



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews

## Chapter 4

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# Introduction

- What St. Paul says in chapter 4 is based on what he has just established:
  1. The sin of unbelief prevented the Israelites from entering into God's rest
  2. Rest can refer to:
    - a. Promised land
    - b. Sabbath (seventh day)
    - c. Salvation
    - d. Eternal Life

# Be Sure to Enter the Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- The promise of God's rest is still there
- Physical rest foreshadowed the spiritual rest
- The Spiritual rest which is anticipated in Sabbath regulations, "still stands".
- We should be careful that none of us miss out on it (unbelief)

# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- Though they heard the gospel, it “was of no value to them because they did not combine it with faith”
- This is both a warning and a challenge
- Hearing the message does not save a person
- Unless it is combined with believing God, i.e. believing His message, to obey its command, to repent, and believe

# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- It is just as sure, just as certain, that those who have believed *do* enter God's rest, as it was sure and certain, confirmed by God's oath, that those who did not believe would *not* enter His rest
- The reality of God's rest is confirmed in verses (3-5)

# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- St. Paul grounds the certainty of the existence and reality of “rest” on the foundation of:
  1. God's action “God has been 'resting' since his completion of his work of creation” (Genesis 2:2)
  2. God's word “God makes reference to 'my rest’” (Psalm 95:11)



# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- “My rest” in Psalm 95 does not mean the rest from creation
- God's rest is a continuing and present reality (3)
- Therefore, God, speaking through David many years later, said *“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts”* (4:7; Psalm 95:7,8)
- Whenever God speaks, that day is “today” and that day we are challenged to believe.

# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4: 1-11)



- "There remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (9)
- The eventual entry of the Israelites into the promised land under Joshua is not to be considered the *real* rest of God's people (8)
- It is only a prophetic physical shadow of the *real* Sabbath rest which is still available for the people of God (9)
- The Lord Jesus Christ is this Sabbath rest



# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- The promise of the Lord Jesus Christ is *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matthew 11:28, 29)

# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- He is the reality to which the weekly Sabbaths pointed
- In Him the believer lives in a perpetual spiritual rest
- Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work (10)
- As God rested when He finished creation, we too can relax in God's eternal Day

# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- So, (4:10) means that in that “rest”, we too can relax in God's eternal Day
- "Then I heard a voice from heaven say, *'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.'*" (Revelation 14:13)

# Be Sure To Enter The Promised Rest (4:1-11)



- We should “make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience” (11)
- This pure faith, this pure obedience to the command to believe the good news, is what we are here challenged to make every effort to do



# The Living, Powerful Word of God (4:12-13)

- If ignoring and rebelling against the Word kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land, we must take it seriously
- Moreover, the Word has a way of uncovering our tendencies to go astray and our weaknesses

# The Living, Powerful Word of God (4:12-13)



- The Word is “living” and “powerful.”
- “Living” could mean, “to be life-productive, offer life.”
- “Powerful” is from the same root as our word “energy.”
- It means, “capable, effective, active.”
- In Isaiah 55:11, God declares that His word that He sends out will not return to Him empty or void, but will accomplish the goal for which it was spoken



# The Living, Powerful Word of God (4:12-13)



- The Word is like a sword that is not only sharp, but double-edged (powerful and dangerous)
- It also penetrates deep into the person
- The soul is the seat of the inner life, while the spirit seems to be that part of the human personality that contains the "breath" of life and relates to the Divine Spirit
- God's Word is so powerful that it can separate the inseparable

# The Living, Powerful Word of God (4:12-13)



- It is God's Word that will be the ultimate Judge
- It can discern what cannot be seen from the outside (the hidden thoughts and intentions of the heart)
- In the face of such discernment we can not escape

# The Living, Powerful Word of God (4:12-13)



- No one or no thing of creation is hidden from the Word of God
- Before it all are *naked* and thus unprotected
- We are *laid bare* before its searching eyes
- All are accountable to God in the final analysis

# Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:14-16)



- The Lord Jesus has not gone into the symbolic presence of God (tabernacle), as the earthly high priests did, but He has gone into the real presence of God
- Not just through the curtain, but through the heavens

# Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:14-16)



- He is Jesus the Son of God: this great high priest, is a real human being:
  - a. The human son of a human mother
  - b. Who walked in our dust
  - c. Cried our tears
  - d. And bled our blood

# Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:14-16)



- But He is also more than this: He is the Son of God
- Therefore since we have such a high priest, fully and perfectly qualified to represent us as man in the presence of God, and at the same time the exalted divine Son of God who came down to earth specifically to do this for us, 'let us hold firmly to the faith we profess'. Why?



# Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:14-16)



- Because no one could be more committed to our good
- No one could be better qualified;
- No one more equipped to represent us in the presence of God;
- No one more capable of obtaining eternal salvation for us
- To ignore this high priest is to scorn the ultimate high priest

# Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:14-16)



- To reject or turn aside from this provision of God is to make the final and absolute rejection of God
- This High Priest “can sympathize with our weaknesses”. Why?
- How can He understand our weaknesses so intimately that He sympathizes with them?

# Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:14-16)



- How can a perfect, sinless person feel what imperfect people feel?
- Because He lived among us (John 1:14)
- He experienced our rejection and hatred
- He heard our false accusations
- He felt our whips and our mocking thorns and our nails

# Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:14-16)



- He was pushed to the very limit of temptation's power by the great deceiver, until the tempter gave in
- All of this without sin
- With such a high priest only one response is appropriate: absolute confidence

# Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:14-16)



- Because of the sin-bearing, substitutionary death of Christ, God's throne is, for those who have acknowledged Christ, "a throne of grace"
- "Mercy" refers to God's recognition of our weakness, inability, and need and His doing whatever is necessary for our good and our survival
- "Grace" is the act of God in which He chooses to save us from sin and its consequences."

# Conclusion



- What do you think St. Paul meant by this promise of "rest" for the believer?
- Why do we need to continually expose ourselves to the Word of God?
- What is so important about "holding fast to our confession?"
- In what ways did the Lord Jesus share our weaknesses? In what ways was Jesus tempted?
- Why should we approach the "throne of grace" with boldness and confidence?