

Hebrews 4:9-16 – A Sabbath Rest

The focus of Hebrews 3:7-4:13 is that we should strive to enter into the future rest promised by God. God gave the Sabbath day for rest, but that only lasts for 24 hours. That is not the promised future rest. Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan and into the Promised Land. After the conquest of the Promised Land, Joshua 21:44a says, “And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers.” But that rest did not last. There is a better rest that lies ahead for God’s people.

Read Hebrews 4:9-13.

In verse 9, ESV, NASB and NIV have “Sabbath rest”. KJV simply has “rest”. This word comes from the same word family as Sabbath. What is the “rest” which remains for the people of God? Who are the people of God? What evidence was given in verse 8 that Joshua did not give the people rest? (4:9)

Based on verse 10, what is true of those who enter God’s rest? When did God cease from his works? What does verse 10 mean? (4:10)

In verse 11, what are the readers/hearers encouraged to do? The contrast is interesting. We are to work hard at entering into rest. What could happen to someone who does not strive to enter this rest? The pattern of this verse is very similar to 3:13 “Exhort one another...that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”. Verse 11 uses the word “fall” (ESV, KJV, NASB). NIV has “perish”. Does “fall” mean the same thing as not entering into God’s rest? Is it a reference to the dead bodies that fell in the wilderness? Is it a permanent state or a temporary state? (4:11)

What is true of God’s word? What is the natural conclusion of how God’s word should be used in our individual lives as well as in the church? Are sermons about social conventions or popular psychology guaranteed to be effective? (4:12)

What happens when people are exposed to God’s word? At the end of the verse, ESV and NIV have “to whom we must give account”. KJV has “with whom we have to do”. NASB has “to whom we must answer”. There may be a play on words. God’s **word** requires us to give a **word** (reckoning) to God. “Word” can mean “word” or “reckoning”. (4:13)

Read Hebrews 4:14-16.

Jesus as high priest was mentioned in 2:17 and 3:1. From 4:14 through 10:18 (with the exception of 5:11-6:12), Jesus as high priest and his service as high priest are the focus. (4:14)

Verse 14 starts with "Since then" in the ESV. KJV has "Seeing then". NASB and NIV have "Therefore, since". Whatever translation is used, there is a conclusion based on what has come before. What is the "since then" referring to? What is the conclusion which is drawn from what has come before? What titles were given to Jesus in verse 14? 3:1 began a section which compared and contrasted Jesus and Moses. 3:1 says "you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession". Notice "heavenly", "Jesus", "high priest" and "confession". Most of 3:1-4:13 was concerned with entering God's rest. Those who followed Moses in the wilderness did not enter God's rest because of unbelief and disobedience. I believe the idea here is to tenaciously follow Jesus because he is our high priest who has passed through the heavens and only he will lead us into God's promised rest in heaven. (4:14)

If we put the first part of verse 15 in the positive, "we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses". Why is Jesus able to sympathize with our weaknesses? ESV, NKJV, NASB all have "sympathize". NIV has "empathize". The sympathy is explained in the second part of the verse. He has been tempted as we are. (4:15)

2:18 says "For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (ESV) Some translations put the emphasis on suffering. Because Jesus suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted. In 4:15, the emphasis is on Jesus having been tempted. Suffering did not enter into the picture. Because Jesus was tempted he is able to sympathize with us who are also tempted. Jesus' sympathy is not just a pat on the back. Jesus gives those who are tempted real help, as we see in the next verse. Does 4:15 have a different message than 2:18 or should the emphasis in 2:18 be on Jesus' temptation rather than his suffering? Does the principle of "scripture interprets scripture" come into play here? (4:15)

Because we have a great high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, what are we exhorted to do? Do you think there is an allusion to the high priest entering into the Holy of Holies? Who could enter the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament? What would an Old Testament believer receive if they entered the Holy of Holies? What will we receive when we enter God's presence as followers of Jesus the great high priest? What a tremendous verse! (4:16)

What is the contrast between verses 4:12-13 and verses 4:14-16?