

ONE BIBLE, ONE STORY: THE EPISTLE to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 4:1-13

I. Introduction

A. Locating 4:1-13 within the ongoing case of Hebrews

- Overarching Argument: In these last days, God has spoken through His Son (1:1)
- If a lesser and partial revelation commanded obedience, how much more will a greater and complete revelation through Jesus?
- Foregoing issue: Jesus and Moses compared (Last Week - Ch. 3)
- A lesson from the negative example of the wilderness generation (3:7-19)

B. Main argument of 4:1-13

- Just as the negative response of the wandering Israelites to the revelation through Moses exposed their unbelieving heart and cost them access into God's rest, so also can our response to the revelation under Jesus unveil our heart toward God, and if found to be evil, deny us entrance into God's Sabbath rest.
- Premise: This argument is based on the premise that the opportunity for entering God's rest is still open.

II. Firm Warning! (vv. 1-2)

A. *Therefore* - directly connecting the inference of 3:19 to the warning of 4:1.

B. Warning: Let us fear, lest...! (1:1)

- Why the call to fear (be careful - NIV)?
 - a. The open opportunity to enter also entails the possibility of not entering.
 - b. Point of similarity: good news came to us, just as to them.

c. Point of dissimilarity (implied): but they disbelieved, so it did not benefit them.

C. Brief discussion

- How does the author's use of the word *fear* make sense in the passage?
- *Fear* is not currently a fashionable idea. In what way can the sense of godly awe/fear actually become a positive trait in the Christian life?

III. **God's Rest and the case for its open opportunity (vv. 3-10)**

A. The author devotes time to the discussion of God's rest. What are some reasons you think this is an important issue in light of this entire passage?

B. Repetition of essential idea in the passage

- v. 1: while the promise of entering his rest still stands
- v. 6: Since therefore it remains for some to enter [the rest]
- v. 9: So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God
- v. 11: Let us therefore strive to enter that rest

C. Tracing the theme of Rest progressively through the OT

- The Rest of God from creation, considering Gen. 2
- The Rest of Canaan: 2 pronged consideration
 - The first generation that fell in the wilderness under Moses
 - The second generation that entered under Joshua
- The Rest of the psalmist, considering Psalm 95:7-11 in the specific *rest* argument
 - Note the emphasis on *Today*. How does the author of Hebrews show a two-sided implication to the psalmist's use of *Today*?
- The Sabbath Rest of God, *i.e.*, the ultimate Rest.

D. Brief discussion

- a. As believers in a society with religious freedom and economic prosperity, we may not always feel the full potency/traction of the eschatological promises of God's word.
How can Christians in our context still find true and authentic motivation from God's eschatological promises?
- b. How does the statement of verse 10 challenge the modern appeal for an "unlaboring" Christian life devoid of occasional inconveniences?

IV. **Exhortation** (vv. 11-13)

A. Strive... so that...

B. Note how the passage begins with a warning, and ends with an exhortation on the same idea.

C. Brief discussion

- How do verses 12-13, speaking of the power of God's word, fit in with the thought of the passage?
- Do those verses only warn, or do they also offer hope to the laboring Christian?

Further reflections on life application:

If you can, take some time this week to reflect on the current social culture and ways it offers a here-and-now artificial rest (ease) from Christian life and commitment. Jot down two of those ways. Commit to examining what the Bible says about those two matters. Then finally, find a Christian friend any time later on to share those thoughts with, and seek to mutually encourage each other on those aspects of faith and social culture.

References for further study: Exodus 17; Numbers 14; 20:1-13; Psalm 95

For next week: Read and reflect upon Hebrews 4:14-5:10.