

Entering into Rest

*“Let us therefore
fear, lest, a promise
being left us of
entering into his
rest, any of you
should seem to
come short of it.”
—Hebrews 4:1*

Our subject, “Entering into Rest,” is of special interest to the people of God. Its importance is outlined in both the Old and New Testaments. The Apostle Paul devotes most of the fourth chapter of the Book of Hebrews to this subject,

which is the basis of our present consideration.

The closing verses of Hebrews chapter 3 present the example of Israel’s failure to enter into the rest which could have been enjoyed by them. Failure to do so, Paul says, was “because of unbelief.” (vss. 18,19) It is this example that the apostle builds on when he writes in our opening text, “Let us therefore fear.” The fear referred to is not that of terror or dread. The apostle writes that God has not given us the “spirit of fear.”—II Tim. 1:7

The “fear” we should have, lest we come short of any promise which the Lord has given to us of entering into his rest, is that of reverential obedience, to make sure that we are not unfaithful to

the Lord's requirements. When the apostle in our text speaks of coming short of a promise, the thought is failure to meet its conditions, which requires obedience. All God's promises to those who are partakers of the heavenly calling are conditional upon faithfulness in doing God's will.

Lack of faith, or unbelief, is one of the greatest contributing factors to disobedience. As Christians, we should be alert to avoid this pitfall. Likewise, failure to be watchful results in the weakening of faith. The blinding, paralyzing influence of unbelief caused the Israelites to fail. Noting this, we should endeavor to maintain a sober appreciation of the dangers involved in our own case. Let us not become overcharged with the cares of this life, or of permitting some earthborn cloud to dim our spiritual vision so that we fail to enter into God's rest.

The promise of a heavenly inheritance is so precious that we should allow nothing to prevent us from attaining it. We should prepare for it by feeding on the heavenly manna provided by our Heavenly Father, and by drinking an abundance of the water of Truth from that "spiritual Rock," Christ Jesus. (I Cor. 10:4) This promise is for all the footstep followers of Jesus. However, only those who are strong in faith will attain, and who preserve their confidence through watchfulness and prayer.

Rest in the Gospel

Verse 2 of Hebrews chapter 4 reads: "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." The word "gospel" means good news. We are accustomed to

think of it as applying primarily to the “gospel of Christ: ... the power of God unto salvation.” (Rom. 1:16) Paul tells us that God “preached before the gospel unto Abraham.” In this case it was the good news that through the patriarch’s seed all the families of the earth would be blessed in due time.—Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8

In this second verse of the chapter, Paul uses the word “gospel” to describe the good news that the Israelites would enter into their inheritance in the Promised Land. To them this meant rest from the hardships of the wilderness—the desert heat, living in tents, and other difficulties. In the land of promise they would enjoy a land of beautiful hills and valleys, where there were abundant springs of living water, cool and refreshing, and an ample amount of food. This was the highest rest the Israelites, with their natural minds, could imagine.—Deut. 8:7-9; 11:10-12

This good news to Israel, as the apostle indicates, foreshadowed the “gospel of [our] salvation,” which has been preached to us—spiritual Israel. (Eph. 1:13) Our ultimate rest will be enjoyed in a heavenly Canaan. The Israelites as a nation were not profited by the message preached to them, but this should not be so with us. We should be “doers of the word” as well as hearers.—James 1:22-25

Our Present Rest

“For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his

works.” (Heb. 4:3,4) There is a rest which the people of God who are strong in faith may enjoy even before they enter into the heavenly rest. This present rest is in proportion to our measure of faith.

What is this rest? The apostle explains that it is like the rest which God entered into when the original work of Creation was finished. (Gen. 2:1-3) We are not to suppose that God was then physically tired and that he ceased all activity until he became rested. On this point the Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?”—Isa. 40:28

God pronounced his creative work “very good.” (Gen. 1:31) He knew, however, that man had to be tested, and that if he failed this test he would come under the sentence of death. God permitted this to happen in order that the human race might experience evil and learn the terrible results of disobedience to his laws. The benefit of this experience, however, could only be gained by restoring man to life. This could not be done unless a Redeemer was provided to give his life in place of the forfeited life of Adam. This entire work of dealing with and blessing the fallen race through redemption and restoration provided through Christ Jesus will result in mankind learning the great lesson of “the knowledge of good and evil.”—Gen. 2:9,17; 3:22

Present Responsibilities

Our lesson continues in Hebrews 4:5-8: “And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter

therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying ... To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day."

In these verses it is clearly shown that in God's plan a fixed number had been determined who would prove their fidelity to God by their complete faith and confidence in him. These were to have faith so strong that they would be able to devote their entire being to him. They would rest completely in the belief that he would cause all things to work together for their good.—Rom. 8:28

The Israelites who came out of Egypt failed in this test. David refers to this in Psalm 95:7,8. Paul quotes this scripture and indicates that when the psalmist used the expression "To day," he was speaking prophetically of the present call to follow in Christ's footsteps. As Christians, our faith is now being tested, and it behooves us to be on the alert, to fear lest our hearts become hardened, due to a lack of faith. The opportunities of this present time are limited, says the apostle, so let us be diligent, for the "time is short."—I Cor. 7:29

Speaking from the standpoint of Israel's Sabbath of rest, and prophetically of the rest of faith enjoyed by spiritual Israel, the Prophet Isaiah writes of how we may delight ourselves in the Lord, and that he will feed us "with the heritage of Jacob." (Isa. 58:13,14) Jacob, because of his faith, gained sweet communion with the Lord and a reaffirmation of the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac.—Gen. 28:14

At the present time we experience a foretaste of the rest that “remaineth,” that perfect rest beyond the veil. We should learn to cast all our care upon the Lord, knowing that he doeth all things well. (I Pet. 5:7) Thus the burden is lifted from our own hearts, and we are free to meditate and to enjoy sweet fellowship with our Heavenly Father and with our Lord Jesus. By faith we are able to eat of the luscious fruit of the spiritual land of promise, and to drink the new wine of the coming kingdom. What wonderful peace and rest results from such a full confidence in, and fellowship with, the Lord.

The Rest that Remaineth

Continuing, we read: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”—Heb. 4:9-11

These two statements—“There remaineth ... a rest” and “let us labour ... to enter into that rest”—refer to our heavenly rest if we are “faithful unto death.” (Rev. 2:10) In the tenth verse, somewhat as a parenthesis, Paul speaks of our present rest of faith. Having entered, we have even now ceased from our own works as God did from his. Thus, entering into the future rest that “remaineth” is dependent upon our having entered into the present rest of faith.

The Word of God

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the

joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12) God spoke to Israel through Moses, Joshua, and others. Their faith was tested by the measure of their obedience to the Word of the Lord imparted to them. He speaks to us also through his Word. Our faith is likewise tested upon the basis of our zeal in doing those things taught in his Word of Truth.—II Tim. 2:15; 3:16,17

The Word of God is a most penetrating searchlight. It searches out even the motives behind our thoughts, as illustrated by the “dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.” Nothing can be hidden from such a searching influence. Let us endeavor to keep our hearts pure, that thus our spiritual vision may be clear and our faith strong.

Paul states further: “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Heb. 4:13) God’s Word penetrates our innermost consciences and reveals what we are to ourselves, enabling us to compare it with what we should be. Meanwhile, the Lord is also looking into our minds and appraising the progress we are making in bringing “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—II Cor. 10:5

Our Great High Priest

Verses 14 and 15 of Hebrews 4 read: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;

but was in all points tempted [Greek: tested] like as we are, yet without sin.”

At those times when we realize that the thoughts and intents of our hearts are not right before God, we can be assured that a loving provision has been made to extend mercy to us through Christ Jesus, our great high priest. Because he is able, as the result of his own experiences, to deal with us sympathetically, we can with confidence continue to “hold fast our profession.” We have professed to accept Christ as our Redeemer and Savior, and to have covenanted to walk in his steps of self-sacrifice. We have professed to believe the promises of God relating to our “heavenly calling.” (Heb. 3:1) We have undertaken to conform ourselves to all the conditions attached to those promises. When we think of self with all its weaknesses, we would perhaps lose courage and begin to let these things slip, were it not for the knowledge that we have a sympathetic high priest who understands when we fail. (Heb. 2:1) Thus we can with confidence “hold fast our profession” in the firm belief that we will ultimately attain our goal, which is Christ.

Our High Priest was tested “in all points,” says the apostle; that is, he was tested in the way we are tested. He is our great burden bearer. He understands how great are our struggles, and what an effort it is to keep God’s will continually uppermost in our hearts and minds. He understands why we fail so often and lack so much in those qualities of righteousness with which the Lord is pleased to see us adorned. His merit is ready for our asking, and it makes up for our defects so long as the intentions of our hearts are right.

The Throne of Grace

Hebrews chapter 4 concludes with these words: “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (vs. 16) God wants us to enter into his presence with confidence, not timidly as though we were fearful he would not recognize the merit of our high priest, in whose name we approach the Heavenly Father. Our present rest of faith depends upon our exercising full confidence in this loving provision. God wants us to enjoy full rest, peace, and joy.

The “throne of grace” is a beautiful and meaningful description of the divine provision of mercy for those members of the sinful and dying race, whom God has taken into his family as sons. It is illustrated by the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy of Israel’s Tabernacle, on which the blood of the Atonement Day sacrifices was sprinkled. (Lev. 16:14,15) The Mercy Seat represents divine justice, while the two cherubim arising out of it and looking down upon it with outstretched wings, illustrate God’s love and power ready to bear the message of redemption and restoration, through Christ, to the world.—Heb. 9:11,12; Acts 3:20,21

It is the merit, or value, of Christ’s ransom sacrifice that satisfies justice and makes available the “throne of grace” for all those whom Jesus is “not ashamed to call [his] brethren.” (Heb. 2:11) Surely this should cause us to exult with joy and gladness as thus we realize the heights and depths of our Father’s love. We will gain strength to hold fast the Lord’s hand as he leads us in the way of righteousness toward our eternal rest in the heavenly courts.—Ps. 65:4 ■