

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS
A Study of Hebrews 4:1-16
By Pastor Marcus Bates

Introduction – Review

- The apostle Paul is believed to be the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (**GC 347, 411, 413, 420-421**).
- Timothy was a close ministry associate of Paul, and is mentioned in the book of Hebrews (**Heb. 13:23**), similar to other epistles written by Paul (**2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:2; 1:18; 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 2:1; Philemon 1:1**).
- Produced prior to Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70, this epistle was written to Jewish Christians, and might have also been used as an evangelistic tool to reach the Jewish people with the Gospel message.
- One of the central themes in the book of Hebrews is the “**Jesus is better than . . .**” theme.
- **Heb. 1:1-14** describes how Christ is better than angelic beings; in like manner, **Heb. 2:1-18** also implies that Christ, the second Adam, is better than the first Adam and every other human being; following suit, **Heb. 3:1-19** describes that Jesus is better than Moses; He has built a better spiritual house (the Church), and offers a better rest than the earthy Canaan of the OT – an eternal rest of salvation in heaven!

Hebrews 4 – Reflections on Hebrews 4:1-5

- Chapter 3 concludes with how some of the ancient Israelites refused to enter into God’s rest during the Exodus; this rest can be understood in three ways – the rest of salvation, the rest of settling in the promised land of Canaan after a 40-year wilderness wandering, and the weekly rest of the Sabbath.
- This refusal to enter God’s rest by some of the ancient Israelites during the Exodus is an example of what not to do; we should strive to experience God’s rest, and not fall short of entering into this rest.
- The ancient Israelites certainly received and heard God’s Word, but because they did not have faith in this Word, they did not benefit from it spiritually or temporally, and were not allowed to enter Canaan.
- We should learn from their example and allow the preaching of God’s Word to benefit us by heeding God’s principles; we should be hearers and doers of God’s Word (**Luke 11:27-28; Rom. 10:17; Jam. 1:22**).
- Although His creative works have been finished since the original creation, God has provided us with a weekly reminder of creation – the seventh-day Sabbath (**Exo. 20:8-11**) – and if we honor this day as a special time of rest and spiritual rejuvenation, we will experience the rest God has provided for us.

Hebrews 4 – Reflections on Hebrews 4:6-11

- Some rebellious Israelites refused to enter into the weekly Sabbath rest during the Exodus (**Exo. 16:4-30**).
- Their lack of trust in God also kept them from the spiritual rest of salvation, and ultimately prevented them from experiencing the rest of settling in the promised land after forty years of wilderness travel.
- Paul encouraged his readers to learn from this rebellious example by not making the same wrong choices; he told them to enter into God’s rest, which involves honoring the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath; God has chosen a specific day for the Sabbath to be observed – the seventh day of the week.
- He also called his readers to experience salvation and obedience; today is the day of salvation (**2 Cor. 6:2**).
- Learning from this past history, we should also seek to avoid hardening our hearts against the Holy Spirit by responding to God’s invitation to experience salvation every day (**Luke 9:23; 2 Cor. 4:16**); this daily call to experience salvation was also later repeated to David in his day (**Psa. 95:7-8**).
- The Israelites should have responded to Joshua’s invitation to enter into God’s rest (**Josh. 22:4**); God has also repeated this special invitation for people to experience salvation in every generation.
- Joshua gave the ancient Israelites a temporal rest from their wilderness travels during the settlement of Canaan; yet, they regularly refused to keep the Sabbath day holy and did not desire God’s offer of rest in salvation; therefore, God had to repeat this salvation invitation to Israel at various stages in its history.
- God’s faithful are also still expected to observe the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest; in doing so, they are following His example of resting on the Sabbath after His six days of creative work.
- We should make an effort to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy, and thus show our faith and obedience in God, and not follow the wrong example of unbelief and disobedience by some of the ancient Israelites.

Hebrews 4 – Reflections on Hebrews 4:12-16

- For those who follow and obey God's Word by faith, Paul equates this Word to a sharp, two-edged sword that speaks to the inner thoughts and motives of the human heart (**Eph. 6:17**).
- God called the ancient Israelites who were involved in the Exodus to have faith in His Word (**Deut. 30:14**); yet, rebellious Israelites chose to reject His Word, and refused to enter into His rest; once again, we should avoid making this mistake, and seek to trust and obey God's Word by faith.
- Because God's Word is able to read the inner thoughts and motives of the heart, we should seek to enter into God's spiritual rest of salvation through Jesus Christ in our inner being; we should give Him heart-service and not just lip-service, because He deserves to have full control of our hearts and minds.
- Jesus Christ is our faithful high priest, the One to whom we can hold fast as far as our profession of faith; because He took our human nature, He can relate to our human struggles with respect to temptation.
- Jesus was tempted in every possible way that we are tempted as human beings, and yet never sinned; this means that He can help us to resist temptation and be victorious over the power of sin.
- To resist temptation and be victorious, we must come to Jesus with a bold and humble faith to seek His mercy and strength in a time of need; this is the true spiritual rest that Christ offers every person.

Summary of Hebrews 4:1-16

- Some of the ancient Israelites refused to enter into God's rest during Israel's wilderness travel after the Exodus from Egypt; their rebellious example is a spiritual lesson for us of what not to do!
- These rebellious ancient Israelites heard the preaching of God's Word by Moses, and yet did not profit from this preaching because they did not faithfully obey God's ways; this demonstrates to us that God's Word can only profit us if we choose to listen and obey God's principles by faith.
- True believers in Christ will seek to enter into God's rest; this includes experiencing the daily rest of salvation and observing the seventh-day Sabbath as a weekly day of rest; God's spiritual rest in the present will ultimately lead to entering into the rest of the heavenly promised land when Jesus' returns!
- God's offer for human beings to enter into His rest is continual, and we should respond every day by choosing to live by faith, and thus avoid hardening our hearts against the appeals of the Holy Spirit.
- God's Word is likened to a spiritual sword that slices into the deeper recesses of our hearts; the Word can read our inner thoughts and motives; Christ, as the Word, can read the very depths of our inner being!
- Jesus Christ is our High Priest, the One in whom we should rest as far as our profession of faith; He can relate to our experiences with temptation, because He has been tempted and victorious.
- As a result, He is able to help us to endure and conquer temptation; we only need to come to Him with a humble and bold faith, and seek His mercy and grace for spiritual strength in our times of need.