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Hebrews 4

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Hebrews 4.

INTRODUCTION: this letter is written to Hebrews who had been enlightened, endured sufferings, been publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, stood alongside others who were persecuted, had compassion on those in prison and joyfully accepted others plundering their property (probably the Romans) knowing they had an eternal possession (Heb. 10:31-36). It appears they had a faith in Christ, but were still bound by the Levitical priesthood and the Jewish religious system and because of this the author brilliantly uses Moses Tabernacle, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place and Old Testament Scriptures to prove Jesus is the only High Priest anyone needs and that it is by faith in Christ and God's grace not religious works that God's people are counted righteous. The blessing of this letter is not limited to the Hebrews since everyone who is seeking God or who is a brother or sister of Christ will be overwhelmingly awed as they read this well-crafted and awe-inspiring letter as it beautifully progresses through the chapters proving Jesus is the Christ (probably written about A.D. 68).

Topics.

- The promise of entering God's rest.
- The Good News did not benefit Old Testament Israel.
- From the foundation of the world God's works were finished.
- God rested on the seventh day from all his works.
- Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.
- The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword.
- We have a great High Priest.
- Jesus has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

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The previous chapter: in the previous chapter the author spoke of Jesus Christ being the High Priest of our confession, of our heavenly calling and of Jesus being counted worthy of more glory than Moses, of those who belong to Christ being God's House that he is the Master Builder of. He warned brothers and sisters in Christ not to harden their hearts against God's great salvation as the wilderness generation of the Old Testament did and of entering into God's rest.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

HEBREWS 4:1-2

The Promise of Entering God's Rest.

- **Hebrews 4:1-2:** 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. ²For 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.

The word, therefore links us back to the previous chapter in which the author was warning his readers not to harden their hearts in unbelief as the generation who God delivered from Egypt did by their refusal to cross the River Jordan and enter the Promised Land and therefore they did not enter into God's rest Those not united by faith were the ten spies while those united by faith were Joshua and Caleb. (The complete story is found in Numbers chapter 13 and 14). Now in this chapter the author is encouraging those who think they have missed God's rest by telling them that it is still available, but for anyone to enter this rest they have to cease from their own works in trying to attain to it (v10). For the generation who God delivered from the bondage of Egypt to enter into God's rest they had to trust the word of the LORD, i.e., that He would not only go before them and destroy their enemies, but would also give them rest in the Promised Land. Likewise, for Christians today to enter into God's rest have to trust the gospel of Christ that proclaims they are saved by faith and grace and not their own works. Jesus by his death and resurrection has gone ahead of them and made the way to eternal life clear of all the religious and ceremonial works of the law. The way to eternal life and God's rest is by remaining on God's royal path of faith and grace and trusting in Christ to save us as Old Testament Israel should have trusted that God would save them from their enemies in the land of Canaan.

NOTE: Old Testament Israel saw the fortified cities and men who looked like giants dwelling in the Promised Land and entered into a spirit of fear, defeat and unbelief. Today we might see the depth of sin indwelling us and think we are not worthy of having the Most Holy God set His love upon us. Truly none of us are worthy since we are all full of sinful dysfunctions and aberrations dwelling within (i.e., selfishness, ego, pride, lustful thoughts, greed and jealousies etc.), thus the reason for grace. We can choose to be like Old Testament Israel and look at the giants or to stand in faith and trust in God's grace and his eternal Saviour to save us from the sinful dysfunctions and aberrations dwelling within corrupted fallen body.

The Good News came to us as to them: the words, "The Good News came to us just as to them" (v2) show that the Good News came to the Old Testament believers as it did to the New Testament believers. The faithful fathers of the Old Testament set their faith and hope on:

- The promised seed of (Genesis 3:15) to come.
- The promised prophet and deliver like Moses to come.
- The promised seed of Abraham and of David to come.
- The promised Messiah the Christ of Israel to come.
- The promised Lord and King of the world to come.

Clearly all of these titles refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, the faithful of the Old Testament had their minds and hearts set in faith in the promises God through the prophets had spoken concerning the coming Messiah the Christ and Saviour.

In Hebrews eleven the author states:

- The faithful of the Old Testament understood that they were to receive as an inheritance a city that has foundations of which God is designer and builder. They acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth desiring a better country, that is, a heavenly one. They were people the world was not worthy of and though they were highly commended through their faith and God is not ashamed to be called their God they did not receive what was promised because God had planned and purposed that apart from us they should not be made perfect because God is building an eternal city for both them and for us (Heb. 11:16).

They should not be made perfect before us refers to the resurrection when our perishable and corruptible mortal body puts on the eternal, imperishable and incorruptible body and we are not only made perfect (1 Thess. 4:14-18) (1 Corinthians 15:53-55) but also gathered together (Old

and New Testament brothers and sisters made up of both Jews and Gentiles) to be with Christ in the eternal city God is building without hands. During the Old Testament the blood sacrifices for sin were a shadow of the Christ to come, we in the New Testament do not need to make blood sacrifices since the eternal Lamb of God without blemish, who all the old Testament blood sacrifices for sin were foreshadowing was to come, has come as a Lamb to the slaughter and laid his life down for all.

The Good News did not benefit Old Testament Israel: the ones united by faith and the message Israel heard (v2) refers to Moses, Aaron Joshua and Caleb who said to the people:

- If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey only do not rebel against the LORD and do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us and their protection is removed from them because the LORD is with us; do not fear them” (Num. 14:8-9).

The ones who did not benefit from the message obviously refer to the people who believed the bad report of the ten spies and not only refused to believe the words of Moses, Aaron Joshua and Caleb, but also refused to trust in the promise of God and instead rebelled in unbelief against Him. Because of their gross lack of faith and unbelief they did not enter into God’s rest in the Promised Land.

HEBREWS 4:3

We who have Believed, Enter that Rest.

- **Hebrews 4:3:** 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.

The words, “We who have believed enter that rest” shows that God’s rest can only be entered by believing faith. Israel did not enter God rest because of their unbelief; likewise, unbelief will prevent New Testament Christians from entering God’s rest. The author is using Old Testament examples to show New Testament believers (primarily the Hebrews) that salvation to eternal life is not by works of the law, but by faith and grace this is the rest in focus. It is rest from self-effort in trying to attain to righteousness by the law or by strictly adhering to religious rites, customs and traditions or by keeping Moses laws of purification. God promised the generation he delivered from the bondage of Egypt rest if they remained faithful and trusted in His promise, but sadly rather than believe the testimony of Joshua and Caleb they believed the ten spies and in unbelief and fear rebelled against God and so never entered into the promised rest. Today Christ and the apostles have proclaimed a message of salvation by faith and grace those who believe this message will enter into God’s rest unlike those who trust in the law or religious rites, customs and traditions to be counted righteous by God.

As I swore in my wrath: it was to the generation who God by miraculous wonders had delivered from the bondage of Egypt that He spoke the words, “They shall not enter my rest” (v3) because they refused to cross the River Jordan and enter into the Promised Land.

THE STORY: the LORD told Moses to send men to spy out the Promised Land so Moses sent one man from each of the twelve tribes. After forty-days they returned and said to all of Israel that the land flowed with milk and honey, but the cities are fortified and the men look like giants. Joshua and Caleb told the people not fear or rebel against the LORD, but go up to the Land because the LORD is with them, but the other ten spies told the people that the cities are fortified and all the men look like giants and they seemed like grasshoppers. Then the people wanted to stone Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, but the glory of the LORD appeared to Moses and said:

- How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers (Numbers 14:21-23).

The only two God said would enter the land were Caleb and Joshua because they had a different spirit (the complete story is found in Numbers chapter 13 and 14).

From the foundation of the world God's works were finished: the following words are awesomely stunning and show the wisdom of God's eternal mind that our mortal and finite minds cannot fathom (i.e., God's works were finished from the foundation of the world) (v3). This means everything God planned and purposed for mankind's eternal salvation was purposed and planned and set in motion before the foundations of the world began. God is not making it up as the world goes along or as historic events change, nothing takes God by surprise since God not only has no beginning and no end and possess all wisdom and an eternal mind, but is also a master mathematician with all the foreknowledge of future events and has therefore calculated His master plan for all eternity taking in to account mankind's sinful and destructive nature and all the advances of new inventions and modern technology of each generation. Isaiah wrote of the LORD:

- For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. My word that goes out from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off (Isaiah 55:8-13).

HEBREWS 4:4-6

God rested on the Seventh Day from all His Works.

- **Hebrews 4:4-6:** For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." ⁵And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest." ⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience.

God rested on the seventh day from all his works; is cited from Genesis and Exodus. Genesis says:

- On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done so God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation (Genesis 2:2-3).

Exodus states:

- In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day, therefore blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Exodus 20:11) and again "The seventh day is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:17).

The words, "They shall not enter my rest" (v5) is cited from (Numbers 13 and 14). Following are five different periods of rest mentioned in the Bible.

1. The rest for God on the Sabbath Day.
2. The rest for Old Testament Israel in the Promised Land.
3. The rest that comes by grace for New Testament Christians.

4. The eternal rest those in Christ will have when the Lord returns.
5. The eternal rest all creation will have at the end of Christ's reign on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords when God Himself descends to earth and is ALL in ALL.

The author of Hebrews is using the truth that even God rested from all His works to support his argument that in this New Testament era to enter into God's rest we like God have to cease from our own works to attain to righteousness. This is because whoever attempts to attain righteousness that leads to eternal life by works will never consider themselves worthy nor will there ever be an end to their struggle. The only way any man or woman can feel some sense of righteousness is by judging themselves against another human that is not as well behaved as they are, but the instant any one of us judges ourselves against God's true measure; the Lord Jesus Christ and God's perfect and Holy Law we are all left undone. This is the reason Paul in his letter to the Romans wrote:

- The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:22-24).

We can only consider ourselves worthy of righteousness that leads to eternal life when we are clothed by faith in Christ's royal robe of righteousness and not our old muddy cloak full of torn holes and old patches. When we reach this level of faith, we enter into the rest the author of Hebrew is speaking of.

HEBREWS 4:7-11

Today, "If you Hear His Voice, do not Harden your Hearts."

5

- **Hebrews 4:7-11:** 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." ⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

The term, "God appoints a certain day" (v7) in this context signifies not only time in general, but also present time, and a particular space of time (i.e., a dispensation of time). Here it is connected to rest meaning a dispensation or age of rest.

When it is understood that:

- The seventh day of creation was a day of rest which God and not man entered into.
- The land of Canaan was a typical rest which the unbelieving Israelites did not enter into.
- David spoke the words, "Today, if you hear his voice" in (Psalm 95:7) about 500 years after Israel had been dwelling in the land of Canaan.

It becomes obvious that the words "God appoints a certain day", must still be future and therefore must apply to another group of believers and another age of rest of which God has made the promise of rest. Throughout all ages of the Old and New Covenant two things have always been common:

1. There have always been many unprofitable hearers.
2. The root of all unfaithfulness is unbelief.

Though the same Gospel of substance (core essence) was preached under both the Old and the New Covenants the privileges we have under the Good News of the Gospel are far greater than any had under the law of Moses and yet many even today continue to trust in self-effort and religious works to earn righteousness that leads to eternal life and are thereby robbed of entering into God's rest. As God finished his work and then rested from it on the seventh day, so he has promised that those who believe will finish their work and enjoy the rest from it, so it is clear that there is a more spiritual and excellent Sabbath Day of rest remaining for the people of God than that of the seventh day and that of which Joshua led the Israelites into. Today in this dispensation of time this rest is, a rest of grace it is resting from our works to earn righteousness that leads to eternal life and trusting in our faith in Christ and God's grace to be counted righteous by God. But this is not the ultimate or final dispensation of God's promised rest for the people of faith, but rather the entry into the next two glorious days of rest yet to come for the people of God.

The first of these days is the millennial reign of Christ in which all who have rested from their works in this present day will enjoy with Christ in the coming day and at the end of this day will stand in breathtaking wonder with all creation as God Himself descends from Heaven in majestic glory to be ALL in ALL and eternity begins in perfection. Our rest in today is grace this is the glory the wonder the splendour of the age we live in. Life in this world is full of labour, troubles and hardship, but in Christ there is mental and spiritual rest in the security and knowledge that despite what this world throws at us we will be accepted into perfect eternity a life of eternal happiness and everlasting glory with the Lord Jesus Christ our King and our Lord. In contrast to those who do not believe never entering into this spiritual rest either of grace now in this day or glory in the next age. God has always declared that the means of His peoples rest would always come through faith in God and faith in His love and for all who live in this age the only way to mentally and spiritually enter God's rest is through faith in God's Son the Lord Jesus Christ and God's grace.

HEBREWS 4:12-13

The Word of God is Sharper than any Two-Edged Sword.

- **Hebrews 4:12-13:** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

A literal sword: it was common practise to make the Roman sword with two razor sharp edges since it made it easier to penetrate into the body. The two edges meant it could inflict deadly wounds, sever vital body parts and kill quickly in every direction. It a fitting symbol for the word of God since God's word pierces deep and cuts wide open every secret thought, intent and motivation of the mind and the heart and like the Roman sword it can not only slays lives, but can also save them. Added to this in the hands of a person driven by ego, pride and the lust for power the two edged sword becomes a brutal murder weapon that inflicts great harm, but in the hands of a King with a heart of compassion mercy and grace it becomes a weapon of deliverance, a weapon of protection for the innocent such is the power of the two edged sword and the word of God, both are crafted by master craftsmen, and both can be used for good or for harm, depending on the heart of the one wielding it. The verses above can apply to the following three:

1. Conversion.
2. Living in Christ.
3. Judgment.

1. **Conversion:** since a sinner who hears the word of God is left with two choices of which one choice will give eternal life while the other choice will slay to eternal death the double edged sword is a perfect symbol, one edge for convicting and converting to eternal life and the other edge for judging and condemning to eternal death. The word of God like a penetrating sword cuts and divides decisively in two laying open the true nature of the feelings of the heart so that there can be no escape for the guilty since they see exactly what they are. The sinner is slain by the law, they are cut down under conviction and prostrate themselves before God as if a sword had pierced their heart and they die, meaning they become dead to their old life, their former passions and ambitions to live a new life in Christ.
2. **Living in Christ:** at conversion the word cuts and convicts, but now as those who have been slain by its convicting power walk in the love of Christ and begin to meditate on the words of the Lord as a sweetheart does with the words of her lover Christ' words begin to reach the very fountains of life. They awaken the conscience laying bare the secret feelings of the heart, and is like a penetrating sword that lays open the whole person Christ's words touch the very center of action cutting deeply to the true motives and feelings of our inner most being. It cleanly and decisively divides in two the flesh (i.e., ego, pride, selfish-ambition and our, me focused attitudes etc.,) from the Spirit (humbleness, kindness mercy forgiveness and God and others focused etc.).

The word has an incisive and razor-sharp quality it not only lays bare self-delusions, the thoughts and the intentions, but also arguments and explanations that seem very plausible on the surface but are actually flawed, misleading and deceptive, which is the reason the author of Hebrews wrote, "The word of God pierces the soul and spirit, joints and marrow" since it lays open the inmost recesses of the mind, the thoughts, the intentions and the motives of the heart.

3. **Judgment:** the word of God in reference to its judicial power is like a highly polished doubled edged sword of justice one edge for exalting the righteous to eternal life and the other edge for condemning the wicked to eternal death, one edge for saving the faithful and the other edge for destroying the disobedient. It causes the sinner to tremble with the apprehension of judgment because the truth of God will like light poured into the heart reveal unbelief, secret sins and detect the feelings of the hypocrite and the deceiver. God's word and eyes are all-seeing (Heb. 4:13) and heart-searching. In the same way as the word of God in its judicial power doomed and excluded the disobedient Israelites from entering the Promised Land it will also exclude the unbelieving from entering into eternal glory and heavenly rest.

Living and active: the word of God is called, "Living and active (v12) for the following two reasons:

1. Christ by his Spirit and the Spirit of love dwells within the heart of every faithful brother and sister. One of the main titles Christ is given is the word made flesh. Jesus personified in perfection God's word in his life and his speech and it is this living and active word that dwells within the inner most being and that energizes and motivates those who have Christ seated as King on the throne of their minds and their hearts.
2. Even those who only consider that God may exist understand that the word of God is the testimony of the most Holy God and that this most Holy God sees the true motivations of the thoughts and intents of the human heart which is always perfectly open before Him and therefore know that they cannot hope to deceive or escape true judgment. In this manner the word of God is active and alive in the consciousness of the mind (howbeit very faintly in many).

We have a Great High Priest.

- **Hebrews 4:14-16:** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We have just read in the previous verses that the word of God like a razor-sharp two-edged sword pierces every thought of our mind and every secret and motive of our heart so not one of us can deceive God. Clearly, we understand the Holiness of God and our fallen condition before Him and that without help we have no hope, thus the reason the author now says, "We have a great high priest who is able to sympathise with our weakness." Jesus Christ is the perfect eternal High Priest of all who come before him. The words, "Let us hold fast our confession" (v14) are words of encouragement. The author is saying to his readers now that you understand the Holiness of God and that nothing can be hidden from him, don't despair, don't give up, hold fast to your Faith, because you have a great High Priest who understands those things, we cannot get the victory over. Even though Christ is without sin, his word is perfect and his heavenly Father is Holy, he understands that we are not this is the very reason Christ our perfect High Priest laid his life down for us. Here is the glory, the wonder and splendour of our eternal High Priest whenever we go before him in prayer with a humble and honest heart it is grace and mercy that he meets us with and not rebuke and condemnation.

NOTICE: grace is exalted as sitting on a royal throne (v16), in the same way grace should be seated on the throne of our hearts and minds so that it influences and flavours everything we say and do. How sad it is that there are still many who believe they must confess to a human mortal priest who himself is full of sinful dysfunctions and aberrations (as we all are) when we all have such a perfect and eternal High Priest who not only laid his life down for us, but can sympathise with our human limitations and those things that hinder us from attaining to the perfect standard the law demands.

HOW GLORIOUS IS IT THAT, THE THRONE OUR HIGH PRIEST IS SEATED ON, IS PICTURED AS A THRONE OF GRACE AND MERCY

Fellowship and our High Priest: certainly it is right and spiritually healthy to share our hearts and faults with brothers and sisters in Christ who we trust, but this is a totally different topic to the one in focus in this chapter since sharing with our brothers and sisters is about fellowship whereas here in this letter to the Hebrews the topic is about who we are exalting in our hearts and minds as our High Priest.

Jesus has been tempted as we are, yet without sin: the words, "Jesus has in every respect been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (v15) Jesus was persecuted, he was poor; he was despised, he suffered betrayal, rejection of his friends, public mocking and humiliations, overwhelming sorrow and the physical pain he endured while lingering and enduring a most cruel death on the cross, but the words "Jesus has in every respect been tempted as we are," show that his temptations were not limited to these only, but include all temptations that are common to all of us. But of course, being born of the Holy Spirit and in a unique relationship of love to his heavenly Father he clearly had far more wisdom and understanding than we do. It is certain he not only acutely perceived the dangers of submitting to temptation better than we who are weak, but also repelled them as instantaneously as the fire does the drop of water cast into it. Christ from personal experience knew what power was needed to overcome human temptations. This is why he is the perfect High Priest since examples of all temptations suited to all people of every

character and under all circumstances have been experienced in Jesus alone. This is why Christ can sympathize with his people; he has shared in them and why he is able to help and comfort them in time of need. Another reason Jesus priesthood by far surpasses all other priests is because the Lord adapts himself to each, as if He had not merely taken on himself man's nature in general, but also the peculiar nature of that single individual, this is the beauty the glory and majesty of our eternal heavenly High Priest there is no other who can sympathize with us and understand our spiritual need as Christ can. The words, "Jesus was in every respect tempted as we are" do not imply that he was led into sin by it, nor does it mean that external temptations aroused sin within him. But: the glory and splendour of our eternal High Priest does not end here, he like no human priest not only cleanses our hearts from all unrighteousness through our faith, but fills it with his Holy Spirit and makes his brothers and sisters his own temple and continual habitation.

Is there any other priest on earth that would be willing to
shine such glory upon us?

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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