

A REST REMAINS

HEBREWS 4



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

A Rest Remains: Hebrews 4
Copyright 2018 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Cover art: *Christ in Majesty*, 6th century apse dome mosaic, Basilica di San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy;
courtesy flickr

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All psalms for singing adapted from The Ailbe Psalter. All quotations from Church Fathers from Ancient Christian Commentary Series, General Editor Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press).

Hebrews 4: Introduction

At least 11 times in Hebrews 4, the author mentions God's rest. Must be pretty important.

The fact is, his readers were looking for rest somewhere else, by retreating into the safe confines of their former religious beliefs. But he wants them to see that God's rest lies elsewhere, since Christ is superior to angels, Moses, and all the priests of Israel.

Jesus is our High Priest, and we enter God's rest through Him, by hearing God's Word, and seeking the Lord's intercession and strength for obedience. This is where we need to focus our energies, so that we do not drift from our great salvation.

We're pleased to make this resource available for personal or group study at no charge, and we hope you will find this series helpful in realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

Please visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to discover the many other resources available to serve your needs. The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Visit our website also to subscribe to our thrice-weekly devotional newsletter, *Crosfigell*, or our daily *Voices Together* devotional and prayer guide.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources, helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 A Promise of Rest

Introduction

God's "rest" is the theme of Hebrews 4. The writer understands that *rest* is a compelling idea, that something in his readers resonates with the idea of finding *rest*. Indeed, these first readers were seeking a merely temporal rest by reverting to the safe confines of Jewish conviction and community. But this rest could never satisfy them, for it is not the rest God offers, nor is it the rest we most deeply and truly desire.

Meditate on Exodus 33.12-23.

Read Hebrews 4.1, 2.

Think it through.

1. When God promised to give Israel *rest*, what was He promising (Ex. 33.12-14)? How does that provide *rest*? The writer insists that "a promise remains of entering His rest" (v. 1). A promise of rest remains for us. We do not expect what Israel experienced in the wilderness. But what *should* we expect? What kind of *rest* does God hold out for us? The writer says we should "fear" coming short of this rest. Really? Why?

2. In what sense was the Gospel "preached" to the people of Moses' day? What "profit" did God intend for His people from these forms of "preaching"? When the writer says that their hearing of the Gospel was not "mixed with faith", what did he mean? How is *our* hearing of the Gospel mixed with faith? Does this apply only at our *initial* hearing of the Gospel? How broad is the Gospel of our great salvation (Heb. 2.3)? To how much of your life does the Gospel apply? Are you hearing with faith in *all* these areas?

Meditate.

"Hearing the words does not suffice for salvation; accepting it in faith is necessary, and holding it firm. After all, what benefit was God's promise to those who received it, but did not receive it faithfully, trust in the power of God or, as it were, associate closely with God's words?" *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 2 Peter 1.5-9

Thank You, Lord, for the gift of faith, the ability to believe in You, Your rest, and Your Word. Today, help me to add to my faith ...

Pray Psalm 84.1-4.

Our rest is in God – in His presence and blessings. As you pray these verses, remember that you have been seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2.6), and that these places are your true home. Thank God for all He shows you about the home He is preparing for your rest.

Psalm 84.1-4 (*Holy Manna: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Lord of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling;
How my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling
Of Your grace forever more.
Like a bird upon the altar
Let my life to You belong.

Blessed are they who never falter
As they praise Your grace with song!

2 God's Rest

Introduction

We need to make sure we understand what God has in store for us. His *rest* awaits all who believe. But why should we want to enter His *rest*?

Meditate on Genesis 1.31-2.3.

Read Hebrews 4.3-6.

Think it through.

1. What comes to mind when you think of “rest”? Do you have a favorite *place* for resting? A favorite activity? What benefits do you enjoy from resting? God rested into a situation described as *very good* (Gen. 1.31). What was *very good* about the creation at the end of day 6? How many different aspects of goodness can you identify? In what ways did this *very good* condition reflect God? In verse 6, the land of promise is referred to as a type of God's rest. In what ways?

2. God's rest is contrasted with His working. God ceased from His original work of creating and entered into rest. God is still working, as Jesus explained (Jn. 5.17); however, He has entered into His rest. How do resting and working go together with God? To enter God's rest, we must meet a certain condition (v. 3). What is that condition? How does this relate to the idea of resting from work, but working in our rest? How can working still be a form of rest? Why does the writer keep repeating Psalm 95.11 (v. 3, see Heb. 2.11, 18)? Is entering God's rest important? Explain.

Meditate.

“He says that there are ‘three’ rests: one, that of the sabbath, in which God rested from works; the second, that of Palestine, in which, when the Jews had entered, they would be at rest from their hardships and labors; the third, that which is rest indeed, the kingdom of heaven, where those who obtain it do indeed rest from their labors and troubles.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11.28, 29

Lord, I'm so busy, so distracted, and so burdened by many things, that I fail to know Your rest as much as I should. Show me how to ...

Pray Psalm 84.1-7.

What is your Valley of Tears (Baca)? How can you find rest, even in times of trial and setback? Ask God to make your tears of sorrow into springs of joy.

Psalm 84.1-7 (*Holy Manna: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Lord of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling;
How my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling
Of Your grace forever more.
Like a bird upon the altar
Let my life to You belong.
Blessed are they who never falter
As they praise Your grace with song!

Blessed are they whose strength is founded
In Your strength, O Lord above.
All whose hearts in You are grounded
Journey in Your strength and love.
Though they weep with tears of sadness,
Grace shall all their way sustain.
In Your presence, filled with gladness,
They shall conquer all their pain.

3 Today and Every Day

Introduction

The writer appeals to Psalm 95 yet again (cf. Heb. 3.7, 8, 15) to urge his readers not to lose their focus, and think that the rest they need is in release from persecution, rather than in the presence and blessings of God. Today, now, is the time to hear the Word of God, believe, and enter His rest.

Review Psalm 95.

Read Hebrews 4.6, 7.

Think it through.

1. We have seen that our writer makes much use of the psalms in calling his readers to faithfulness. Already he has appealed to Psalms 2, 8, 22, 45, 95, 102, 104, and 110. For those Hebrew believers, the Psalms were their prayer book and hymnal, just as they have been for Christians throughout the ages. Look at Acts 4.23-26. In this situation, one person probably began praying Psalm 146.5, 6, then took up the first verses of Psalm 2. As he did, the people – *thousands* of them – raised their voice with one accord, like we would do in an assembly of believers if someone started singing “Amazing Grace”. Why would it make sense for the writer of Hebrews to base his argument and appeal on the Psalms? What was he hoping to accomplish by linking his teaching to prayers and songs his readers would know very well? Are we missing something by not singing and praying the psalms any more than we do? Singing psalms is evidence of the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5.18ff). Would it please the Spirit if we sang and prayed psalms? Would we benefit from this discipline? Explain.

2. The writer links unbelief with disobedience in recalling the failure of his readers’ forebears (vv. 6, 2). Unbelief and disobedience flow from a heart that is hardened against the Word of God (v. 7, quoting Psalm 95.7, 8). How did the hearts of those people become hardened? What hardened their hearts, so that they refused to enter the land of promised rest? How do our hearts become hardened today? Today and every day, we need to hear the Word of God, and claim the rest that comes from believing and obeying. This is what it means to “hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb. 3.14). How can we guard against our hearts becoming hardened against hearing God’s Word? How can we encourage one another in this?

Meditate.

“They had received clear evidence of the power of God; they ought to have believed. But yielding too much to fear and imagining nothing great concerning God and being faint-hearted, they perished. And there is also something more to be said, as, that after they had accomplished the greatest part of the journey, when they were at the very doors, at the haven itself, they were sunk into the sea. This I fear, he says, for you also.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10.28

You have called me to hold fast my confidence in Jesus today and every day, O Lord. But I can see snares of the fear of man ahead, such as ...

Pray Psalm 84.5-9.

How will you deal with the fear of man today? Call upon the Lord for His strength – strength to strength – and plead with Him to be your shield. Then go forth in boldness into your Personal Mission Field.

Psalm 84.5-12 (*Holy Manna: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Blessed are they whose strength is founded
In Your strength, O Lord above.
All whose hearts in You are grounded
Journey in Your strength and love.
Though they weep with tears of sadness,
Grace shall all their way sustain.
In Your presence, filled with gladness,
They shall conquer all their pain.

Lord of hosts, my prayer receiving,
Hear me, help me by Your grace!
In Your courts I stand believing;
Turn to me Your glorious face!
Lord, our sun, our shield, our glory,
No good thing will You deny
To those who proclaim Your story,
And who on Your grace rely.

4 A Rest Remaining

Introduction

Joshua provides a type of God's rest. The people of God who fought with him truly *rested* in the promises of God, if only for a season. But a rest of God remains, toward which Israel's settling in the land of promises and enjoying the covenant blessings of God points. By looking back, we can perhaps better understand what's involved in entering God's rest.

Read *Joshua 23.1-13*.

Read *Hebrews 4.8-10*.

Think it through.

1. Under Joshua's leadership, the people of Israel entered a *rest* of the Lord (Josh. 23.1). What was involved in their entering that rest? Can you see that Joshua, like the writer of Hebrews, warned God's people against *drifting* from that rest? How would that happen in ancient Israel? How should Joshua's warning to them warn us? The writer of Hebrews indicates that the rest Israel achieved under Joshua was not the *true* or *final rest* God intends. How can you see that in Hebrews 4.8? But what can we learn from the rest Israel, under Joshua, attained to help us in thinking about the rest that remains?

2. Explain "His rest" and "his works" in verse 10. In Hebrews 10.24, the writer will indicate that "love and good works" are the proper fruit of all who have entered God's *rest*. If a believer has ceased from "his" works, what works are indicated in Hebrews 10.24? In what sense does the *rest* of God "remain" for believers? Does this suggest that *rest* is not a permanent condition? Or does he mean to suggest greater depths to God's *rest* or greater consistency in *rest* yet remain for us? Explain. Should knowing this affect our daily walk with and work for the Lord? Explain.

Meditate.

"Indeed, Joshua made them rest, because he gave them the land as an inheritance, but they did not rest in it perfectly, as God perfectly rested from God's works, for they lived in toils and wars. If that rest was not a true rest, since Joshua himself, the giver of their rest, was urged by the wars, if this is their condition, I say, there still remains the sabbath of God, who gives rest to those who enter there, as God rested from God's works, that is, from all the works which God made." *Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD)*

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Matthew 11.28, 29

I would enter more deeply and consistently into Your rest, O Lord, but not from Your works. Help me today to ...

Pray *Psalm 84.1-7*.

As you pray, let the images of these verses suggest aspects of the rest you have in God. Thank and praise Him specifically for each one.

Psalm 84.1-7 (*Holy Manna: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Lord of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling;
How my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling
Of Your grace forever more.
Like a bird upon the altar

Let my life to You belong.
Blessed are they who never falter
As they praise Your grace with song!

Blessed are they whose strength is founded
In Your strength, O Lord above.
All whose hearts in You are grounded
Journey in Your strength and love.
Though they weep with tears of sadness,
Grace shall all their way sustain.
In Your presence, filled with gladness,
They shall conquer all their pain.

5 This Way to Rest

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews is using *rest* as Paul and Peter use *promises*. The *rest* of God, as symbolized in Israel's entering the land of promise, entails that whole raft of promises made to Abraham, fulfilled in Jesus, and now available to all who believe in Him (Gen. 12.1-3; 2 Cor. 1.20; Rom. 4.16; 2 Pet. 1.4). We enter God's rest by faith and obedience, as we have seen. But faith *in* what? Obedience *to* what? Our writer answers those questions in today's verses.

Read Psalm 19.7-14.

Read Hebrews 4.11-13.

Think it through.

1. A *rest* remains for those who believe. Therefore, we should make it our business to enter *that* rest, *God's* rest, and leave off thinking we can find *better* rest by turning from Him to other things. The writer says we should "be diligent to enter that rest." What does someone look like who is diligently entering ever more deeply into God's rest and promises? What is that person doing? What should he experience? According to the last part of verse 11, if we are not diligent in entering that rest, to what are we susceptible?

2. The writer abruptly turns from exhorting us to be diligent in entering God's rest to what seems like a different topic. Verse 12 begins with the word, *For*, as though some rationale or explanation were to follow. What is that rationale? How does the Word of God show itself to be *living and powerful, sharp and piercing* in your life? The Word surfaces what's going on in our minds and hearts. What does this mean, and why is it important we be reminded of this? In verse 13, the Word is likened unto the "eyes of Him to whom we *must give account*." We open the Scriptures, and through the Scriptures, God opens His eyes on us. How are the Scriptures like the "eyes" of God? Why is it important for us to know this? What does all this have to do with entering God's rest?

Meditate.

"Now the holy depth of divine Scripture is expressed in such common language that everyone immediately takes it in. But buried within it are hidden senses of truth, so that the vital meaning must be most carefully sought out. What contributes most of all to our understanding that it is really divine is the fact that ignorant persons are known to have been able to explain most subtle things, and mortal humans eternal things, but only when filled with the divine Spirit." *Cassiodorus (485-580 AD)*

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1.19-21

Your Word is alive, O Lord, and powerful. You see me through it, and I see You in it. O help me, Lord, to ...

Pray Psalm 84.1-12.

The life of faith is a journey which takes us deeper into God's promises and rest every day, until at last we arrive in His heavenly rest in glory. Pray this psalm, thinking about the day ahead, and how you prepare to know God's rest, come what may.

Psalm 84.1-12 (*Holy Manna: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Lord of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling;

How my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling
Of Your grace forever more.
Like a bird upon the altar
Let my life to You belong.
Blessed are they who never falter
As they praise Your grace with song!

Blessed are they whose strength is founded
In Your strength, O Lord above.
All whose hearts in You are grounded
Journey in Your strength and love.
Though they weep with tears of sadness,
Grace shall all their way sustain.
In Your presence, filled with gladness,
They shall conquer all their pain.

Lord of hosts, my prayer receiving,
Hear me, help me by Your grace!
In Your courts I stand believing;
Turn to me Your glorious face!
Lord, our sun, our shield, our glory,
No good thing will You deny
To those who proclaim Your story,
And who on Your grace rely.

6 Hold Fast

Introduction

The Word of God shows us the rest He has prepared for us, illuminates whatever obstacles in our souls may be keeping us from entering that rest, and guides us along the path of faith and obedience. But the Word must be coupled with prayer if we are to connect fully with Him Who alone can bring us into the rest of God. He will deliver us from the allure of false rests as we seek Him diligently in prayer.

Meditate on Jeremiah 29.11-14.

Read Hebrews 4.14-16.

Think it through.

1. As we read and ponder it, the Word of God reveals the depths of our soul, where we discover many things that might discourage us from entering God's rest. But Jesus has gone before us into God's rest. We are seated with Him, and our lives have been hidden with Him (Eph. 2.6; Col. 3.3). How should this encourage us to persevere in seeking God's rest? What is the *confession* to which we must "hold fast" if we are to enter God's rest? How does Jesus our High Priest help us in holding fast to this confession?

2. Jesus our High Priest rules at the right hand of God (Ps. 110). He understands us. He knows what it's like to be tempted. But to be tempted – even to be tempted to seek rest somewhere other than in God – is not sin. Temptation can *lead* to sin, but not necessarily so. Whenever we find ourselves in temptation, what should we do? We want to *grow through* temptation into greater degrees of sanctification, and not *fall through* temptation into sin. But *if* we fall through, what should we do (1 Jn. 1.8-10)? The place where Jesus rules is a "throne of grace." Why is that important to know? What's the difference between mercy and grace? Why is Jesus able to facilitate these for us?

Meditate.

"The believers at that time were subjected to constant billowing by trials; so he consoles them by bringing out that our high priest not only knows as God the weakness of our nature but also as man had experience of our sufferings, remaining unfamiliar with sin alone. Understanding this weakness of ours, he is saying, he both extends us appropriate help and when judging us he will take our weakness into account in delivering sentence." *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. 1 John 1.8-10

Lord Jesus, lift me into Your Presence! Cleanse and renew me, and send me out in Your Name today to ...

Pray Psalm 84.1-12.

As you pray, envision the heavenly court and the throne of grace where Jesus reigns. Let your prayer and singing swell with joy as the Lord receives You into His Presence.

Psalm 84.1-12 (*Holy Manna: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Lord of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling;
How my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling
Of Your grace forever more.

Like a bird upon the altar
Let my life to You belong.
Blessed are they who never falter
As they praise Your grace with song!

Blessed are they whose strength is founded
In Your strength, O Lord above.
All whose hearts in You are grounded
Journey in Your strength and love.
Though they weep with tears of sadness,
Grace shall all their way sustain.
In Your presence, filled with gladness,
They shall conquer all their pain.

Lord of hosts, my prayer receiving,
Hear me, help me by Your grace!
In Your courts I stand believing;
Turn to me Your glorious face!
Lord, our sun, our shield, our glory,
No good thing will You deny
To those who proclaim Your story,
And who on Your grace rely.

7 Enter God's Rest

Introduction

In chapter 4, reference to God's *rest* occurs no less than 11 times. Clearly, the theme of entering God's rest is primary in this chapter, as in the entire book of Hebrews. It is *God's* rest we must seek, for only in His rest will we find the fullness of life that He offers to all who believe and obey His Word. We must not be distracted into seeking other kinds of rest, for these are at best only temporary, and at worst utterly false. We are on a journey into the eternal rest of God, but we must enter that rest daily, and persevere in it.

Read Psalm 84.

Read and Meditate on Hebrews 4.

Think it through.

1. How would you define the *rest* the writer of Hebrews is urging upon his readers? Keeping in the mind the various false "rests" people might seek, how would you work this idea of God's *rest* into your presentation of the Gospel? The writer also says we should "fear lest any of you seem to come short" of God's *rest*. Why? Entering God's rest is not a once-for-all activity, but something we seek to realize increasingly. What does this involve (vv. 2, 6, 11, 14)?

2. Summarize the relationship between the Word of God and prayer when it comes to entering God's *rest*. Why is it a good thing that Jesus has gone before us through the veil as our great High Priest?

Meditate.

"Just as the first 'rest' did not prevent there being a second rest, so neither does the existence of a second rest prevent the existence of a third and more perfect rest.... Then it is clear that there is a certain other rest beyond those rests which have been spoken of, and that this rest is hallowed not for any who happen to chance upon it, but rather 'for the people of God.' But truly the people of God are 'those who believe' in him and who keep his commandments." *Photinus (820-891 AD)*

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3.12-14

Help me daily to press on, Lord, to enter more fully into Your rest, and thus to know ...

Pray Psalm 84.1-12.

Give thanks to God for your journey into His rest, for how far you have come to this point, and for how much more of His rest awaits you day by day.

Psalm 84.1-12 (*Holy Manna: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Lord of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling;
How my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling
Of Your grace forever more.
Like a bird upon the altar
Let my life to You belong.
Blessed are they who never falter
As they praise Your grace with song!

Blessed are they whose strength is founded
In Your strength, O Lord above.
All whose hearts in You are grounded
Journey in Your strength and love.
Though they weep with tears of sadness,
Grace shall all their way sustain.
In Your presence, filled with gladness,
They shall conquer all their pain.

Lord of hosts, my prayer receiving,
Hear me, help me by Your grace!
In Your courts I stand believing;
Turn to me Your glorious face!
Lord, our sun, our shield, our glory,
No good thing will You deny
To those who proclaim Your story,
And who on Your grace rely.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What is the *rest* which we are called to enter?
2. What other “rests” can distract or divert us from God’s rest? How can we determine when we have begun to drift from God’s rest?
3. Why is it important to understand that Jesus has gone before us as a High Priest into the presence of God?
4. How do the Word of God and prayer help us in entering God’s rest? How do faith and obedience related to the Word and prayer?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.