

Hebrews Chapter 4

V1. In chapter 3 we were looking back at the Children of Israel, who when facing their first attacking, rather than defensive, battle they bottled it. This annoyed God greatly, to the point that He wanted to kill them instantly, but relented at Moses's intervention and settled with making them walk round the desert for 40 years until they all died of natural causes. Hebrews 3 uses that account of the Children of Israel's rebellion as a picture that warns us as individuals, not to provoke God's wrath in the same way, or we'll end up with the same result.

So, if Israel's rebellion is a picture, warning us not to follow suit, or we'll not see that place of rest, then what or where is that place of rest that Hebrews chapter 3 and Hebrews 4:1 talks about? Is this place of rest Heaven or is it the Christian walk with God? If we take that picture literally, the Children of Israel were in slavery, then following the Passover they walked out, crossed the Red Sea and walked to the borders of Canaan. There, they encountered what they saw was a huge problem, and they bottled it. They decided that they were going back to Egypt and into slavery. They failed to believe God's promise given to them in Exodus 33:14

So what does that picture equate to? Does the land of Canaan represent Heaven? I don't think so. Heaven is a place of perfection, Israel was far from perfect, and had its ups and downs. The picture of Israel represents....? The Christian journey. We were slaves to sin, Romans 6:16, rescued by Jesus, and then if a battle confronts us, we bottle it and abandon our faith, we'll be back as slaves to sin. Jesus talked about this in the parable of the sower, Mark 4:1-8. Can you recall the obstacles that the seeds had to overcome before they could flourish? What other examples are there in the Bible of believers who slipped from grace back into slavery? Cain, Genesis 4:6-7, Esau, Genesis 25:33-34. Saul, 1 Samuel 15:10-11 & 22-23.

V2. The Hebrews writer talks about the Gospel that was preached to them and the Gospel that was preached to us. What Gospel was preached to the Children of Israel before they set out on their epic journey? Exodus 4:1-9 as well as their witnessing the 10 plagues, the parting of the red sea, God's provision of food and water and protection against enemies that came up against them. That Gospel was experiential, so how does the Gospel that was preached to us differ? In what way and why did their gospel not profit them? They obviously lacked faith.

V3. We believe, we will enter the rest, he then re-quotes Psalm 95:11. Notice he quotes the absence of the negative to prove the positive. Then he throws in a comment that God's works were completed at creation.

V4-5. Hebrews mentions the Sabbath day in the context of creation. Question; what work would God have recommenced on day 8, that He rested from on day 7? Mark 2:27-28. The Sabbath was the finishing touch to God's creation. God didn't rest because He was knackered after doing all that creation; no God created rest for us, whether we use that rest or carry on and burn out, is up to us. So how does the Sabbath day compare with an everyday life of rest as a believer? List all the similarities. So for the believer, is not every day a Sabbath day?

In our list of differences between the Sabbath and the believer's everyday, is there the issue of work? Are we saying that when we become believers, we stop all work? Obviously

not. Colossians 2:16-17. Paul isn't forbidding Sabbaths, or festivals like Christmas and Easter, he's saying, do it for Christ.

V6. The 'some' were two, Joshua and Caleb, the 'many' were the other 999,998, or thereabouts, the price of disobedience.

V7. David designates a day in the calendar for being obedient, Psalm 95. What date was it? (Verse 7). The Psalm praises God, but gives a warning.

V8. Joshua did give the Children of Israel rest, but not until Joshua 22:4. From the moment he took over Moses's mantle, Joshua hit the ground running. Moses's body was still warm and Joshua was calling the troops, Joshua 1:10-11, then 12-15. Note these words in verses 12 and 15.... The Lord your God is giving you rest and verse 15, until the Lord has given your brethren rest ... So using this story as an analogy of the Christian life, what's the lesson that we can draw from Hebrews 4:8 and the story of Joshua? Having been released from the slavery of sin, we have to go into battle with it, and only then can we rest.

V9. You've got to Joshua 22 in your Christian life, Hebrews is saying, now relax and put your feet up. Is that right? Matthew 11:28-30.

V10. Again, is this telling us to take to the couch and put our feet up?

V11. Another warning. We don't normally have to be diligent to rest. Read more carefully, entering the rest is where we need to be diligent. So why and in what way do we need to exert energy to enter into rest? So in what way and how might one fall into disobedience?

V12-13. The word of God (the Bible) can be devastating. It can convict us of sins that we didn't even know were sins. Ephesians 6:17 describes, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The only offensive, as opposed to defensive item in the whole armour of God. It can divide the soul from the spirit. The soul is our personality that makes us feel emotions. Our spirit is our connection with God. Our joints and marrow is like a picture of our biblical DNA. God's word can effect every part of us in a good way, making us more Christ-like, but obviously, only if we read it.

When we go into the library, there are two sections, fiction and non-fiction. A real page turner in the fiction section may make us laugh or cry, sad or happy. We might want to read it again but not again and again like we do with the Bible in the Bible Discussion Group. In the non-fiction section, a book will have information on how to or an interesting part of history or a recipe, but we're not going to want to go deeper and deeper into it and compare one section book with another. The Bible is unique. In what ways is it unique and unlike any other book?

Imagine, what would our world be like if there were no Bible. How would we know about God? How would we find our way to God? Jesus would be just a character in history like Alexander the Great or Napoleon. There was a time before the Bible when God revealed Himself to a few individuals like Enoch, Job and Abraham, but they didn't know God like we know God. How do you think their knowledge and experience of God would compare to ours, thanks to the Bible? John 8:56, Job 19:25-27, Jude 1:14-15.

On a global scale, what effect has the Bible had on the world we live in today?

In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus uses the word of God to thwart Satan's temptations. In Revelation 2:12 Jesus, even after His ascension, He is using the word. If we neglect the word/Bible, God sees it, and will one day ask us, "Why?"

V14. Exodus 28:1. Aaron is appointed the first High Priest. His most important job was the sin offering. Leviticus chapter 4, If someone unintentionally sinned, they took a goat to a Priest, he slaughtered it and put it on an altar and burned it as a sacrifice. That's a picture of Jesus, dying for our sins. The priest, having gone through various rituals was deemed holy, and on the people's behalf, he offered a sacrifice to God. So in this picture, is Jesus represented as the priest or the goat?

Where do we fit into this picture? Clearly, we are the sinners who come to the priest, asking Him to intercede with God on our behalf. On another level, we are priests, interceding on behalf of our family, loved ones, neighbours, friends, colleagues, peers etc. 1 Peter 2:5. For some, that will become a career during Jesus's 1,000 year reign, Revelation 20:6.

V15. What does this say about a High Priest who dictates from on high, and about High Priests in the Old Testament?

V16. What is the throne of grace (non capital letters)? So it's not a physical place, it's not in Heaven, because if it were, we couldn't go there in time of need. So why and how do we come boldly and what grace and mercy can we obtain in times of need? What do you think that the writer is referring to in this verse?