in the book of Hebrews that my head is spinning! We know it's obviously speaking about a "spiritual rest" because it is still offered to us today. If it was simply a literal rest for the Israelites when they got to Canaan, the "rest" would not be offered to you and me. People refer to it as the "Sabbath" rest or the "Canaan" rest, which we briefly discussed last week. Most believe that the "Sabbath" rest is a picture of our present rest as we commit our lives to Christ. The author uses the Old Testament story of Creation to try to express his idea of rest. After the world was created, God began a new period of rest. Genesis 2:2 tells us that at the conclusion of the sixth day, God rested from His work of Creation on the seventh. With the seventh day, the period of God's rest began. (That doesn't mean that God was tired or that He's now idle, because He continues to maintain His creation, as Hebrews 1:3 suggests. He is also continuously active in the work of the redemption of man. But He ceased in creating.) When we come to Christ by faith and stop trying to "work" our way on our own merit, we get "peace *with* God" (Romans 5:1).

Literally, the "Canaan rest" was the peace they found when they got to the land, but that came from a trust and obedience to His Word. (I don't

believe that all those who died in the wilderness were also eternally lost. That would include Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. But they did miss out on the rest, the blessings God's inheritance had for them. But many were unbelieving about redemption as well.) To us today, this represents the victory we have in Christ as we "submit" to Him and His Lordship over our lives. By obeying God by faith and claiming our spiritual inheritance, we can have the "peace *of* God" (Phil. 4:6-8) as we experience that Canaan rest. He wants to provide us with a peaceful journey on the way to our ultimate rest. We can have peace even when we encounter perils on our path, as long as we submit and trust Him. "The only way to travel at peace is to travel with the Prince of Peace." (Jeff Snell)

There is a future rest as well (4:9) that believers will enjoy with God when we enter Heaven, all labors and battles ended for good! (Revelation 14:13). Bottom line ... believers, because of firm faith, enter God's rest, which is a spiritual state of being in the presence of God. As John Calvin said, "The highest happiness of man is to be united to His God."

5. The author quotes Psalm 95 again in verse 7. What does he say? When is the time for response?

6. Why is "today" such a word of Hope?

7. Why does the author bring up Joshua in verse 8? (Read Joshua 1:1-9.) What point is the author making?

The name Joshua is equivalent to the name Jesus in the Greek. We know that Moses led the Israelites "out" of Egypt, and Joshua led them "into" the Promised Land where they enjoyed peace and rest from wandering. Jesus leads His people into the presence of God and grants them eternal rest and peace through Him! Jesus leads us into a far better rest than Joshua led Israel into, that's for sure.

8. Okay. Let's ask some heart questions now. Obviously, the first being, have you entered into His rest and accepted Christ in faith? That's step one. His blessings and the spiritual inheritance we have in Him are only available to those who believe in faith.

9. If you have, you've made your "peace *with God*." Now, are you experiencing the "peace *of God*" that's available to you? Are you pursuing a life of obedience and striving to live in the presence of God? Or are you living your own way and missing all the blessings and rewards God has for you? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the depth of your heart. We can't expect God's blessings if we aren't living according to His Word. It's our choice ...

10. Read Hebrews 4:10. What "works" is the author referring to? Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and explain what the author means in your own words. (Are you still trying to "work" your way into Heaven?)

See you tomorrow, my friends! Praise the Lord for His marvelous and amazing rest!

Fourth Day

What's your verse?

1. Read Hebrews 4:1-16, focusing on 10-13. What is the author's repeated exhortation? (Also read 2 Peter 1:10)

2. What does the author say about God's Word in verse 12? What does he mean? (How is it living? How is it active?)

3. Why does he bring this up now? How does this verse tie in with the rest of the chapter?

4. Why is God's Word compared to a sword?

The phrase "Word of God" is used at least 39 times in the New Testament, referring to the written or spoken Word of God. It's not only alive, it's active! That means it is "effective and powerful"! The original Greek word uses a word from which we get our word "energy." No one can escape the living and active Word. No one. Just like in the wilderness, today some men choose to obey it, and others refuse to believe it. (1 Cor. 1:18). The Bible is not dead like other letters; It's alive. A double-edged sword was probably the sharpest weapon available at the time. God's Word is sharper than that! It cuts and divides, like the knife of a surgeon. It addresses every aspect of our hearts. Every nook and cranny is open to His scrutiny. Nothing is hidden from God and His Word.

5. How does God's Word expose the motives and attitudes of the heart? (Explain the process as if you were trying to explain it to an unbeliever.)

6. What staggering truth is found in verse 13? (Are there any secrets from Him?) How does that make you feel?

7. Could this be a reason that we stay away from reading the Word? Why do we do that, if He knows it anyway?

8. Do you have any secrets from the Lord? Have you stayed away from the Word, knowing that your motives and attitudes will be revealed, making you responsible to make changes? Have you ever done this?

9. But do we always "know" our true heart? Read Jeremiah 17:9. How does God's Word enable us to see the truth?

10. Why is humility needed to really see the truth?

I like what Wiersbe wrote. He said, "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. God uses the Word to enable us to see the sin and unbelief in our heart. The Word exposes our hearts and then, if we trust God, the Word enables our hearts to obey God and claim His promises. This experience enables us to be honest with God, to trust His will, and to obey Him."

11. Are you, or have you been, guilty of criticizing God's Word? What do you think that means?

Let me end with a quote by Ray Stedman that I love. He said, "Plainly, Scripture is the only reliable guide we have to function properly as a human in a broken world. Philosophy and psychology give partial insights, based on human experience, but they fall short of what the Word of God can do."

Amen, Mr. Stedman!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. Read Hebrews 4:1-16. Let's take a closer look at the last three powerful verses. The first 13 verses of chapter 4 seem to be an introduction to the discussion of Jesus being our High priest, which he introduced in 2:17-18. What did he say about our High Priest in 2:17-18? What does he add now in 4:14-16?

Moses' brother Aaron was the High Priest. The author now contrasts Jesus' position with Aaron's, which was far superior. The difference between them is immeasurable. The term "great" already sets Him above the others. He didn't enter the Holy of Holies once a year and sprinkle blood for the atonement of sins. Jesus actually became the substitute, or the propitiation, Himself. The Great High Priest has brought the supreme sacrifice in offering Himself on the cross on behalf of His people!

2. The Jewish High Priest entered the inner sanctuary of the Temple once a year and stood temporarily in the presence of God. According to verse 14, how is Jesus greater than that?
3. What does the author exhort us to do in these verses?
4. In your own words, explain verse 15. Why is this so extremely significant to you and I?

The readers to whom the author is writing may not have understood the real significance of what he was saying, if they saw Christ as only divine. The writer is making sure they understand that Jesus was fully human as

well. Here, and in 2:18, he reminds them that He was tempted as they were. He understood their weaknesses and temptations because He was tempted by Satan. He coped with thirst, hunger, rejection, pain, weariness, and disappointments. B. F. Wescott said, "He has been tempted in every extent and range, in every way. Nothing in human experience is foreign to Him, for He Himself has endured it. Yet, He was without sin."

John Albert Bengel said, "Because of His sinless nature, the mind of the Savior much more acutely perceived the forms of temptation than we who are weak, not only during His earthly ministry but also as His service as the exalted High Priest. He anticipates temptations we are going to face, sympathizes fully with us, and is able to help those who are tempted."

5. Verse 16 is one of the most exciting, spectacular verses in the Bible. What amazing truth does it teach us?

6. How are we invited to approach?

We know that Jesus sits on the right hand of God and has been given full authority in Heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). The sinner who comes to His throne in faith and repentance finds the forgiving grace of Jesus. We can come in confidence, rather than in fear of judgment. He invites us to come freely and boldly, receiving His mercy and compassion in our time of need. He stands ready to help. When we face temptation, He will provide a way out (1 Cor 10:13).

7. Are you in need right now? Are you struggling with the pressures and problems of life? Don't neglect this invitation. Have you gone boldly to His throne for help? Don't seek human help; go for the divine wisdom!

8. What truth, verse, or thought ministered to you the most from this chapter?

