

SERMON  
SERIESAND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE  
TO PLEASE HIM, FOR WHOEVER  
WOULD DRAW NEAR TO GOD  
MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS  
AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE  
WHO SEEK HIM.

## HEBREW'S



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HEBREW'S  
VERSE BY  
VERSE STUDYLET US DRAW NEAR IN  
*Faith***SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 4:1-11**

To understand what the author means by “rest.”

**Read the Text:**

“Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest,” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” 5 And again in this passage, he said, “They shall not enter my rest. 6 Since, therefore, it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.” (Hebrews 4:1-11, ESV)

**Study the Text:****Rest Remains**

Chapter 4 continues with the same thought that ended chapter 3, as shown by the word “therefore” (Heb. 4:1). A useful interpretive question whenever you see the word “therefore” is: “What’s the ‘therefore’ there for?” Answering that question often helps clarify the context of the argument. The second part of chapter 3 emphasizes the failure of the wilderness generation, and verse 12 offers the main command for that section: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). “Take care,” or “watch out,” or “be on the lookout!” Why? Because the danger of unbelief, which can lead to abandoning faith, is very real.

With that former example in mind, chapter 4 provides two important reminders: 1. The rest that was available to the wilderness generation is still available since they failed to attain it, and 2. We are at risk of such failure

as well. However, questions arise in light of these reminders. 1. What kind of rest does Hebrews mean? 2. How do we enter it? We will attempt to answer such questions by appealing to a number of keywords and Old Testament passages quoted here.

## The Former Example

There are at least a couple of different Old Testament allusions that are either quoted or implied in this text, and understanding what they are will help us develop a clearer understanding of what is meant by “rest” in this text.

### **THE WILDERNESS GENERATION**

Obviously, the wilderness generation is still in mind. Again, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:11, which is a Psalm that focuses on the failures of the wilderness generation, specifically in the book of Numbers. Recall that in Hebrews 3:8, the author employed the Septuagint translation of Psalm 95:8, which, in the Hebrew version, references both “Meribah” and “Massah.” Both names are connected to a specific instance in which the people of God complained about a lack of water, leading God to command Moses to strike the rock with his staff so that water would come out and quench Israel’s thirst. Given that Psalm 95 has once again been quoted here indicates that this wilderness generation is still very much in mind.

### **JOSHUA’S GENERATION**

Verse 8 also brings into view the generation led by Joshua, who actually crossed into the land of Canaan (Josh. 3:17). However, the “rest” that the author has in mind does not seem to be directly connected to the Promised Land in this passage, because otherwise Joshua would have succeeded in giving the people of God rest, which is clearly stated otherwise (Heb. 4:8-9).

### **GENESIS 1-2**

Verse 3 also references the first two chapters of Genesis in which God creates all things. The “rest” that the author is speaking about is open and has been open since the beginning of creation, since all of “His works were finished from the foundation of the world” (Heb. 4:3). Moreover, Genesis 2:2 is explicitly quoted in verse 4. God’s ceasing of work after finishing creation and His subsequent “rest” form the foundation for the eventual “Sabbath” commanded of Israel. However, it seems unlikely that the formalized “Sabbath day” is in mind here.

That may seem hard to believe given that verse 9 literally says: “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” However, closer inspection is required. The underlying Greek term here is σαββατισμός (sabbatismos), which appears only once in the entire New Testament: right here, in verse 9. It is not the typical term we might expect for the traditional “Sabbath day.” It is also likely intimately connected to another term used multiple times in this text, which is also translated “rest,” the Greek term καταπαύω (katapauō). It appears that the author is using the broader term for rest, linked to the resting of God after creation and also the rest offered to the wilderness generation in Canaan, the Promised Land, and reinterpreting it in light of Sabbath language, thereby redefining the Sabbath in some way for the new covenant. This is strengthened by the reality that while the observance of the Sabbath included a host of guidelines, all of which were important to follow, this particular “rest” only requires belief (Heb. 4:3). Beyond that, there seems to be an allusion to atonement in mind, as well.

### **LEVITICUS 16, 23**

Some scholars have argued that the kind of “Sabbath” the author of Hebrews had in mind was not a generic Sabbath, but the specific Sabbath day referenced in both Leviticus 16 and Leviticus 23, which was connected

to the Day of Atonement.<sup>1</sup> The argument is strengthened by the fact that the language of these chapters concerning the Day of Atonement is taken up aggressively later on in Hebrews 8:1-10:18. If this is the case, and you remember that “belief” is the only requirement to enter this “rest,” a strong textual case could be made that the “rest” in mind here is belief in Jesus Christ who makes atonement for His people that we might have peace and fellowship restored with God.

## Eschatological Rest

There is also very much a forward-facing aspect of this “rest” in the text, as well. The rest, entered by faith and rooted in the atonement of Christ, is still something we are to strive to enter (Heb. 4:11). That means we have not yet arrived, and this rest still lies in the future. Whether it is a rest brought by Jesus in the second coming or after the remaking of the heavens and the earth is unclear. What is clear is that it is, to some degree, future-oriented.

## What About Now?

There are some important takeaways. For one, we are as at risk of failure as the former generations. Unless we obey God by faith, we too risk not entering God’s rest. Second, whether the Sabbath is reinterpreted here as a spiritual Sabbath or not, Sabbath rest of “some kind” is clearly still important for God’s people. Some have held to a strict Sabbatarian view wherein no work is permitted on Saturday. Others have observed the early practices of the church in the Book of Acts and in church history and noted that their day of rest seems to shift from the Sabbath to the “Lord’s Day,” which is Sunday. Others still have argued that the day itself doesn’t matter, as long as the rhythm of rest is upheld. After all, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27). Whatever day or time you set aside, be sure to actually set it aside and rest. It is not merely a mindless commandment God has given us, but it is for our benefit.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Hebrews 4:1-2. Who is the example in mind in this text? What went wrong with them?

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2. Read Hebrews 4:3. What is required to enter this “rest?” What verse is quoted? What verse is alluded to?

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### Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 4:4-5. What verses are quoted here? What is being implied?

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2. Read Hebrews 4:6-7? In your own words, summarize these verses. What verse is quoted?

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 154-55.

### Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 4:8. Who is mentioned in this verse, and what did he not do for the people of God?

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2. Read Hebrews 4:9. What remains for the people of God? What is this a reference to, and what is not referencing? (Hint: See above notes)

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### Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 4:10. What does entering God's rest entail?

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2. Read Hebrews 4:11. For what are we to strive? What is at stake?

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### Discuss the Text!

## Session 8 Discussion: Rest!

Regardless of how you view the Sabbath, the importance of rest cannot be overstated. Talk as a group about what you need to do to better practice rest "rhythms" in your own life.

1. Icebreaker: What is your "ideal" kind of rest? What does it involve? What does it not involve?
2. Do you have a regular rhythm of rest in your life? If not, why not?
3. Do you know when you are starting to get run down or close to burnout? What are the warning signs?
4. Is it hard for you to rest? If so, why?
5. What is the busiest day of the week for you? Why?
6. Kid Talk (For Home): Find an old, very used toy. Point out that the parts on it are worn down, and that some of them may even be broken. Explain that it is broken because it has been overused. Now, explain that the body is the same; it can be overused, and unless we rest, we risk "breaking down." Naps for the win!

## Takeaways:

1. Psalm 95 is again quoted to tie the wilderness generation to the present generation.
2. Genesis 2:2 is also quoted to connect God's original rest after creation with our dire need for rest.
3. Rest requires faith to properly enter it.
4. Rest is also future-oriented, rooted in the second coming of Jesus Christ.