

Hebrews 4:1-2 Commentary

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CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST
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 Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
[Swindoll's Chart](#), [Interesting Pictorial Chart of Hebrews](#), [Another Chart](#)

The Epistle to the Hebrews				
INSTRUCTION Hebrews 1-10:18			EXHORTATION Hebrews 10:19-13:25	
Superior Person of Christ Hebrews 1:1-4:13	Superior Priest in Christ Hebrews 4:14-10:18			Superior Life In Christ Hebrews 10:19-13:25
BETTER THAN PERSON Hebrews 1:1-4:13	BETTER PRIESTHOOD Heb 4:14-7:28	BETTER COVENANT Heb 8:1-13	BETTER SACRIFICE Heb 9:1-10:18	BETTER LIFE
MAJESTY OF CHRIST	MINISTRY OF CHRIST			MINISTERS FOR CHRIST
DOCTRINE			DUTY	
DATE WRITTEN: ca. 64-68AD				

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)
 (See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

Borrow [Ryrie Study Bible](#)

Hebrews 4:1 **Therefore**, let us **fear if**, while a **promise remains** of **entering** His **rest**, **any one** of you may **seem** to have **come short** of it. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [Phobethomen \(1PAPS\)](#) [oun mepote kataleipomenes \(PPPFSG\)](#) [epaggelias eiselthein \(AAN\)](#) [eis ten katapausin autou doke \(3SPAS\)](#) [tis](#) ex [humon husterekenai: \(RAN\)](#)

Amplified: THEREFORE, WHILE the promise of entering His rest still holds and is offered [today], let us be afraid [to distrust it], lest any of you should think he has come too late and has come short of [reaching] it. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

KJV: 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.

NKJV: Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

NLT: God's promise of entering his place of rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to get there. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: Now since the same promise of rest is offered to us today, let us be continually on our guard that none of us even looks like failing to attain it. For we too have had a Gospel preached to us, as those men had. Yet the message proclaimed to them did them no good, because they only heard and did not believe as well. It is only as a result of our faith and trust that we experience that rest. For he said: 'So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest'; not because the rest was not prepared - it had been ready since the work of creation was completed, as he says elsewhere in the scriptures, speaking of the seventh day of creation, 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works'. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

TLB: Although God's promise still stands—his promise that all may enter his place of rest—we ought to tremble with fear because some of you may be on the verge of failing to get there after all.

Wuest: Let us therefore fear lest, a promise at any time being left behind and still remaining of entering into His rest, anyone of you should think that he has fallen short of it or has come too late.

Young's Literal: Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it.

THEREFORE, LET US FEAR: [phobethomen \(1PAPS\)](#) [oun:](#)

- Heb 4:11; 2:1, 2, 3; 12:15,25; 13:7; Pr 14:16; 28:14; Jer 32:40; Ro 11:20; 1Cor 10:12
- [Hebrews 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

OT PASSAGES QUOTED IN HEBREWS 4 - [Click for complete list of OT Quotations/Allusions](#)

He 4:3 <> Ps 95:11

He 4:4 <> Ge 2:2

He 4:5 <> Ps 95:11

He 4:7 <> Ps 95:7, 8

KEY WORDS IN HEBREWS 4 - [Click for complete list of Key Words in Hebrews](#)

Faith - He 4:2

Let us - He 4:1, 11, 14,16 ([Click](#) for all 12 "let us..." exhortations in Hebrews in the NASB).)

CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

INSTRUCTION He 1:1-10:18	EXHORTATION He 10:19-13:25
REVELATION He 1:1-10:18	RESPONSE He 10:19-13:25

PRECEPTS He 1:1-10:18		PRACTICE He 10:19-13:25	
DOCTRINE He 1:1-10:18		DUTY He 10:19-13:25	
SUPERIORITY of CHRIST'S PERSON He 1:1-7:28		SUPERIORITY of CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD He 8:1-10:18	SUPERIORITY of the CHRISTIAN'S PRACTICE He 10:19-13:25
MAJESTY OF CHRIST He 1:1-4:13		MINISTRY OF CHRIST He 4:14-10:18	
Christ the Son of God He 1:1-2:4	Christ the Son of Man He 2:5-4:13	Christ the High Priest He 4:14-10:18	Christ the Way He 10:19-13:25

This chart is adapted in part from Jensen's Survey of the NT and Wilkinson's Talk Thru the Bible

Irving Jensen - The main theme of Hebrews may be stated thus: The knowledge and assurance of how great this High Priest Jesus is should lift the drifting believer from spiritual lethargy to vital Christian maturity. Stated another way: The antidote for backsliding is a growing personal knowledge of Jesus (He 2:1, He 2:3). (Jensen, I. L. Jensen's Survey of the New Testament: Search and discover. page 418. Chicago: Moody Press)

Therefore - Always **pause to prayerfully ponder** this strategic **term of conclusion**, and you may be surprised at the insights you glean under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit.

A W Pink explains the "therefore" writing that "The exhortation begun by the apostle in Heb 3:12 is not completed till He 4:12 is reached, all that intervenes consisting of an exposition and application of the passage quoted from Ps. 95 in Heb 3:7, 8, 9, 10, 11. The connecting link between what has been before us and that which we are about to consider is found in 3:19, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." These words form the transition between the two chapters, concluding the exhortation found in He 4:12, 13, and laying a foundation for the admonition which follows... The opening words of this chapter bid us seriously take to heart the solemn warning given at the close of 3. God's judgment upon the wicked should make us more watchful that we do not follow their steps. (Pink, A. W. An Exposition of Hebrews)

Bruce Wilkinson reminds us of the purpose of this epistle and the importance of this middle section (He 4:14-He 10:18) to unequivocally establish the greatness of Christ's priesthood...

Many Jewish believers, having stepped out of Judaism into Christianity, wanted to reverse their course in order to escape persecution by their countrymen. The writer of Hebrews exhorts them to "press on" to maturity in Christ (He 6:1). His appeal is based the superiority of Christ over the Judaic system. Christ is better than the angels, for they worship Him. He is better than Moses, for Moses was created by Him. He is better than the Aaronic priesthood, for His sacrifice was once for all time. He is better than the Law, for He mediates a better covenant. In short, there is more to be gained by suffering for Christ than by reverting to Judaism. Pressing on to maturity produces tested faith, self-discipline, and a visible love seen in good works. (Wilkinson, B., & Boa, K. 1983. Talk thru the Bible. Page 453. Nashville: T. Nelson)

Vine introduces Hebrews 4 with the following summary - What has been given of Israel's history in chapter 3 is now applied with emphasis on two facts, (1) that Israel failed to enter into rest through unbelief, (2) that rest was yet assured and that believers who are not seeking rest here but who accept the present world as a wilderness, should enter God's rest now. God has provided a means of judging unbelief and everything that would hinder a believer from entering into the rest of God and enabling him to give diligence to do so. That means is the Word of God and its power to penetrate the heart; for we all have to do with God, from whom nothing is hidden. This portion also begins to present the main part of the great theme of the book. Here we see Christ not only in the heavens as our Great High Priest, called, qualified and perfected, possessed of the unique order of Melchizedek, but making open for us thereby the sanctuary. All this is set in connection with the new, the better covenant in contrast with the first with its ordinances. There are three subdivisions: (1) Heb 5, 6 and 7, bringing before us the priest himself, (2) Heb 8, speaking of His ministry as the Mediator of the better covenant; (3) Heb 9 and 10, showing us the way into the Holiest and how it has been opened for us. ([Vine, W E: Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. 1996. Nelson](#))

HEBREWS 4:1-11

A DIFFICULT PASSAGE TO INTERPRET

I have wrestled with this passage which at first glance I thought was quite straightforward, only to find that there is considerable variation in interpretation in conservative, evangelical sources. Basically these interpretations break down into two groups - (1) Those who feel the writer is addressing believers who have failed to enter into the fulness of the Christian life (failed to enter His rest). (2) Others who feel this is a strong warning against unbelief which will result in the eternal separation of the faithless person from the presence of God and His eternal rest. There are also permutations and combinations of these two interpretations. Although I think the primary warning is to unbelievers, the text can clearly be applied to the lives of genuine believers who are living what Pastor Chuck Smith calls a "yo-yo" type of Christian life -- sometimes up, sometimes down, but not predominantly victorious over sin and the rest that such a life secures in this present age.

Explore the Bible notes has a good summary of aspects of "rest" described in Hebrews 3-4...

- 1) The **rest** Israel failed to enter when they believed the evil report of the ten unfaithful spies.
- 2) The Sabbath **rest** in the aftermath of God's six days of creative activity: these first two "rests" point to something beyond the mere historical occurrences of creation and conquest. Ultimately, the text describes the **saving rest** which **true believers** experience and the **glorious rest** the saints will enter when they join Christ in heaven.
- 3) The **rest** that people experience when they trust Christ as Lord and Savior: Some of the commentators emphasize the future implications of the "**rest**" of the Lord's people, but they do so at the expense of the present "**rest**" that sinners may find, here and now, when they trust the Savior.
- 4) The future "**rest**" of the people of God when they enter the glories of heaven: This text does have an eschatological element, and Bible students should not neglect this aspect of the chapter's teaching. Also, the comments in point three (above) do not negate or diminish the believer's wonderful expectation of the bliss and rest of heaven. ([Be Obedient](#))

Comment: I basically concur with this classification of rest in Hebrews 3-4, but would add that the future rest might be viewed as having 2 components (if one accepts a literal 1000 years in Revelation 20), with the Millennium preceding the New Heavens and New Earth. For example, **Roy Zuck** in "A Biblical Theology of the NT" (Dallas Theological Seminary) has a note that "**promised rest**" in Hebrews 4 refers to the believer's **earthly, Millennial blessings** as well his **eternal future in heaven**.

Warren Wiersbe offers the following interpretation of the concept of **rest** in Hebrews 3-4...

The **Canaan rest** for Israel is a picture of the **spiritual rest** we find in Christ when we surrender to Him. When we come to Christ by faith, we find **salvation rest** (Mt 11:28).

When we yield and learn of Him and obey Him by faith, we enjoy **submission rest** (Mt 11:29, 30). The first is "**peace with God**" (Ro 5:1-note); the second is the "**peace of God**" (Php 4:6-note, Php 4:7-note, Php 4:8-note).

It is by believing that we enter into **rest** (He 4:3); it is by obeying God by faith and surrendering to His will that the **rest** enters into us. ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

Alternatively, one might also look at **rest** from the perspective of the **Three Tenses of Salvation** (Wiersbe addresses only the first two).

INTERPRETATION OF REST IN HEBREWS 3-4		
PAST TENSE SALVATION	PRESENT TENSE SALVATION	FUTURE TENSE SALVATION
Rest of justification	Rest of sanctification	Rest of glorification

Some commentators feel that the writer of Hebrews is describing primarily **past tense salvation** (e.g., see [Cole's sermon favoring "past tense salvation"](#)) and that his goal is to make certain that any Hebrew readers who are waffling between Judaism and

Christianity would make the choice (today) to enter into the **spiritual rest** and **peace with God** found in justification by faith (Ro 5:1-note). Clearly without **past tense salvation** his readers can experience no **spiritual rest** for their souls, either in this life or the one to come. Others feel that the writer is addressing both **past and present tense salvation**, albeit with the emphasis still being on making certain that the Hebrew readers enter the **rest of past tense salvation**. Finally, a number of commentators feel that the writer is speaking of the **rest** that the believer will experience in eternity future when our salvation is consummated in glorification. (See related topic **Three Tenses of Salvation**)

Richard Phillips for example writes that...

It is ultimately heaven (**Ed**: My "Future tense salvation") that is on the mind of the writer of Hebrews as he urges his readers to enter into the rest of God through faith in Christ (**Ed**: My "Past tense salvation"). The term "rest" occurs five times in this passage (Heb 4:6-11). (Reformed Expository Commentary – Hebrews)

Comment: It is interesting that even though Phillips makes this statement regarding the rest of "future tense salvation", he clearly feels the writer is seeking to make certain that his readers enter the rest of initial salvation ([see his comments](#)).

Therefore ([3767](#)) (**oun**) is a **term of conclusion** which means consequently and thus introduces a logical result or inference from what precedes.

As **Bengel** says "Since many have fallen there is cause for fear." ([note](#))

Therefore - Because of what he has just stated "And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. (He 3:18, 19-**note**)

Comment: Note that **disobedience** and **unbelief** are equated. In other words, the truth is that genuine faith obeys... **therefore**... !

Because of the "Chosen people's" historical example and the result of their **unbelief** we need to have a "healthy" fear of God Who keeps His Word, both of grace and mercy and promised judgment! God is deadly serious about **disobedience**. Thus chapter 3 to chapter 4 is a poor chapter division. Just as the Jews perished in the wilderness because of unbelief, the first century Hebrew readers faced a real peril of perishing eternally if they failed to enter the spiritual rest in Christ.

In addition to the preceding comments regarding the interpretation of this section of Hebrews, the reader should be aware that there are two other ways this section has been

(1) The **rest** refers to a state which is offered to those who are already **true believers**. They are saved but have not entered the fullness of rest in Christ. One could refer to this rest as that associated with sanctification (present tense salvation), in which a believer is walking in faith, enabled by grace and by the Spirit. As depicted in the table this is almost certainly a component of the rest one experiences, but the context and thrust of the writer's arguments do not favor this as the primary interpretation of the rest that is available to the Hebrew readers.

(2) The **rest** to be entered refers to the rest of salvation by grace through faith. It is a call to those Hebrew readers who profess but not truly possess Christ. The writer's clear call is that they believe the good news they have heard and unite their hearing with belief whereby they would enter the spiritual rest of salvation. As stated above, the flow of the writer's argument strongly favors this interpretation. As **Augustine** said...

**You made us for Yourself, O Lord,
and our hearts are restless till they rest in You.**

The excellent expositor **William MacDonald** comments that

No one should think that the promise of rest is no longer valid. It has never had a complete and final fulfillment in the past; therefore the offer is still in effect. But all who **profess to be believers** should make sure that they do not come short of the goal. If their **profession is empty**, there is always the danger of turning away from Christ and embracing some religious system that is powerless to save. ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

William Newell makes...

no division between the close of Hebrews 3 and the beginning of Hebrews 4, so that there may be no interruption of our study of the great subject of the "**rest**" of God. Going back, now, to Hebrews 3.15, let us

note in the following verses, that the opposite of holding fast the "**beginning of their confidence**" (Hebrews 3.6, He 3:14) was "**hardening their hearts**" (Hebrews 3.8, He 3:15), "**provoking**" God (He 3.8, He 3:15, 16), and "**displeasing**" Him (He 3.10, He 3:17); thus coming short of entering His rest (Hebrews 3.11, He 3:18; He 4.1). The solemn fact is that in this book of Hebrews **eternal salvation** is constantly contrasted with "**neglect**," "**sluggishness**," "**falling short**" of a promise; mere "**tasting of the heavenly gift**" (eternal life), sinning "**willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth**" and afterward "**falling away**," "**treading under foot the Son of God... counting the blood of the covenant a common thing**"! It could not be otherwise, for God in Hebrews is speaking unto us in His Son! (He 1.2).

What God in sovereign grace may do (as in the case of the man in 1Co 5.1-5, and in 1Cor. 11.29, 30, 31, 32, 33), is God's affair. But the book of Hebrews is not the place in which He sets it forth. Hebrews, unlike Romans, does not proclaim the way of Salvation; but places before us the Person of Christ, Son of God, Son of Man; His oneness with His saints, His victory over Satan; His one offering for sin; His blessed heavenly priesthood; His headship as Son over the house of God: and God sets before us all these in view of the holy walk on earth they involve in true saints!

We have seen that Israel lost their promised land (Numbers 14) through simply not believing! Just as they fell short of Canaan, so many professing Christians (Ed: an oxymoron, for only genuine believers are possessing Christians!) today, though a promise is left them of entering into His rest, fail of it: -- of that spiritual "rest" which belongs to all who hear and believe that Christ has borne their sin; that He made peace by the blood of His Cross.

(Newell appends an interesting note stating that...) Most the nation of Israel in the future will not profit by the voice of the two witnesses of Re 11:3-12, warning them of the fearful results of worshiping the Antichrist and his image... A "remnant" shall be saved (Isa 1:9; 4:2-6, Ro 9:27, 28). ([Hebrews Commentary - Verse by Verse Online](#))

H A Ironside - The rest here spoken of is not our present enjoyment of Christ, as many have imagined (Ed: I think there is an element of resting in Jesus in our present tense salvation experience - we can be restless in our walk because of unconfessed sins or we can rest in Jesus, Mt 11:28, 28, 30, Pr 28:13), but clearly refers to that rest which, as in Israel's case, is at the end of the way. What a solemn thing for any who eventually come short of that! We have heard the glad tidings of a rest to come, as did the Israelites. Let us then see that we profit thereby in a way which they did not, proving the reality of our faith by our behavior.

Richard D Phillips commenting on Hebrews 4:1 writes that "The matter the writer of Hebrews has in mind here is nothing less than the eternal salvation of our souls... Consistently, and drawing his terminology from Psalm 95, he describes salvation as the "rest" offered by God. What does he mean by this kind of language? The first way to answer is by looking at the context, namely, the exodus of God's people from Egypt to the Promised Land. As one commentator explains: "The concept of rest in the context of the promise to the Exodus generation had the connotation of entrance into Canaan (the Promised Land), where Israel would experience relief from turmoil and security from their enemies." In what sense does this apply to the readers of Hebrews? The writer does not mean that they will lead lives of material riches and temporal peace, since this letter was written to those facing persecution, with all the deprivation and danger that implies. The New Testament does not promise believers that they will be free from strife in this world. In fact, Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). Obviously, then, the meaning is spiritual. It is our souls that will be supplied and kept safe. Surely this is what Jesus had in mind in his great Bread of Life discourse, recorded in John 6:35, 39... Jesus offers our souls the same benefits offered to Israel in the Promised Land: bountiful provision and complete security. (Reformed Expository Commentary – Hebrews)

Riggins writes that...

Trust and obedience are the two indispensable elements of our faith. Indeed the fundamental attitude which lies at the heart of what the Scripture calls faith is trust in God. Faith is not about knowing all the answers and being able to analyze all the doctrines without the slightest doubt or concern. It is about trusting God come what may. (Riggins, W. Focus on the Bible: Hebrews)

Let us (All uses in Hebrews = Heb 4:1, 11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1, 28; 13:13, 15) **Kingsley** comments that this (**let us**) is the author's "favorite word in this chapter, and in one or two other places that I shall quote presently, is 'Let us'. Here is something for ourselves to do; let us pull ourselves together, and do it; now is your opportunity, seize it. These imperatives are not stern as all imperatives would appear of necessity to be; they are persuasive, gentle, full of hope; they give the very courage which they invite. How much depends upon how a thing is said! I have often taken occasion to say that the word 'woe' as pronounced by Jesus Christ might have a tear in it. We always associate the word 'woe' with some snowstorm, some bolt of fire, some cloudy look that has anger in it. But that might not be so necessarily; Jesus might be simply revealing the results of certain sowings and preparations, and He might say in a gentle whisper, 'Woe is in that act; I warn you of it, do not do it, refrain from repeating it; even you, scribes and

Pharisees, hypocrites, actors, may be warned in time; this woe is so pronounced as to invite you to escape it'. I always try to read the New Testament with tears; it is a book whose music only yields itself to gentle entreaty. When Jesus seems the most severe He may be most gentle: take that as a hint, and write it upon your New Testaments, and in your studies, and in the market place and on825 the highway; read the New Testament in the light of that suggestion."

Let us fear - The **NET Bible** is a bit "soft" in my opinion in its rendering "Let us be wary" for **wary** emphasizes suspiciousness and alertness in watching for danger and cunning in escaping it. On the other hand the English word **fear** seems a bit stronger and more apropos to the context, the 1828 version of Webster's definition of fear as...

A painful emotion or passion excited by an expectation of evil, or the apprehension of impending danger. Fear expresses less apprehension than dread, and dread less than terror and fright. The force of this passion, beginning with the most moderate degree, may be thus expressed, fear, dread, terror, fright. Fear is accompanied with a desire to avoid or ward off the expected evil. Fear is an uneasiness of mind, upon the thought of future evil likely to befall us.

Regarding the exhortation **let us fear**, **John Piper** makes a similar pithy comment regarding a very popular Bible translation, stating that "the **NIV** irresponsibly weakens this [let us fear] by the translation" 'Let us be careful!'" ([Be Diligent to Enter God's Rest!](#))

Let us fear ([5399](#)) (**phobeo** - see study of **phobos**) means to frighten, terrify, be alarmed and in Classical Greek meant to cause to run away. In some contexts it conveys the sense of to revere, fear exceedingly, give reverence or be in awe of.

Puritan John Owen has a good description of the meaning of **fear** in this context "How are we to do this? What kind of fear is involved? It is not a fear of diffidence, or doubting, or wavering, or uncertainty about our obedience. This happens to many people, but no one is commanded to be like this. It is the fruit of unbelief, so it cannot be our duty. Neither can it mean fearfulness about difficulties, opposition, or danger. It is the fear of a sluggard who cries out, "There is a lion outside, I shall be killed in the streets." To cast out this fear, as the fear that weakens people's Christian profession, is one of the main purposes of this letter. The fear referred to in this verse does not mean that general reverence that ought to be with us all the time, whenever we have anything to do with God. For this is not particularly influenced by warnings from God, since we are always bound to "fear the Lord and his goodness." The fear intended in this verse is a combination of two things. First, it is a reverent understanding of God's holiness and greatness, and his severity against sin. Second, it is using the means of grace carefully to avoid the evil of unbelief and disobedience. ([Hebrews 4 Commentary](#))

Barnes explains the used of **phobeo** in this context as...

Let us be apprehensive that we may possibly fail of that rest. The kind of fear which is recommended here is that which leads to caution and care. A man who is in danger of losing his life or health should be watchful; a seaman that is in danger of running on a lee-shore should be on his guard. So we who have the offer of heaven, and who yet are in danger of losing it, should take all possible precautions lest we fail of it (Albert Barnes. Barnes NT Commentary)

Vine writes that "this is a definite warning concerning the spiritual rest in Christ which believers are to enjoy as God's provision. Judaism could not procure it for Hebrews. Works cannot procure it for any believers. ([Ibid](#))

Reformed Expository Commentary - The Greek text literally says, "Let us be afraid." The point is to say: "Therefore, let us be alarmed at the prospect, given this decisive age of opportunity and testing, that any of you should not press on to salvation." We see... the demand for perseverance under trial. That is what the author means by saying "**lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.**" The metaphor is an athletic one, and the idea is that of finishing the race. **Perseverance** is an essential element of the Christian life. Indeed, running the race to the end is the hallmark of **genuine, saving faith**, while falling away is the mark of a spurious faith that does not lead to salvation. (Reformed Expository Commentary) (Bolding added)

John Piper - Reverence is the combination of admiration and fear, awe and dread, wonder and terror. It's an emotion that we were made to experience. (See John Piper's excellent discussion re the question "Do We Live in Constant Fear of Being Lost?" [Click full sermon on Hebrews 4:1-11 Be diligent to enter God's rest](#))

A proper **fear of the Lord** that should be in every Christian's heart, like the respect of a loving child and not the dread of a frightened slave.

As **A W Tozer** once said "Nothing twists and deforms the soul more than a low or unworthy conception of God."

Phobeo is aorist **subjunctive** which in this context conveys the sense of an **imperative** (command). The idea is "**Be fearful!**" Note also that **phobeo** is the first word in the Greek sentence (emphatic in the Greek construction) because the writer does not want his readers to be complacent, unbelieving (obstinately so) and/or as disobedient as their forefathers.

In many other places in Scripture God says "fear not" (cp Isa 41:10, 43:1, 5, Jn 14:27, 2Ti 1:7, etc). And yet other passages concur with this passage in Hebrews and teach that there is a proper **fear of the Lord** that should be in every Christian's heart, a "fear" that manifests the respect of a loving child and not the dread of a frightened slave. Proper fear motivates proper conduct as Peter emphasized writing...

And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, **conduct yourselves** (**aoist imperative** = do this now! do it effectively!) in **fear** (**phobos** - noun form of verb phobeo) during the time of your stay upon earth (1Pe 1:17-note)

To refute, refuse or reject this clear teaching truth is to play the fool. As the wise King Solomon wrote...

Because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the **fear of the LORD**. (Pr 1:29).

In the context of Hebrews 3-4, the **fear** the writer is referring to is that they fear lest they miss heaven and especially in view of Heb 3:19 are to fear the sin of **unbelief**. We must fear **unbelief**. We should all fear not taking God at His faithful Word.

On the other hand, one should be balanced in one's fear for there is an unhealthy fear, an anxious fear or dread that abides and broods in one's soul. For discussion of Scriptures dealing with this type of undesirable fear see - **How To Handle Fear**

To reiterate, the writer is saying that in view of what happened to Israel (read the Hebrews 3:18, 19 = a poor chapter break), take this to heart and let it cause you to tremble. This is serious. Have you heard and heard and heard what God has said but you have never really heeded, never embraced Christ and never entered into His promised rest.

Peter has a similar warning that those who **profess Christ**, need to make sure they truly **possess Christ**...

Therefore, brethren, **be** all the more **diligent** (**aoist imperative** = an urgent command to immediately have this attitude, remembering that attitude issues in "congruent" action) to make certain about His calling and choosing (2Pe 1:10KJV = election; Greek = ekloge = God's "picking out" or selection, but not implying the rejection of those not picked) you; for as long as you practice these things (= continually, as our lifestyle = "direction" not "perfection"! Such "actions" will validate our "profession" of Christ as indeed a valid, legitimate "possession" of Christ. A diligent attitude will show forth in definite actions.), you will never stumble (not that you won't commit sins, but that you won't "stumble" and miss heaven); for (Peter now explains why we should be diligent and dutiful - the prospect of a future abundant entrance should be a strong motivation to present diligence and practice! [1Co 3:12, 13, 14] Contrast a "less than abundant" entrance into heaven [1Cor 3:15]!) in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2Pe 1:10, 11-note).

The writer of Hebrews is saying in essence that if you have missed the promise, then come on in. The promise remains. But be fearful if you miss this promise of rest, for as Jesus said...

Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Mt 10:28).

Rest in Jesus

by Fanny Crosby

Come with all thy sorrow,
Weary wandering soul!
Come to Him who loves thee—
He will make thee whole.

Refrain

***There is rest in Jesus,
Sweet, sweet rest;
There is rest in Jesus,
Sweet, sweet rest.***

He, thy strength in weakness,
Will thy refuge be;
Cast on Him thy burden—
He will care for thee.

Refrain

Come in faith believing,
To His will resigned;
Ask, and He will give thee;
Seek, and thou shalt find.

Refrain

See the door of mercy!
Wouldst thou enter there?
Knock, and He will open;
Lo! the key is prayer.

Refrain

Puritan Thomas Watson rightly says that...

One may lose other races and not be miserable—but he cannot lose this race in religion without being miserable. In other races, a man only loses his wager; but if he falls short of this spiritual race—he loses his eternal soul. How seasonable, therefore, is that Apostolic caution (Heb 4:1) ([The Heavenly Race](#))

(In another writing Watson describes the metaphor of a sheep) A sheep is a TIMOROUS creature. It is very fearful if any danger approaches. It is easily frightened by the wolf. Thus the saints of God, who are Christ's sheep, pass the time of their sojourning here in fear. **They are—fearful of provoking God; fearful of wounding their peace; fearful of temptation; fearful they should come short of heaven through sloth,** Hebrews 4:1. It is an earmark of Christ's sheep, that they are endued with the fear of God, Genesis 42:28. This is their earmark, "men fearing God". It's true, the righteous are as bold as a lion in a righteous cause—but timorous and fearful of sinful fear. And, let me tell you, happy is he who in this sense fears always. Holy fear is the best antidote against temptation. The way to be safe, is always to fear.

To make some use of this, let us all labor to be found in the number of Christ's sheep (cp Heb 2:1, 2, 3, 6:1, 10:36, 37, 12:25). All the world is divided into two ranks—sheep and goats (Mt 25:31, 32, 33, 34, 41). If you would be glad to be found in the day of judgment as Christ's sheep, and sit at His right hand, be much in prayer. Pray to God that He would change your nature, that He would take away your wolfish nature, your fierceness, your frowardness, and that He would transform you into His own image. Labor to be among Christ's sheep, to get into Christ's fold (Luke 13:24).

There is only one way in which you do not want to be like sheep—for sheep are apt to wander sometimes from their fold (Is 53:6, 1Pe 2:25, Ps 119:176). Take heed that you do not straggle into bypaths of error and heresy (cp Jer 18:15). It is dangerous to wander for fear the devil, the wolf, should catch you. Don't go astray as sheep; but in other things resemble sheep in meekness, in patience, in usefulness, in willingness.

And particularly in this one thing let us labor to resemble sheep, when the shepherd's dog comes near, all the sheep flock together. Persecution should be like the shepherd's dog. It should make all Christ's sheep run together and unite. Do Papists and Formalists agree in persecuting God's people? And shall not the saints of God agree to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Love is the earmark by which Christ's sheep are known. John 13:35, "By this shall all men know you are My disciples, if you love one another." It was the harlot who said, "Let the child be divided." It is the Jesuit who says, "Let the Church of God be divided." It is Satan's great design to set his cloven foot among God's people to make division and contention among the sons of Zion. The devil's best music is discord.

Oh! Let all Christ's people, His sheep, flock together and associate in love. Those who hope to meet together in heaven should not fall out by the way. Unity is the great music in heaven. There is unity in the Trinity—and unity among saints would be a great blessing on earth. For Christians to unite is their interest and wisdom; union is their strength, union is their glory and their ornament. This was the honor of the primitive churches, all of one heart, Acts 2:1. There was but one heart among them. Let the sheep of Christ unite together. When the saints are harmoniously united, then they adorn their blessed Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. So much for the first of these, Christ's sheep. ([The Good Shepherd](#))

Spurgeon on let us fear - Now, the apostle cannot mean that we are to fear lest we should come short of heaven for want of merit. There is not a man living, nor has one ever lived, nor shall one ever live, who will not come short of heaven if he tries that road. Human merit is not the way to heaven. Since the hour in which our first parent broke the law for us, the perfect keeping of the law has been impossible; neither is the keeping of the law set before us in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as the way of acceptance

with God. "For by the works of the law no person will be declared righteous before him, for through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20). The just shall live by faith, and it is in the matter of faith that we are cautioned against coming short. The apostle would with indignation have spurned the idea that the gospel race is to be run at the foot of Sinai, and that its prize would be a reward for good works. Over and over again he has plainly declared, "It is not from works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:9); but by grace, as the pure gift of the good pleasure and mercy of God. We must not, therefore, twist his words into a legal injunction, for they were never intended to bear such a meaning. The great point that we are to be concerned about is lest we come short of the heavenly rest by failing in the faith that will give us the rest. In a word, we must put our trust in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; we must give up all other confidences, and cast ourselves entirely upon Him, otherwise we shall certainly never enter into the rest that is reserved for believers.

IF, WHILE A PROMISE REMAINS OF ENTERING HIS REST: mepote kataleipomenes (PPPFSG) epaggelias eiselthein (AAN) eis ten katapausin autou:

- He 4:9; Nu 14:34; 1Samuel 2:30; Romans 3:3,4; 2Timothy 2:13
- [Hebrews 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Spurgeon - "Rest" is a blessed golden word. It is the one thing, surely, that the world seeks after. It may be true that every man seeks after happiness; I question if it is not equally true that each man seeks after rest. There are some few fiery spirits who wish not to rest, who seem to be like thunderbolts that must speed on in their predestinated pathway, and only an incessant and morbid activity suits them at all; but for the majority of us the expectation of rest is very sweet, and the enjoyment of it now in the poor measure in which we can get it is one of our greatest refreshments.

See excursus on Rest in Hebrews 4.

While (mepote) Lest at any time. The kind of "fear" which is recommended here is what leads to caution and care. A man who is in danger of losing his life or health should be watchful; a seaman that is in danger of running on shore should be on his guard. So we who have the offer of heaven, and who yet are in danger of losing it, should take all possible precautions lest we fail of it.

Promise (1860) (epaggelia/epangelia from **epí** = intensifies verbal meaning + **aggéllō** = to tell, declare) originally referred to an announcement or declaration (especially of a favorable message) but in later Greek came to mean a declaration to do something with the implication of obligation to carry out what is stated (thus a promise or pledge). **Epaggelia** was primarily a legal term denoting summons, a promise to do or give something, but in the NT speaks primarily of the promises of God.

Leon Morris - God's promises mean much to the writer, and indeed the word **epaggelia** ("promise") occurs more often in Hebrews than in any other NT book (fourteen times; next is Gal with ten). The promise in question "still stands." That is to say, it has not been revoked. But throughout this section it is basic to the argument that even physical entry into Canaan did not constitute the fulfillment of the promise. God had promised "rest" and that meant more than living in Canaan. ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan](#))

Epaggelia - 52x in 50v -

Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33, 39; 7:17; 13:23, 32; 23:21; 26:6; Rom 4:13f, 16, 20; 9:4, 8f; 15:8; 2 Cor 1:20; 7:1; Gal 3:14, 16ff, 21f, 29; 4:23, 28; Eph 1:13; 2:12; 3:6; 6:2; 1 Tim 4:8; 2 Tim 1:1; Heb 4:1; 6:12, 15, 17; 7:6; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9, 13, 17, 33, 39; 2 Pet 3:4, 9; 1 John 2:25.

Note the 14x in Hebrews in 13 verses (27.4% of all 51 NT uses) - See **notes** He 4:1, He 6:12, 6:15, 6:17, 7:6, 8:6, 9:15, 10:36, 11:9, 11:13, 11:17, 11:33, 11:39)

TDNT summarizes this word group writing that it has the following nuances...

a. The first sense is "to indicate," "declare," "declaration," "report."**b.** When the state declares something, it becomes an "order."**c.** In law we find the senses "accusation" and "delivery of a judgment."**d.** We then find the senses "to declare an achievement," "to show one's mastery," "to profess a subject."**e.** Another sense is "to offer," "to promise," "to vow." As regards promises, tension between word and deed is felt, so that promises are often seen as worthless. **f.** A special type of promise is the "promise of money," and in this sense the idea of a "subscription" or "donation" arises (state liturgies, gifts to rulers at their accession, priests promising gifts in support of their candidature). **g.** In the Hellenistic period we also find a sacral use for the "proclamation" of a festival. Among all the instances, only one example has been found for the promise of a deity. ([Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans](#))

There is an interesting play on words... the OT example speaks of the **Promised Land**, whereas the writer in Hebrews speaks of something far greater than land. He speaks of our spiritual rest in Christ.

Left (2641) (**kataleipo** from **kata** = intensifies or strengthens the meaning of **leipo** + **leipo** = to leave behind, forsake, to be wanting or deficient) literally means to leave behind or leave remaining (of a person or place - Mt 4:13, 16:4, 21:17, He 11:27). In the passive sense as used here in Hebrews 4:1 **kataleipo** means to remain behind for a purpose.

Kataleipo - 24x in 24v - Matt 4:13; 16:4; 19:5; 21:17; Mark 10:7; 12:19, 21; 14:52; Luke 5:28; 10:40; 15:4; 20:31; John 8:9; Acts 6:2; 18:19; 21:3; 24:27; 25:14; Rom 11:4; Eph 5:31; 1 Thess 3:1; Heb 4:1; 11:27; 2Pet 2:15. NAS = forsaking(1), kept(1), leave(4), leaves behind(1), leaving(3), leaving behind(1), left(8), left behind(1), left... behind(1), neglect(1), pulled free(1), remains(1).

Kataleipo is in the **present tense** passive meaning "continually caused to remain" or "a promise still being left". That is, it was given to believers among Israel of old, and holds good still for all.

The **passive voice** indicates an outside force effects the action of keeping the door of the Ark open, so to speak. When God decides the time is up, it is up! (He 9:28-note) Even for those "almost persuaded" such were Agrippa (Acts 26:28), the young ruler Mark 10:21, and all those who are "almost" but not "quite" prepared to give up the world and to surrender themselves to the Redeemer.

To all these the promise of **rest remains**, if they will accept of salvation as it is offered in the gospel; all of them cherish a hope that they will be saved; and all of them are destined alike to be disappointed. With what earnestness, therefore, should we strive that we may not fall short of or away from the amazing grace of God!

The same idea of "**remains**" (but a different Greek verb) is found in...

Hebrews 4:6 (note) Since therefore it **remains** (not **kataleipo** but **apoleipo**) for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,

Hebrews 4:9 (note) There **remains** (not **kataleipo** but **apoleipo**) therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Wuest sees the rest as a spiritual rest, a rest in a **Person**, not in a **Place**, a **Life**, not a **Land!** - Having reminded his readers that the generation which came out of Egypt did not enter into the rest of Canaan because of unbelief, the writer now proceeds to warn them of a possible failure on their part of entering into rest in Messiah. The words "**being left**" are the translation of a present participle. The idea is "there being left behind and still remaining." The writer wishes to emphasize the fact that the promise of a spiritual rest in Messiah is still available to the first century Hebrews. He is fearful lest any of them should come short of this rest. ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

Of entering (1525) (**eiserchomai**) means to go or come into or to enter into.

Compare **Elijah's** query...

1Ki 18:21 How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word.

Look around and be distressed.

Look inside and be depressed.

Look at Jesus and be at rest .

Corrie Ten Boom

Rest (2663) (**katapausis** [word study] from **katá** = intensifies or "down" conveying sense of permanency + **paúo** = make to cease) describes literally a ceasing from one's work or activity. Thayer cites a use in the active sense of a putting to rest as used in the sentence "a calming of the winds". Metaphorically as used in the present verse, **katapausis** speaks of the spiritual fulfillment God provides for His people.

Katapausis is used 8 times in the NT, all but one in the epistle to the Hebrews - Acts 7:49, Hebrews 3:11-note, Hebrews 3:18-note, Hebrews 4:1-note, Hebrews 4:3-note, Hebrews 4:5-note, Hebrews 4:10-note, Hebrews 4:11-note,

Katapausis does not refer to just any rest, but in context to the Creator's rest (**His** rest)! The wilderness wanderings represent those who had heard the truth but who would not believe that truth with the result that they spend their whole life in restless unbelief.

Barclay has the following analysis of **katapausis** noting that...

In a complicated passage like this it is better to try to grasp the broad lines of the thought before we look at any of the details. The writer is really using the word rest (**katapausis**) in three different senses. **(i)** He is using

it as we would use the peace of God. It is the greatest thing in the world to enter into the peace of God. (ii) He is using it, as he used it in Hebrews 3:12-note, to mean The Promised Land. To the children of Israel who had wandered so long in the desert the Promised Land was indeed the rest of God. (iii) He is using it of the rest of God after the sixth day of creation, when all God's work was completed. This way of using a word in two or three different ways, of teasing at it until the last drop of meaning was extracted from it, was typical of cultured, academic thought in the days when the writer to the Hebrews wrote his letter. ([Hebrews 4 Commentary](#))

Illustration - Few have lived as stressful and frenetic a life as Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission. Day and night this was his secret, "just to roll the burden on the Lord." Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkingiang might hear, at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor's favorite hymn ["Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art"]. He had learned that for him, only one life was possible—just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.

Spurgeon - "Rest" is a blessed golden word. It is the one thing, surely, that the world seeks after. It may be true that every man seeks after happiness; I question if it is not equally true that each man seeks after rest. There are some few fiery spirits who wish not to rest, who seem to be like thunderbolts that must speed on in their predestinated pathway, and only an incessant and morbid activity suits them at all; but for the majority of us the expectation of rest is very sweet, and the enjoyment of it now in the poor measure in which we can get it is one of our greatest refreshments.

ANY ONE OF YOU MAY SEEM TO HAVE COME SHORT OF IT: doke (3SPAS) tis ex humon husterekenai (RAN)

- Matthew 7:21, 22, 23,26,27; 24:48, 49, 50, 51; 25:1, 2, 3; Luke 12:45,46; 13:25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30; Romans 3:23; 1Cor 9:26,27
- [Hebrews 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Spurgeon - Not come short of it but even seem to do so. God keep us from the very shadow of sin, from the very appearance of evil. If you avoid the very seeming of it, you will avoid the thing itself. Oh, that we were careful about this—that there was nothing that should give any reasonable fear to those who observed us, or to ourselves when we search our hearts, lest we should not enter into this rest.

The **Reformed Expository Commentary** makes an excellent point = Notice that the subject of the sentence is plural—it is "us" who must be careful—while the object is singular—lest anyone ("any one of you") fall away. This is the attitude we need in the church today, one that says: "Yes, I am my brother's keeper. I have a stake in the spiritual affairs of others here and a responsibility not merely for my own salvation, but for theirs as well." This is not an invitation for destructive meddling but for the mutual building up that is to define life in the church. So important is this to the life of the church that the apostle James concluded his epistle on this very note: "Whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). Simon Kistemaker is right when he observes, "We ought to take careful note of members who may be drifting from the truth in doctrine or conduct and then pray with them and for them. We are constantly looking for spiritual stragglers." (Reformed Expository Commentary)

Ray Stedman explains this passage writing that "In Hebrews 4:1 we are given the first hint that the promise of rest given to Israel envisaged more than entering the Promised Land. It is, he says, a promise which still stands, that is, was not satisfied by entering Canaan, but still exists at the time of his writing. Furthermore, his readers stand in danger of missing it unless they are careful. The Greek construction of the phrase that none of you be found to have fallen short of it indicates that wrong behavior, such as disobedience or long-continued grumbling, suggests the heart is unchanged and unbelieving. **Be found** refers to God's knowledge of the heart and his actions based on that knowledge. ([Hebrews 4:1-2 A Promise Requires a Response](#))

In Matthew **Jesus** gave a stern warning that parallels the warning by the writer of Hebrews...

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS. (See **note** Matthew 7:21; 7:22; 7:23)

Any one of you ([5100](#)) (tis) means one, someone or a certain one. This pronoun tis is used particularly and generally of some person or thing whom one cannot or does not wish to name or specify particularly.

Though two spies brought back a good report, 600,000 men rejected it.

May seem (1380) (**dokeo**) means to hold an opinion based upon appearances which may be significantly different from reality. It means to regard something as presumably true, without particular certainty.

Seem is a way of softening the warning so that the writer refrains from saying that any of them actually missed or will miss the promise.

To come short (5302) (**hustereo** from **hústeros** = last, latter, terminal, hindmost) has the basic meaning of come to late (in time) or to come after (in terms of space) and thus it means to fail in something, come short of, miss, not to reach. **Hustereo** has the basic meaning of being last or inferior. It means to be left behind in the race and so fail to reach the goal, to fall short of the end, to lack. It means to come late or too tardily.

Wuest - These persecuted Jews had expected to find the fulfilment of all promise in Messiah, including freedom from stress and strain such as they were experiencing in the persecutions (He 10:32, 33, 34). The Old Testament Jews were taught to believe that tribulation was a mark of God's displeasure with Israel. They did not understand that that which was a mark of God's displeasure with His own in Old Testament times, was a mark of His blessing and a means of purging and refining the lives of saints in New Testament times. Thus, they found it hard to believe that **rest** was attainable in Messiah. Their **professed faith** was being sorely tried by the adverse circumstances in which they found themselves. Thus, they were in danger of renouncing their **professed faith** and of returning to the First Testament sacrifices under the stress of this persecution. The writer proceeds to show that this promise is still open. ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

Comment: Note that the idea of "professed faith" is addressed in Hebrews 3:6 and Hebrews 3:14, where the the readers are told that if they hold fast to the end, they are genuine believers and in fact there professed faith is a "possessed" faith. Those who fell away after making a profession of faith would prove that they had never genuinely believed in the Messiah.

It means to be excluded (He 12:15-note) or as in Hebrews 4:1 as coming too late through one's own fault and so to fail to reach the intended objective or goal.

In several of the NT passages **hustereo** means to be in short supply, to fail, to give out or to lack. **Hustereo** can mean to experience deficiency in something advantageous or desirable and thus to be lacking, go without or come short of (as in Mt 19:20).

Hustereo is used 14 times in the Lxx (Num. 9:7, 13; Neh. 9:21; Job 36:17; Ps. 23:1; 39:4; Eccl. 6:2; 9:8; 10:3; Cant. 7:2; Dan. 4:33; 5:27; Hab. 2:3) and 16 times in the NT (**see below**) (Matt. 19:20; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 15:14; 22:35; Jn. 2:3; Rom. 3:23; 1 Co. 1:7; 8:8; 12:24; 2 Co. 11:5, 9; 12:11; Phil. 4:12; Heb. 4:1; 11:37; 12:15)

Hustereo is used in the famous "Hall of Faith" chapter, Hebrews 11...

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, **being destitute** (**hustereo**), afflicted, ill-treated (see **note** Hebrews 11:37)

The meaning of **hustereo** is further illustrated in the following verses...

(At the wedding in Cana site of Jesus' first recorded miracle) And when the wine **gave out**, (**hustereo**) the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." (John 2:3)

Now when he (the prodigal son) had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began **to be in need** (**hustereo**). (Luke 15:14)

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still **lacking** (**hustereo**)?" (Mt 19:20)

If our perseverance should "fall short" like the wine at the wedding feast in Cana, the party could be ruined (John 2:3). If our faith runs out like the prodigal son's money, we may find ourselves very impoverished (Lu 15:14). It is easy for this deficiency to come on us unnoticed, like the rich young ruler's lack of freedom from his wealth (Mt 19:20).

The **perfect tense** means they came short at a point in time and are still short - it speaks of the permanence of their condition! The entire phrase in **Hebrews 4:1** could be translated

lest you think you have come too late to enter into the rest of God

This same verb **hustereo** is used later in **Hebrews**, the writer warning...

See to it that no one **comes short** (**hustereo**) of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up

causes trouble, and by it many be defiled (see **note** Hebrews 12:15)

With reverential fear all are to examine their own spiritual condition (cf. 1Cor 10:12; 2Cor 13:5) and to actively press for commitment on the part of others (cf. Jude 1:23).

Hustereo means to essentially to be found to come short as in Romans 3 where Paul writes that ...

all have sinned and **fall short (hustereo)** of the glory of God (Ro 3:23-note)

When you **come short** of something, you can miss it an inch or a mile, but you still miss it! So those in **Romans 3:23** have missed it a "mile". There are others who have missed it by only an "inch". For example, take the man that Mark wrote about...

And looking at him (a man who ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him), Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "**One thing you lack** (hustereo): go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property. And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! (Mark 10:21, 22, 23)

In this declaration by Jesus the verb **lack** is the same word **hustereo** (come short) used here in Hebrews 4. Jesus was telling the man (and all who have ears to hear) that "you are coming short in just one thing".

Spurgeon - Not come short of it but even seem to do so. God keep us from the very shadow of sin, from the very appearance of evil. If you avoid the very seeming of it, you will avoid the thing itself. Oh, that we were careful about this—that there was nothing that should give any reasonable fear to those who observed us, or to ourselves when we search our hearts, lest we should not enter into this rest.

Isn't it amazing how some individuals can come so close to eternal life and yet end up in eternal death! They are in a good Bible believing church, they know stories and verses in the Bible, they know the message of the gospel, the good news, they are "good" people, etc, etc... but they lack one thing...they've never confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior of their life the importance of which Paul explains...

But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"-- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you **confess** with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and **believe** in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man **believes**, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he **confesses**, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER **BELIEVES** IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED (means to be caused to be much ashamed, humiliated or disgraced!)." (Ro 10:8, 9, 10, 11-See **notes** Ro 10:8; 10:9; 10:10; 10:11)

When you come so close yet are still short, you might even presume that you have entered into the rest (like a "vaccination" or being inoculated with the inactive virus to prevent you from getting the real viral disease), and so this is why it is so important to continue to encourage one another daily while there is still time. Coming to Bible study means nothing if Christ is not in your heart. You can know a lot in your head but the real issue is to make certain of your calling and election. Many will say to Jesus in that day "**Lord, Lord**" but He will say those frightening, fateful words "**I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness**" (Mt 7:21, 22, 23- See **notes** Mt 7:21; 22; 23)

Among those **WHO COME SHORT OF GOD'S REST** will be the following classes...

- (1) Those who are professors but who have never known anything of true piety.
- (2) those who are expecting to be saved by their own works.
- (3) those who defer attention to the subject from time to time until it becomes too late. They expect to reach heaven, but they are not ready to give their hearts to God "now," and the subject is deferred from one period to another, until death arrests them unprepared.
- (4) those who have been awakened to see their guilt and danger, and who have been almost but not quite ready to give up their hearts to God. Such were Agrippa (Acts 26:28), the young ruler Mk 10:21, and such are all those who are "almost" but not "quite" prepared to give up the world and to devote themselves to the Redeemer.

To all these the promise of **rest** is made, if they will accept of salvation as it is offered in the gospel; all of them cherish a hope that they will be saved; and all of them are destined alike to be disappointed. With what earnestness, therefore, should we strive that we may not fail of the grace of God!

Here are all the uses of **hustereo** (words in bold below represent translation of hustereo) in the NT...

Matthew 19:20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still **lacking**?"

Mark 10:21 And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing **you lack**: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Luke 15:14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began **to be in need**.

Luke 22:35 And He said to them, "When I sent you out without purse and bag and sandals, **you did not lack** anything, did you?" And they said, "No, nothing."

John 2:3 And when the wine **gave out**, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and **fall short** of the glory of God,

1 Corinthians 1:7 so that you are not **lacking** in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Corinthians 8:8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither **the worse** if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

1 Corinthians 12:24 whereas our seemly members have no **need of** it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,

2 Corinthians 11:5 For I consider myself not in the least **inferior** to the most eminent apostles.

2 Corinthians 11:9 and when I was present with you and **was in need**, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need (related word husterema), and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.

2 Corinthians 12:11 I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect **was I inferior** to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

Philippians 4:12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and **suffering need**.

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem **to have come short** of it.

Hebrews 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, **being destitute**, afflicted, ill-treated

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one **comes short of** the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Lipstick On A Bulldog - "In a lot of organizations, change is like putting lipstick on a bulldog. There's a tremendous amount of effort involved, and most times all you get is some cosmetics—and an angry bulldog." So writes Dave Murphy of the San Francisco Chronicle.

Real change, whether in a business, church, family, or in ourselves, can be difficult and elusive. While we long for a deep and lasting transformation, we often get only a temporary cover-up that solves nothing and satisfies no one.

The word repent is used in the Bible to describe the beginning of genuine spiritual change. Language scholar W. E. Vine says that to repent means "to change one's mind or purpose." In the New Testament it always involves a change for the better as a person turns away from sin while turning toward God. Jesus began His public ministry with the call, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

When we feel sorry for doing wrong or for getting caught, it may be nothing more than a spiritual cosmetic. But true repentance occurs deep in our hearts and results in a visible difference in our actions.

When we turn to Christ and yield ourselves to Him, He produces real change—not just a cover-up. —David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Don't hide your sin and cover up,

Pretending there is nothing wrong;
Instead, confess it and repent,
And God will fill your heart with song. —Sper

Repentance is not just words but actions.

Hebrews 4:2 For **indeed** we have had **good news preached** to us, **just** as they **also**; but the **word** they **heard** did not **profit** them, because it was not **united** by **faith** in **those who heard**. (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: [kai gar esmen \(1PPAI\)](#) [eueggelismenoi \(RPPMPN\)](#) [kathaper kakeinoi, all' ouk opheselen \(3SAAI\)](#) [o logos tes akoes ekeinous, me sugkekerasmenous \(RPPMPA\)](#) [te pistei tois akousasin. \(AAPMPD\)](#)

Amplified: For indeed we have had the glad tidings [Gospel of God] proclaimed to us just as truly as they [the Israelites of old did when the good news of deliverance from bondage came to them]; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because it was not mixed with faith (with the leaning of the entire personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness) by those who heard it; neither were they united in faith with the ones [Joshua and Caleb] who heard (did believe). ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

KJV: 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.

NLT: For this Good News--that God has prepared a place of rest--has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't believe what God told them. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: For we too have had a Gospel preached to us, as those men had. Yet the message proclaimed to them did them no good, because they only heard and did not believe as well. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

TLB: For this wonderful news—the message that God wants to save us—has been given to us just as it was to those who lived in the time of Moses. But it didn't do them any good because they didn't believe it. They didn't mix it with faith.

Wuest: For, as for us also, to us [first-century Jews] was the good news [of rest in Messiah] thoroughly proclaimed, with the present result that we have it indelibly impressed on our minds, as well as the good news [of rest in Canaan] thoroughly proclaimed to them [the generation which came out of Egypt], good news that was indelibly impressed on their minds.

Young's Literal: For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

FOR INDEED WE HAVE HAD GOOD NEWS PREACHED TO US, JUST AS THEY ALSO: kai gar esmen (1PPAI) eueggelismenoi (RPPMPN) kathaper kakeinoi:

- Acts 3:26; 13:46; Gal 3:8; 4:13; 1Pe 1:12
- Ro 10:16,17
- [Hebrews 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

There are essentially two ways Hebrews 4:2 is interpreted -

(1) As a general declaration of **good news**, much as we might say today "I have good news today for you" (e.g., about the stock market).

Zane Hodges who was formerly associated with Dallas Theological Seminary and is the primary author in the Bible Knowledge Commentary section on "Hebrews" typifies this interpretative approach stating that what was preached to the Israelites "was, quite clearly, God's offer of rest. This, of course, was good news for them just as it is for people now, but it is not exactly what is meant today by gospel." (Thomas Constable takes a similar approach)

(2) The **good news** preached signifies the gospel that was preached to Israel and which was not united with faith (which is allowing the text to "speak for itself").

John MacArthur takes this approach writing that...

From the human side, the first requirement for salvation is faith. Hearing the gospel is essential, but it is not enough. The ancient Israelites heard God's good news of rest, but it did them no good since they did not accept it. They did not trust in the God who gave them the good news. It does no good to hear if we do not believe. That is the point here. **Hearing the good news of the rest of God is of no benefit, no profit, to any person at any time unless the hearing is united by faith.**

It is tragic that hell is going to be populated with people who will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" To which Jesus will reply, "I never knew you; **depart (present imperative)** from Me, you who practice (present tense = as the habit of your life; they may have made of "profession" of faith but their life has never exhibited a change of direction - emphasize "**direction**", not **perfection**, for no Christian achieves the latter in this life, but not person is a true Christian who has not exhibited the former!) lawlessness [cp 1Jn 3:4]" (Mt 7:22, 23-note; cf. Lk 13:26, 27).

Their knowledge and their work was not united with faith. Jews prided themselves on the fact that they had God's law (Ro 2:17, 18-note, Ro 2:23-note) and God's ordinances (cp Ro 1:32-note) and God's rituals (Ro 10:3, 4-note). They were especially proud to be descendants of Abraham. But Jesus warned that true children of Abraham believe and act as Abraham did (Jn 8:39). Paul reminded his fellow Jews that "He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God" (Ro 2:29-note).

Spiritually, an unbelieving Jew is a contradiction in terms. ([MacArthur, John: Hebrews. Moody Press](#)) (**Bolding** added for emphasis)

The Holman New Testament Commentary ...

Wherever **rest** appears in He 3:1-4:11, it refers to an **experience of salvation we enter by faith in Jesus Christ**. The writer of Hebrews makes this interpretation clear when he insists on the necessity of faith in the gospel the readers had received (He 4:2). This faith demands a dependence on God's work instead of on our own works (He 4:10-note). Those who have begun the Christian walk by an experience of faith in Jesus Christ demonstrate the reality of their commitment when they continue to enjoy the **rest** God has promised. **Those who cease to share in that rest show by their spiritual failure that their profession of faith was false.**

Some interpreters explain rest as a lifetime experience of unbroken fellowship with God. They feel that the issue discussed by the writer concerns a loss of fellowship rather than an experience of salvation. This interpretation, as the one in the previous paragraph, rests on valid points. It is difficult to accuse proponents of either viewpoint of being completely in error. Still, the present writer, as shown above, feels that the total evidence supports the interpretation of rest as related to salvation rather than to sanctification. ([Lea, Thomas. Holman New Testament Commentary Hebrews & James. B& H Publishing. 1999](#)) (**Bolding** added for emphasis)

Drew Worthen asks "You mean to say that the Jews in the wilderness had the **gospel** preached to them? You bet. In fact the word used here in our text is the word **gospel** as it applied to them. In the original Greek the word **iseuaggelizo** and it's where we get our English word **evangelize**. The Jews in the desert were **evangelized**. They were the recipients of good news that God would deliver them and bring them into His rest. Later we'll look at what this rest entails, but it included a **spiritual rest** which can only be received **by faith**. ([Hebrews 4:1-10 Cease From Your Rest & Enter His](#)) (**Bolding and italics** added for emphasis)

Spurgeon - In the old time that gospel that was preached to them was preached to us—but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. God send us this holy mixture of the hearing and the believing, to our soul's salvation, to His glory. The message of Moses and the reports of the faithful spies were both typical of the gospel that was brought to us by our Lord and His apostles. Our gospel is more clear than theirs; yet they had the gospel also, in all the essential truths of it. And had they fully believed it, it would have been a saving gospel to them. Why was it the gospel that they heard did not benefit them? Assuredly, it was not the fault of the gospel that they heard. In itself it is calculated to profit all who receive it. It promised liberty, and this should have made them gratefully obedient. It promised an inheritance, and added to it a high and holy calling, and this should have aroused their loftiest aspiration. It promised every help to the getting of the promised blessings, and what could they have more? It was not the fault of the preacher; for Moses spoke God's word with great meekness and gentleness. He set

before them the truth with all fidelity. It was not the fault of a lack of confirming signs from God. No default of divine working hindered Israel's faith. God wrought with His gospel in those days very mightily. The daily manna and the water leaping from the rock, with other signs and wonders, went to prove the word of the Lord. Neither was it for lack of the Holy Spirit that these people made the gospel a failure to them; for we read that the Holy Ghost spoke to them, and they rebelled, and vexed the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Ghost who spoke to them and said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb 3:15; 4:7). Well, then, what was the cause? We put our finger on it at once: "They were not united with those who heard it in faith." Where there is no faith in the gospel, no good consequence can possibly come of it. Where there is no faith, men remain slaves to the present. If they did not believe in the milk and honey of Canaan, you see why they hankered for the cucumbers of Egypt. An onion is nothing comparable to an estate beyond Jordan; yet as they think they cannot get the estate, they pine for the onions. When men do not believe in eternal life, they naturally enough cry, "Give me bread and cheese. Let me have a fortune here." They keep their nose to the grindstone, always thinking about this passing life, because they do not heartily believe in heaven and its glories. They are as "dumb driven cattle," that do not see into another state: this life seems real to them, but the next life they suspect to be a dream. As long as there is no faith, this world is all, and the world to come is nothing at all.

Bruce Barton has an interesting analysis of **Hebrews 4**, first reminding us of Israel's OT experience...

In this chapter, the word "**rest**" is used in three different ways: (1) the **rest** Israel had been promised in Canaan; (2) God's **rest** after creating the world (He 4:4); and (3) the **rest** experienced by Christians—both now and in the future.

Deuteronomy 12:9, 10, 11 describes the "rest" that Israel had been promised in Canaan: the land itself, security and protection because they were God's people, rest from fighting (peace) (and) God's presence through the tabernacle (and later the temple) While the next generation of Israelites did enter and possess the land, this was still only a shadow of the final "rest" that was to come. The Jewish people refused God's plan and rejected their Savior; thus, the promise of entering his rest still stands—God has made this rest available to Christians. Since God had barred the rebellious Israelites from the Promised Land, the promise stands (**Ed**: "a promise remains" He 4:1) for those who remain obedient to him (**Ed**: See related topic on the phrase **Obedience of faith**). The promise has not been fulfilled, but neither has it been revoked. **For those who have come to trust in Jesus, He gives rest.** They first find rest from trying to fulfill all the requirements of the law (Mt 11:28). Unshackled from this yoke (cp Ga 5:1, 4, 6, 2:3, 4, 5, Ac 15:1, 24, Ro 9:31, 32-note), they can experience salvation and God's "**rest**" today. This rest will be fully culminated in heaven. While Christians presently enjoy "**rest**" with God, at the same time, we look forward to that day when our final **rest** will be in face-to-face fellowship with the Father. Christians are promised the full extent of God's **rest**: heaven, security and protection because we are God's people, relief from earthly struggles and sin, God's perfect presence in our lives through the Spirit and eventually face-to-face, Christians must learn from the tragic mistake of the Israelites. The writer of Hebrews warned readers how serious it would be to turn away from Christ by saying let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. This is not a mere encouragement, but a warning sign: Danger ahead! **Just as God rejected the rebellious Israelites on the basis of their unbelief** (He 3:19-note), **so He will reject those who turn away from Christ, refuse to believe Him, or refuse to follow Him.** ... The Jewish believers to whom this letter was written were in danger of turning away from their faith, just as their ancestors had turned away from the Promised Land. ([Barton, B. et al: The NIV Life Application Commentary Series: Tyndale](#)) (Bolding added for emphasis)

Ray Stedman explains that here in **Hebrews 4:2** "we are given the reason for the Israelites' unbelief in the wilderness. Even though the **gospel** of God's deliverance from an evil heart (Je 3:17, 7:24, 11:8, 16:12) was proclaimed clearly through the sacrifices, the tabernacle ritual and the preaching of Moses (cp Gal 3:24, 3:8), it met with a **lack of faith** among those who perished. The writer will declare in He 11:6 (note) that "**without faith it is impossible to please God.**" **Without a personal response to the promise of salvation, no one may be saved.** Declared many times in Scripture, this fact invalidates completely the teaching of universalism that everyone is already saved by virtue of Christ's death and that God will reveal that to them at the end, no matter how they lived. This teaching ignores the need for **repentance** (**Ed**: Verses that call for repentance and refute the false teaching in many evangelical circles that repentance is not a vital component of salvation - Jonah 3:8,10 2Ki17:13 2Chr 30:6 Pr 1:23 Je 25:5 Ezek 14:6, 18:30, 31, 32, 33:11, Da 4:27 Hos 14:2 Joel 2:12 Mal 3:7 Ro 2:4 1Th 1:9, 10-note, 2Pe 3:9-note, Re 2:21-note, Re 2:22-note, Mt 3:2, 4:17, 11:20, 12:41, Mk 1:4,15, 6:12 Lk 13:3, 5, 15:7,10, 16:30, 24:47, Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 26:20, 17:30, 20:21, 2Co 7:9, 10, 12:21 2Ti 2:25, 26-note): turning from ungrateful rebellion to a thankful acceptance of God's provision. Ro 10:17(see note) indicates that the **gospel** ("the word of Christ") has power to awaken belief in its hearers (cp Ro 1:16-note, Col 1:5-note, Col 1:6-note, 1Th 2:13-note); if that belief is acted upon by a willing response (faith), it results in **salvation** (divine life imparted). ([Hebrews Commentary](#)) (Bolding added)

For indeed we have had - Hearing the good news is not sufficient. Even belief when it is solely a mental acceptance (cp the

slippery slope of progression of "intellectual belief" to overt rejection of Jesus in John 8:31, 8:44, 8:58, 59) of the facts about God and Jesus as being true (cp Jas 2:19-note) is not sufficient to bring rest to one's soul. It is not enough to know about Jesus. What is critical is that **He know us** (as happens when our faith is real) (see Mt 7:21-note, Mt 7:22, 23-note)

We... us... they - The pronouns **we** and **us** refer to the first-century Hebrew readers, whereas **they** refers to the generation which came out of Egypt.

Preach the gospel (good news)([2097](#)) (**euaggelizo/ euangelizo** from **euaggelos** = bringing good news from **eu** = good, well + **aggéllō** = proclaim, tell) means to announce good news, to declare or bring glad tidings.

See discussion of The Gospel in the Old Testament

This word could refer to declaration of any kind of good news, but in the NT it refers especially to the glad tidings of coming kingdom of God and of salvation obtained through the Lamb of God. Thus it means to "**evangelize**" especially to preach the gospel. It was at the time that the first Christians were "**scattered abroad, and went about preaching the Word**" after the martyrdom of Stephen (he being one of the seven), that the verb **euaggelizo**, to publish the good tidings or good news, was used by Luke in Acts 8:4, 12, 25, 35, 40.

The **perfect tense** emphasizes the permanence of God's invitation to join Him in heaven, all bills paid ("It is finished" = [Our sin debt has been] "Paid in full"! Jn 19:30)!

Wuest explains that "The character of the **good news** (gospel) must be defined by the context. The **good news** (gospel) which was announced to the first-century readers of this epistle was that of a **spiritual rest in Messiah**. The **good news** given to the generation which came out of Egypt was that of a temporal, physical rest in a land flowing with milk and honey, offered to a people who had been reduced to abject slavery for 400 years and who had lived on a diet of leeks, garlic, and onions during that time... Those who **heard** did not assimilate the **good news** by **faith**. They did not make the **promise of rest** in Canaan their own. The words "**Unto us was the gospel preached**" are a periphrastic **perfect** participial construction in the Greek text. This speaks not only of a complete work accomplished in the past, but also of the persistence of the finished results in the present. The announcing of the good news of Canaan to the generation which came out of Egypt, and the proclamation of the good news of a spiritual rest in Messiah to the first-century generation was so thoroughly done that the memory of these messages was indelibly impressed on the minds of their respective hearers. There was therefore no excuse possible that the message had not been clearly and forcibly delivered in both instances. The participle is in the passive voice. The literal rendering is, "For we have in times past been completely evangelized with the present result that the message of good news is in our minds, even as they." ([Hebrews Commentary - Online](#))

Hughes adds that the literal meaning of this opening clause is...

"**for we also have been evangelized just as they were,**" the **perfect tense** of the verb implying, as Spicq observes, the completeness of the evangelization that had taken place, and thus leaving no room for any excuse to the effect that the evangelization had been inadequate or deficient. There is a real equivalence between the promise of the Old Testament and the evangel (gospel) of the New Testament, for their essential content is the same: the former looks ahead to fulfilment in Christ, the latter proclaims the accomplishment in Christ of what was promised. Thus Paul, using a compound of the same verb, describes the giving of the covenant promise to Abraham as the preaching of the gospel beforehand to Abraham—his pre-evangelization (Gal 3:8).

But in the case of the Israelites in the wilderness the message (evangel) which they heard did not benefit them, and the reason for this deplorable eventuality was that it did not meet with faith in the hearers. Here we find three things in close association: (1) the **message**, (2) **hearing**, and (3) **faith**. They are present in the same dynamic combination in Romans 10:14:

how are they to believe [faith] in him of whom they have never heard? and how are they to hear [hearing] without a preacher [to proclaim the message]?

It follows that the message by itself, as an isolated concept, is of no avail; to be **good news** it must be **proclaimed** so that there is a **hearing** of it; but, again, merely to hear it is in itself insufficient, for to hearing the response of **faith** must be added. The generation in the wilderness discovered to their cost that the same evangelical message which they heard and faithlessly rejected became the source of their condemnation. What possible excuse can there be for us if we follow their example? What difference can we plead (good news came to us just as to them) except that, if anything, we are all the more culpable, for they had the promise, whereas we have the fulfilment? To us he whom the evangelical message proclaims says: "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the

last day" (Jn 12:48) (Hughes, P. A. Commentary On The Epistle To The Hebrews)

John Piper asks the pertinent question...

What was the **good news** preached to them? Well, among many other things it was God's word to Israel from Mount Sinai in Exodus 34:6, 7,

"Then the LORD ... proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.'"

It was good news of love and mercy and forgiveness of every kind of iniquity and transgression and sin. And it was the good news of God's promise that God would bring them into the land of milk and honey and be with them if they would trust him and not rebel (Numbers 14:8, 9).

So this writer says that the Israelites had heard the gospel just like his readers had -- not the foundation of it in the death and resurrection of Christ, which his readers have heard -- but still the promise that God is merciful and forgives sins and promises rest and joy for those who trust him. So there is a very similar situation between Israel and the readers of this letter, and the point is: this good news was not believed by Israel and so they did not enter God's rest, God's promised joy.

Hebrews 4:2: "The word they heard [= the good news of forgiveness and promised joy] did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."

In other words, they didn't believe it. They doubted God. They distrusted him. They did not have faith in his promise to give them a better future than they had in Egypt and so they gave up on God and wanted the old life.

And what was the result of that unbelief? Heb 4:2 says: the promise "did not profit them." It was of no value to them. **It did not save them.** As Heb 3:19 said, they did not enter God's rest. They fell in the wilderness. God swore in his wrath that they would never enter his rest -- a picture of missing heaven.

So the point of Heb 4:2 is exactly the same as the point of He 3:19 -- its a reason for why we should fear unbelief.

Heb 3:19: "They were not able to enter because of unbelief."

Therefore (He 4:1) **fear unbelief**; because (He 4:2) when the good news to Israel was not united to faith, it profited them nothing and they perished in the wilderness. The main point is: fear this happening to you.

Fear hearing the promises of God and not trusting them.

Because the same thing will happen to us as to them: we will not enter into **God's rest** -- **God's heaven** -- if we do not trust His promises. ([Click to read John Piper's full sermon on Hebrews 4:1-11 Be diligent to enter God's rest](#)) (Bolding added)

**BUT THE WORD THEY HEARD DID NOT PROFIT THEM, BECAUSE IT WAS NOT UNITED BY FAITH IN THOSE WHO HEARD:
all ouk ophelosen (3SAAI) o logos tes akoes ekeinous me sugkekerasmenous (RPPMPA) te pistei tois akousasin
(AAPMPD):**

- Ro 2:25; 1Cor 13:3; 1Ti 4:8) (He 4:6; 3:12,18,19; 11:6; 1Th 1:5; 2:13; 2Th 2:12,13; Jas 1:21
- [Hebrews 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

FAILURE TO MIX THE WORD WITH BELIEF

But - always pause to prayerfully ponder this **term of contrast** asking at least "What is being contrasted?"

The word (3055)(**logos**) means something said and describes a communication whereby the mind finds expression in words. Note that the writer uses the definitive article ("the") so that it is not just any word but "the word" which surely ultimately points to the Word of God. O how often He speaks and I fail to listen and so fail to profit from what He says!

They heard (189) (akouo) means literally to hear and here is in the **aorist tense** which speaks of past completed action. They really did hear. Therefore, the conclusion is that they had no excuse! They heard the living Word... the blessing and the curse...

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them. (Dt 30:19, 20).

Barton - Jews from both the Old Testament era and the New Testament era had received communication from God. But for many of the Old Testament Jews, the message they heard was of no value to them. Why not? Because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Not only must God's message be heard, it must also be combined with faith (**Ed**: Study the definition below of genuine **faith that saves**) before it will be effective. Hearing must lead to believing. Implicit in these words is the warning to these New Testament Jewish believers not to make the same mistake. ([Barton, B. et al: The NIV Life Application Commentary Series: Tyndale](#))

Did not profit (5623) (opheleo from **óphelos** = increase, profit <> **opheleia** = benefit profit) means to provide assistance, w emphasis upon resulting benefit. The Greek word for **not** (ou/ouk) signifies absolute negation (absolutely no way!)

Opheleo - 15x in 15v - Matt 15:5; 16:26; 27:24; Mark 5:26; 7:11; 8:36; Luke 9:25; John 6:63; 12:19; Rom 2:25; 1 Cor 13:3; 14:6; Gal 5:2; Heb 4:2; 13:9. **NAS** = accomplishing(1), benefit(1), benefited(1), doing... good(1), help(2), helped(1), profit(4), profited(1), profits(2), value(1).

Simply put... **the Word of God** was of **no** value to them and they were not saved. Their falling in the wilderness and failing to enter the promised rest is (in my opinion) a picture of missing heaven. Notice the Greek word for "no" (ou, ouk) signifies **ABSOLUTELY NO profit!** How tragic. Truth spoken, but truth rejected!

Regarding the phrase **did not profit them, John Wesley** writes that "So far from it, that it increased their damnation (**Ed**: cp "gradations" or "degrees" of damnation as taught by Jesus - Mt 12:41, 42, Mk 12:40, Lk 11:31, 32, 20:46, 47). It is then only when it is **mixed with faith**, that it exerts its saving power. (Wesley, J. Wesley's Notes: Hebrews) (Bolding added)

Spurgeon - Why was it the gospel that they heard did not benefit them? Assuredly, it was not the fault of the gospel that they heard. In itself it is calculated to profit all who receive it. It promised liberty, and this should have made them gratefully obedient. It promised an inheritance, and added to it a high and holy calling, and this should have aroused their loftiest aspiration. It promised every help to the getting of the promised blessings, and what could they have more? It was not the fault of the preacher; for Moses spoke God's word with great meekness and gentleness. He set before them the truth with all fidelity. It was not the fault of a lack of confirming signs from God. No default of divine working hindered Israel's faith. God wrought with His gospel in those days very mightily. The daily manna and the water leaping from the rock, with other signs and wonders, went to prove the word of the Lord. Neither was it for lack of the Holy Spirit that these people made the gospel a failure to them; for we read that the Holy Ghost spoke to them, and they rebelled, and vexed the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Ghost who spoke to them and said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb 3:15; 4:7). Well, then, what was the cause? We put our finger on it at once: "They were not united with those who heard it in faith." Where there is no faith in the gospel, no good consequence can possibly come of it.

Therefore let us fear that we might **hear** the promises of God and yet fail to **trust** in them or else the same thing will happen to us as happened to Israel 4000 years ago. God is the same holy God and entry into His presence has always been via the doorway of faith in His Son (Jn 14:6, 8:24, Acts 4:12, 16:31).

**Beware, Oh professing Christian,
lest you miss His rest!**

And be clear on the fact that the writer is not saying that you will lose salvation. You cannot lose something you have never possessed! So possess His promised rest by faith, a faith that shows itself real by obedience (albeit imperfect - see related topic on the **Obedience of faith**) and a changed (transformed) life (a manifestation of a new heart God gives when we enter the New Covenant of grace by faith - cp Jas 2:14-26-note).

And even **true believers** need to apply the principle living daily by faith not sight or works (2Co 5:7, Gal 3:1, 2, 3), continually seeking to guard our hearts (Pr 4:23-note). We cannot lose what we possess (salvation, Jesus, Christ in us the hope of glory - Col 1:27-note) but we can lose the precious sense of intimate communion and fellowship with God our Father and with Jesus our great High Priest and with our Comforter the Holy Spirit (cp Ep 4:30-note). We can also lose rewards at the judgment seat of Christ for as the apostle **John** warned...

Watch (present imperative = command to be on the alert continually. **Why?** For our **flesh** is ever looking for a

"crack" in our spiritual armor [Mt 26:41, Gal 5:17-note, Jas 1:14, 15-note], as is our Adversary the Devil - 1Pe 5:8-note) yourselves, that you might not lose (apollumi = destroy, ruin, bring to naught, to fail to obtain what one expects or anticipates) what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. (2John 1:8, cp 1Co 3:14, 15, 2Co 5:10 where "bad" = **phaulos**)

The **Nelson Study Bible** writes that "**The gospel was preached** is the translation of a single Greek word meaning "the good news was announced." The good news of God's rest (He 4:1) had been proclaimed to the Israelites. The generation led by Moses had failed to enter their rest, which was the Promised Land (see Dt. 12:9), because of their lack of faith. In the same way, the gospel of Christ that had been proclaimed to the author's audience was calling them into God's rest, but their unbelief would hinder them from entering into it. ([Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. The Nelson Study Bible: NKJV. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

Kenneth Wuest has a comment that helps understand what **the word they heard did not profit them** means...

There always was the **remnant (see study)** in Israel, a little group which offered the symbolic sacrifices as an indication of a real living faith in the future substitutionary sacrifice, and there was always the larger group, which, while it went through the ritual of the Levitical sacrifices, yet exercised **no heart faith to appropriate a salvation offered in grace** on the basis of justice satisfied by the atonement, but depended upon personal merit and good works for salvation.

These two groups were in existence in Israel in the first century. An illustration of the first is found in such believers as Zacharias, Elizabeth (**Ed**: Lk 1:5, 6, cp Simeon, Anna, Lk 2:25, 36, 37, 38, Joseph of Arimathea, Lk 23:51), Mary the virgin (Lk 1:30, "favor" = **charis**), the disciples other than Judas.

An illustration of the second we find in the priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians, who while observing the sacrificial ritual of the Temple yet ignored its significance and depended for salvation upon personal merit and their own good works (cp Mt 23:2, 3, 4, 5, Lk 16:15, Lk 16:15NLT, Jn 12:43)...

Sinners were saved in Old Testament times by pure grace just as they are today (Ge 15:6, Gal 3:8), without any admixture of good works. ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

IT WAS NOT UNITED: **me sugkerasmenous (RPPMPA)**:

- [Hebrews 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

FAILURE TO CONNECT FAITH WITH THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL

United (4786) (**sugkerannumi** from **sún** = together, with + **keránnumi** = mix) it mans to mix or blend together and figuratively to join together. The idea is to mingle wine with water or mix spices and by implication, prepare a drink, pour out for drinking, fill one's cup. In regard to the word group of **kerannumi**, note that a **kerameus** is a potter; **keramos** the potter's clay or pottery; and **keramion**, an earthenware vessel or pot. From this group of words we get the English word "ceramic." The observations indicate a very thorough mixing.

United (4786)(**sugkerannumi** from **sun** = with +) means to mix or blend together and figuratively to join together. The idea is to mingle wine with water or mix spices and by implication, prepare a drink, pour out for drinking, fill one's cup. In regard to the word group of **kerannumi**, note that a **kerameus** is a potter; **keramos** the potter's clay or pottery; and **keramion**, an earthenware vessel or pot. From this group of words we get the English word "ceramic." The observations indicate a very thorough mixing.. Actively it means to mix or mingle together, blend, unite; figuratively, of unifying a group into one body compose, put together, combine; figuratively, of unifying a group into one body compose, put together, combine (as in 1 Cor 12:24). (2) Figuratively and passive be united with (Heb 4:2) [Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#) - The meaning of **sunkerannumi** is "to mix together with" or "to mingle." In classical usage the word is used to indicate when two things are mixed or blended together. The word is sometimes applied in connection with relationships between people suggesting close friendship or personal attachment. Xenophon used the word to suggest that one has become deeply involved in a situation (Liddell-Scott). The papyri use the word similarly. One document uses the word in connection with people joining together in a wedding. Another document uses it in the context of the "mixing of souls" in friendship (Moulton-Milligan). In both cases the idea suggests an intimate joining together of people in love or friendship. Sunkerannumi occurs only twice in the Septuagint, once to refer to the mixing of metals in an earthen pot (Daniel 2:43, LXX only), and once in the noncanonical book of 2 Maccabees where there is a reference to the mixing of water and wine (2 Maccabees 15:39). The word is used only twice in the New Testament. The first is in 1 Corinthians 12:24 where Paul developed the metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ. The idea here is that God has "compounded" or "put together" the

Body in such a way as to help create peace in the Body. The word pictures God as a craftsman, structuring the Church intentionally and carefully, and mixing the gifts and personalities of the believers like a metallurgist mixes metals to give strength to the final product. The second use of the word is found in Hebrews 4:2. Here **sunkerannumi** describes the interrelationship between the preaching of the word of the gospel and the reception of the Word in the hearer. In Hebrews 4:2 it suggests that there must be a mixing or a joining of faith (that is, **faith-obedience**) in the hearer with the preached word. We can translate the phrase in Hebrews 4:2 something like this, "For the word which they heard did not benefit them, because it was not mingled with faith in the ones that heard it" (see also Hagner, Good News Commentary, Hebrews, p.49).

Barnes - The word "**mixed**" is supposed by many of the best critics to refer to the process by which "food" is made nutritive, by being properly "mixed" with the saliva and the gastric juice, and thus converted into chyme, and chyle, and then changed into blood.

Liddell and Scott suggest that the word was used in classical circles of forming close friendships.

Moulton and Milligan report a medical receipt which has the instructions appended, "Give to drink with raisin wine and honey and pine-cones mixed."

Mere knowledge of God's message regarding salvation is not sufficient. This life saving truth must be appropriated by saving faith. As noted above, the picture of **sugkerannumi** is mixing or mingling wine with water (kerannumi) with preposition **sun** emphasizing intimate, even indissoluble union of these diverse constituents. Once wine is mixed with water it cannot be **unmixed**... so faith that mixes with the good news is a "new wine" so to speak and cannot be "unmade". In other words you **cannot** lose your salvation (there are many other more Scriptural reasons to substantiate this truth but this Greek verb sugkerannumi in the present context provides at least a picture of the fact.)

Barclay's non-literal translation picks up the idea of the author: it did not become woven into the very fibre of their being

Spurgeon - That which is not appropriated can be of no use to you. Look at your food. How is it that it builds up your body? Because you take it into the mouth, and it descends into the stomach, and there it is mixed with certain fluids, and is digested, and ultimately is taken up into the system and becomes a life-sustaining force. Being properly mixed, it is taken up and assimilated. And so it is with heavenly truth: if it is taken into the heart, and then mixed with faith, it is digested, and becomes food to every part of the spiritual nature. Without faith the gospel passes through the soul undigested, and rather feeds disease than promotes life.

Later in Hebrews a much longer exposition will again expound on the vital topic of **faith** (Hebrews 10:19-12:29). The writer's point of comparison in the present passage is that, like the Jews who left Egypt (Hebrews 3:16, 17, 18, 19), his generation had also received God's message of the proclamation of the gospel (= they had been evangelized!).

The Disciple's Study Bible rightly emphasizes that "The gospel proclamation **requires a response**. Neutrality is not a valid response. The hearer will either receive the message with repentance and faith or will reject it in unbelief. Proclamation confronts the mystery of human free will. God forces no one to be saved. The proclaimer of God's Word is not a coercer of people. Salvation comes when the individual chooses to receive God's offer through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:12; Rev 22:17-note). Salvation is rejected when the individual chooses not to receive God's offer (Ac 24:24, 23, 25; 1Co 1:18; 2Th 1:8). ([Disciple's Study Bible](#))

Perhaps you have never considered the **gospel** as an OT teaching but have thought it was restricted to the NT. While clearly the gospel is most fully expounded upon in the NT, Paul makes it very clear that good news was proclaimed in the Old Testament...

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU (quoting from God's promise to Abram in Ge 12:3)." (**Galatians 3:8**)

Comment: So how is this the **gospel**? Simply put, God's promise required the coming of the Messiah to redeem the world for fulfillment of the promise to **all nations**. Furthermore, this promise was made long before Israel became a nation, and thus took on a more general or universal scope. Abraham thus believed this very early form of the gospel and was justified by faith many years before God gave him the sign of circumcision as a token of the covenant in Genesis 17:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. Genesis 15:6 records that Abraham "believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." To summarize, God's Word of promise [none of which shall ever fail] as given to Abraham, indicated that all nations would or could be justified by faith. This was a unique revelation in a day when all the world's nations had already drifted away from monotheism and were relying on works to achieve whatever they may have understood as salvation.

In light of the fact that **good news** was clearly preached (verb = proeuaggelizo) to Abraham and was also clearly preached to Israel (verb = euaggelizo) the comment by **Zane Hodges** in **The Bible Knowledge Commentary**, is surprising...

What was preached to the Israelites of old was, quite clearly, God's offer of rest. This, of course, was **good**

news for them just as it is for people now, but it is not exactly what is meant today by gospel. The Greek verb used, euangelizomai, was fully capable of having a non-technical sense in the NT (cf. its use in Lk 1:19; 1Th 3:6), but naturally the writer here did not sharply distinguish the “good news” about rest, which his readers had heard, from the “good news” to which the term “gospel” is more usually applied (cf. 1Cor 15:1, 2, 3, 4).” ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#)).

Comment: Hodges is a Greek scholar but that does not guarantee that his interpretation is correct (cp the importance of being Bereans = Acts 17:11-note). Using Scripture to interpret Scripture (see **Comparing Scripture with Scripture**), it is difficult to dismiss the plain teaching of the passage that the writer of Hebrews means what he says - they **heard** the **gospel** but they did not **believe** the **gospel**. The conclusion would of course be that most of Israel was not genuinely saved (not justified by faith).

J Vernon McGee (among many others) disagrees with **Zane Hodges'** softening of the intent of this passage writing that...

Here is the “**rest**” of salvation, the **rest of trusting Christ as Savior**. They **heard** the gospel but did not **believe** it. ([Hebrews 4:2-3 Mp3](#)) (Bolding added for emphasis)

Henry Morris in his note on this passage explains that...

The **gospel** is not just a New Testament revelation, for it was preached to the children of Israel in the wilderness, in types and prophecies, at least. In fact, it is **the everlasting gospel** (see Re 14:6-note; Re 14:7-note), and the first promise of redemption (Ge 3:15) is commonly known as the protevangelium (first gospel). In its essence, the **gospel** (good news) is the message that the Creator is also our Redeemer and coming King, and that true faith in Him--faith which produces salvation--will also produce loving obedience to His Word. ([Morris, Henry: Defenders Study Bible. World Publishing](#)) (Bolding added)

Matthew Henry comments that...

the same **gospel** for substance was preached under both Testaments, though not so clearly; not in so comfortable a manner under the Old as under the New. The best privileges the ancient Jews had were their gospel privileges; the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament were the gospel of that dispensation; and, whatever was excellent in it, was the respect it had to Christ. Now, if this was their highest privilege, we are not inferior to them; for we have the **gospel** as well as they, and in greater purity and perspicuity than they had. (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible)

The **Reformation Study Bible** writes that...

The good news of deliverance and God's love that Israel heard at Sinai was not as clear as the salvation spoken now through the Lord (He 2:3-note), but it would have been of value to the hearers, ushering them into God's rest, if they had combined it with faith. (Whitlock, L. G., Sproul, R. C., Waltke, B. K., & Silva, M. Reformation Study Bible. New King James Version. Nashville: T. Nelson)

BY FAITH: te pistei:

- [Hebrews 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The **New English Bible** translates it “they brought no admixture of faith to the hearing of it.”

Hughes - This is amazing because they had had constant witness of God's character and provision. They had the spectacular historical examples of the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. And there were also the ubiquitous pillars of cloud and fire and the day-in, day-out provisions of manna. But now, faced with a new challenge, they simply did not trust God and so failed to enter their rest. Many, perhaps thousands, were believers (they *believed* in God), but only two really *trusted* God and found rest. We must keep this subtle distinction between **belief** and **trust** clear if we are to understand what kind of faith is necessary to have rest in this life. New Testament scholar Leon Morris says that faith here in Hebrews 4:2 is “the attitude of trusting God wholeheartedly.” [Leon Morris, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), p. 40.] So we must understand that the opening line of He 4:3, which says, “Now we who have believed enter that rest,” specifically means, “we who have wholeheartedly trusted enter that rest.” Thus, it is spelled out in no uncertain terms that faith that pleases God is belief plus trust. **Belief**, the mental acceptance of a fact as true, will simply not bring rest to any soul. Acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world will not give us rest. **Trust** in Him is what gives rest to our souls. Belief, the mental acceptance of a fact as true, will simply not bring rest to any soul. Acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world will not give us rest. Trust in

him is what gives rest to our souls. "Trust brings rest," says Alexander Maclaren, "because it sweeps away, as the north wind does the banded clouds on the horizon, all the deepest causes of unrest." [Maclaren - The Rest of Faith - an excellent discussion of faith as belief plus trust]. First, trust in Christ's sacrificial death begins our rest by giving us rest from the burden of guilt for our sins and a gnawing conscience. Second, trust in his character as an almighty God and a loving Savior gives us rest as we place our burdens on Him. Just as a child sleeps so well in his parents' arms, so we rest in God. ([Hughes, R. K. Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul. Volume 1. Crossway Books - Volume 2](#))

The **Amplified** translation explains **faith** as "with the leaning of the entire personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness."

Here is **God's commentary** on this verse...

And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? (Nu 14:11)

Drew Worthen writes that that "**Many Jews in the desert walked alongside with the people of God, but many of those Jews did not know God.** And "So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." Our writer wants us to consider Whom we believe as we consider how we believe Him which will effect the way we believe with lives of dependence on God as we walk in obedience. ([Hebrews 4:1-10 Cease From Your Rest & Enter His](#)) (Bolding added)

Alexander Maclaren writes that...

Important lessons are given by this alternation of the two ideas of faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Disobedience is the root of unbelief (**Ed**: I think the next statement is more accurate. I think "disobedience" is not the "root" but the "fruit" of unbelief!). Unbelief is the mother of further disobedience.

Faith is voluntary submission within a person's own power. If faith is not exercised, the true cause lies deeper than all intellectual reasons. It lies in the moral aversion of human will and in the pride of independence, which says, "who is Lord over us? Why should we have to depend on Jesus Christ?"

**As faith is obedience and submission,
so faith breeds obedience,
but unbelief leads on to higher-handed rebellion.**

With dreadful reciprocity of influence, the less one trusts, the more he disobeys; the more he disobeys, the less he trusts...

Trust brings rest because it sweeps away, as the north wind does the banded clouds on the horizon, all the deepest causes of unrest. (From his sermon **Hebrews 4:11 Man's Share in God's Rest**)

Faith ([4102](#)) (**pistis**) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it.

Pistis - 243x in 227v - **NAS** = faith, 238; faithfulness, 3; pledge, 1; proof, 1.

Matt 8:10; 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28; 17:20; 21:21; 23:23; Mark 2:5; 4:40; 5:34; 10:52; 11:22; Luke 5:20; 7:9, 50; 8:25, 48; 17:5f, 19; 18:8, 42; 22:32; Acts 3:16; 6:5, 7; 11:24; 13:8; 14:9, 22, 27; 15:9; 16:5; 17:31; 20:21; 24:24; 26:18;

Romans 1:5, 8, 12, 17; 3:3, 22, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31; 4:5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20; 5:1, 2; 9:30, 32; 10:6, 8, 17; 11:20; 12:3, 6; 14:1, 22, 23; 16:26;

1Co 2:5; 12:9; 13:2, 13; 15:14, 17; 16:13; 2 Cor 1:24; 4:13; 5:7; 8:7; 10:15; 13:5; Gal 1:23; 2:16, 20; 3:2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 22, 23, 24; 5:5, 6, 22; 6:10; Ep 1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13; 6:16, 23; Phil 1:25, 27; 2:17; 3:9; Col 1:4, 23; 2:5, 7, 12; 1Th 1:3, 8; 3:2, 5, 6, 7, 10; 5:8; 2Th 1:3, 4, 11; 2:13; 3:2; 1Ti 1:2, 4, 5, 14, 19; 2:7, 15; 3:9, 13; 4:1, 6, 12; 5:8, 12; 6:10, 11, 12, 21; 2Ti 1:5, 13; 2:18, 22; 3:8, 10, 15; 4:7; Titus 1:1, 4, 13; 2:2, 10; 3:15; Philemon 1:5, 6;

Hebrews 4:2; 6:1, 12; 10:22, 38, 39; 11:1, 3, 4, 5, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 33, 39; 12:2; 13:7;

Jas 1:3, 6; 2:1, 5, 14, 17f, 20, 22, 24, 26; 5:15; 1 Pet 1:5, 7, 9, 21; 5:9; 2 Pet 1:1, 5; 1 John 5:4; Jude 1:3, 20; Rev 2:13, 19; 13:10; 14:12.

This is the author's first use of **pistis** -- from the above list it is notable that only the book of Romans surpasses the book of Hebrews

in the number of uses of **pistis** (Romans = 35, Hebrews = 31, out of 243 NT uses)

As **pistis** relates to God, it is the conviction that God exists and is the Creator and Ruler of all things well as the Provider and Bestower of eternal salvation through Christ. As faith relates to Christ it represents a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through Whom we obtain eternal salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Stated another way, eternal salvation comes **only** through belief in Jesus Christ and no other way.

Wayne Grudem defines **faith** that saves one's soul...

Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God. This definition emphasizes that saving faith is not just a belief in facts but personal trust in Jesus to save me... The definition emphasizes personal trust in Christ, not just belief in facts about Christ. Because saving faith in Scripture involves this personal trust, the word "trust" is a better word to use in contemporary culture than the word "faith" or "belief." The reason is that we can "believe" something to be true with no personal commitment or dependence involved in it. ([Grudem, W. A. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine Online](#)) (Bolding added)

See related studies on the specific phrases (1) "**the faith**" and (2) the "**obedience of faith**". See also study on **pistos**

Biblical faith is not synonymous with mental assent or acquiescence which by itself is a superficial faith at best and not genuine (saving) faith. For example, the apostle John distinguishes two types of belief (using the related verb **pisteuo** but still illustrating a truth relevant to the discussion of the noun **pistis**), one of which is only **superficial**...

John 2:22 When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they **believed** (pisteuo) the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (Morris in [Defenders Study Bible](#) writes "Note the superior category of faith of the disciples to that of the "many" (John 2:23) who believed "when they saw the miracles," (John 2:23) but soon fell away. The disciples did not believe because of the miracles but because of the Scripture and Jesus' words. It is far better to place one's faith in God's Word than in signs and wonders.")

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many **believed** (pisteuo) in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. (Note that their belief was associated with His signs)

24 But Jesus, on His part, was not **entrusting** (pisteuo) Himself to them, for He knew all men (Morris in [Defenders Study Bible](#) writes "Although many in the Jerusalem crowd "believed in his name when they saw the miracles" (John 2:23), Jesus did not "believe" in them because He knew their hearts and knew their outward faith in Him was only superficial)

25 and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man. (The [The Ryrie Study Bible](#) notes that "The contrast is between people who put their trust -- pisteuo, Gk.-- in Jesus, and Jesus, who does not put His trust in people because He knows their motives and thoughts. **Enthusiasm for the spectacular is present in them**, but Jesus looks for **genuine faith**." Bolding added) (John 2:22-25)

In another example of belief that fell short of genuine saving belief John records that when Jesus spoke to the Jews *who had believed him*" (John 8:31) but as their subsequent actions demonstrated their belief was not genuine for Jesus accused them declaring "*you are seeking to kill Me*" (John 8:40) and after several heated exchanges, these same "believing" Jews "fulfilled prophecy" and indeed sought to kill Jesus, picking "*up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple*" (John 8:59).

True faith that saves one's soul includes at least three main elements

- (1) firm persuasion or firm conviction,
- (2) a surrender to that truth and
- (3) a conduct emanating from that surrender. In sum, faith shows itself genuine by a changed life. [Click](#) for **W E Vine's** similar definition of **faith**)

Respected theologian **Louis Berkhof** defines genuine faith in essentially the same way noting that it includes an intellectual element (notitia), which is

a positive recognition of the truth"; an emotional element (assensus), which includes "a deep conviction of the truth"; and a volitional element (fiducia), which involves "a personal trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, including

a surrender ... to Christ." ([Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939](#))

Larry Richards has an excellent discussion on faith writing that...

Originally this word group seems linked with a more formal contract between partners. It stressed faithfulness to the agreement made or trustworthiness in keeping promises. In time the use expanded. In the classical period, writers spoke of trust in the gods as well as trust in people. In the Hellenic era, "faith in God" came to mean theoretical conviction about a particular doctrine, a conviction expressed in one's way of life. As different schools of philosophy and religion developed, the particular emphasis given *pistis* was shaped by the tradition within which it was used. The NT retains the range of meanings. But those meanings are refined and reshaped by the dynamic message of the gospel.

The verb (*pisteuo*) and noun (*pistis*) are also used with a number of prepositions. "To believe through" (*dia*) indicates the way by which a person comes to faith (Jn 1:7; 1Pe 1:21 [note]). "Faith *en*" indicates the realm in which faith operates (Ep 1:15-note; Col 1:4-note; 2Ti 3:15-note). The most important construction is unique to the NT, an invention of the early church that expresses the inmost secret of our faith. That construction links faith with the preposition **eis**, "to" or "into." This is never done in secular Greek. In the NT it portrays a person committing himself or herself totally to the person of Jesus Christ, for our faith is into Jesus. (**Ed note:** Leon Morris in "[The Gospel According to John](#)" agrees with Richards writing that "*Faith, for John, is an activity which takes men right out of themselves and makes them one with Christ*" indicating that Morris likewise understands the Greek preposition **eis** in the phrase **pisteuo eis**, to be a significant indication that NT faith is not just intellectual assent but includes a "*moral element of personal trust*")

One other aspect of the NT's use of faith words is fascinating. Usually the object of faith is Jesus. Only twelve verses have God as the object of faith (Jn 12:44; 14:1; Acts 16:34; Ro 4:3-note, Ro 4:5-note, Ro 4:17-note, Ro 4:24-note; Gal 3:6; 1Th 1:8 [note]; Titus 3:8 [note]; He 6:1 [note]; 1Pe 1:21 [note]). Why? The reason is clearly expressed by Jesus himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (Jn 14:6). God the Father has revealed himself in the Son. The Father has set Jesus before us as the one to whom we must entrust ourselves for salvation. It is Jesus who is the focus of Christian faith. ([Richards, L O: Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Regency](#))

Wuest in his study of **pistis** and the related words in this family, *pisteuo* and *pistos*, explains that...

When these words refer to the faith which a lost sinner must place in the Lord Jesus in order to be saved, they include the following ideas; the act of considering the Lord Jesus worthy of trust as to His character and motives, the act of placing confidence in His ability to do just what He says He will do, the act of entrusting the salvation of his soul into the hands of the Lord Jesus, the act of committing the work of saving his soul to the care of the Lord. This means a definite taking of one's self out of one's own keeping and entrusting one's self into the keeping of the Lord Jesus. ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

William Barclay notes that "**Faith** begins with **receptivity**. It begins when a man is **at least willing to listen** to the message of the truth. It goes on to **mental assent**. A man first hears and then agrees that this is true. But mental assent need not issue in action. Many a man knows very well that something is true, but does not change his actions to meet that knowledge. The final stage is when this **mental assent** becomes **total surrender**. **In full-fledged faith, a man hears the Christian message, agrees that it is true, and then casts himself upon it in a life of total yieldedness.** ([Hebrews 4 Commentary](#))

Faith is relying on what God has done rather than on one's own efforts. In the Old Testament, faith is rarely mentioned. The word **trust** is used frequently, and verbs like **believe** and **rely** are used to express the right attitude to God. The classic example is Abraham, whose **faith** was reckoned as righteousness (Ge 15:6). At the heart of the Christian message is the story of the cross: Christ's dying to bring salvation. **Faith** is an attitude of trust in which a believer receives God's good gift of salvation (Acts 16:30,31) and lives in that awareness thereafter (Gal 2:20; cf. Heb 11:1).

See **John Owen's** book - [Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God's Elect](#)

J. B. Lightfoot discusses the concept of faith in his commentary on Galatians. He notes that in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the definition of the word for **faith**

"hovers between two meanings: trustfulness, the frame of mind which relies on another; and trustworthiness, the frame of mind which can be relied upon... the senses will at times be so blended together that they can only be separated by some arbitrary distinction. The loss in grammatical precision is often more than compensated by the gain in theological depth... They who have faith in God are steadfast and immovable in the path of duty."

Faith, like grace, is not static. Saving faith is more than just understanding the facts and mentally acquiescing. It is inseparable from repentance, surrender, and a supernatural longing to obey. None of those responses can be classified exclusively as a human work, any more than believing itself is solely a human effort.

Faith is manifest by not believing in spite of evidence but obeying in spite of consequence. John uses the related verb *pisteuo* to demonstrate the relationship between genuine faith and obedience writing...

"He who **believes** (present tense = continuous) in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36)

Charles Swindoll commenting on faith and obedience in **John 3:36** concludes that...

In 3:36 the one who "believes in the Son has eternal life" as a present possession. But the one who "does not obey the Son shall not see life." To **disbelieve** Christ is to **disobey** Him. And logically, to **believe** in Christ is to **obey** Him. As I have noted elsewhere, "This verse clearly indicates that **belief** is not a matter of passive opinion, but decisive and obedient action." (quoting J. Carl Laney)... Tragically many people are convinced that it doesn't really matter what you believe, so long as you are sincere. This reminds me of a Peanuts cartoon in which Charlie Brown is returning from a disastrous baseball game. The caption read, "174 to nothing! How could we lose when we were so sincere?" The reality is, Charlie Brown, that it takes more than sincerity to win the game of life. Many people are sincere about their beliefs, but they are sincerely wrong!" ([Swindoll, C. R., & Zuck, R. B. Understanding Christian Theology.: Thomas Nelson Publishers](#)) (This book is recommended if you are looking for a very readable, non-compromising work on "systematic theology". Wayne Grudem's work noted above is comparable.)

Subjectively faith is firm persuasion, conviction, belief in the truth, veracity, reality or faithfulness (though rare). **Objectively faith** is that which is believed (usually designated as "the faith"), doctrine, the received articles of faith. Click separate study of "the faith (pistis)"

Spurgeon wrote that...

Faith is the foot of the soul by which it can march along the road of the commandments.

FAITH - RESTING YOUR WHOLE WEIGHT ON JESUS OUR REST!

When missionary [John Paton](#) was translating the Scripture for the South Sea islanders (New Hebrides islands), he was unable to find a word in their vocabulary for the concept of believing, trusting, or having faith. He had no idea how he would convey that to them. One day while he was in his hut translating, a native came running up the stairs into Paton's study and flopped in a chair, exhausted after a long jungle hunting excursion. He said to Paton something like this...

"It's so good to stretch myself out and rest my whole weight in this chair."

John Paton had his word: **Faith** is resting your whole weight on God. That word went into the translation of their New Testament and helped bring that civilization of natives to Christ. Believing is putting your whole weight on God. If God said it, then it's true, and we're to believe it. By faith, the weary sinner stretches out to rest on Jesus Christ, upheld by His glorious gospel. Substituting Paton's translation in some familiar passages, they would sound like this...

"Stretch yourself out on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever stretches out on him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

Nothing before, nothing behind,
The steps of faith
Fall on the seeming void, and find
The rock beneath -- Whittier

Quotes on Faith

It will not save me to know that Christ is a Savior; but it will save me to trust him to be my Savior. I shall not be delivered from the wrath to come by believing that his atonement is sufficient; but I shall be saved by making that atonement my trust, my refuge, and

my all. The pith, the essence of faith lies in this—a casting oneself on the promise. (C H Spurgeon)

Little faith will bring your soul to heaven; great faith will bring heaven to your soul. (C H Spurgeon)

Never put a question mark where God has put a period. (John R. Rice)

True faith commits us to obedience. (A. W. Tozer)

A faith that hasn't been tested can't be trusted. (Adrian Rogers)

Faith is a reasoning trust, a trust which reckons thoughtfully and confidently upon the trustworthiness of God. (John R. W. Stott)

Faith is not anti-intellectual. It is an act of man that reaches beyond the limits of our five senses. (Billy Graham)

Faith sees the invisible, believes the unbelievable, and receives the impossible. (Corrie ten Boom)

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,

And cries it shall be done. -- Charles Wesley

I prayed for faith and thought that some day faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." I had up to this time closed my Bible and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since. (Dwight Lyman Moody)

Charles Swindoll explains genuine belief writing...

My favorite illustration of what it means to believe is the true story of Ann Seward, a resident of Portland, Oregon. She was asked to costar with high-wire artist Philippe Petit at the opening of the Portland Center for the Performing Arts. Intrigued by the opportunity, she responded, "I'd like to meet this man and see if I trust him." Her stage would be on an eighty-foot wire between the new theater building and the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall. On August 31, 1987, the ninety-one-pound Seward placed her life in the hands of the high-wire artist and was carried on his back while he performed high above the street. (from Chris Myers, "*Chance Encounter Led to a Truly High Time*," *Oregonian*, 3 September 1987) She said that her performance had a lesson for those who witnessed it. "I think that one of the most beautiful things about the performance was that it took a lot of trust—absolute trust—to do that," she said. "I think in the world that is a very profound issue... Here it is—I'm putting my life in someone else's hands and trusting the whole crowd not to do anything to distract him." Many of those who witnessed the performance "**believed**" that Petit could successfully complete the performance with someone on his back. But **their belief was merely intellectual and did not feature the absolute trust and total commitment** exhibited by Ann Seward. She expressed her belief by placing her very life in the hands of the artist. This is the kind of "belief" referred to in the words of Paul, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). **This belief is not merely head knowledge; it is the response of a heart to the person of Christ saying, "I trust Your redeeming work to deliver me from sin and carry me safely to heaven."** ([Swindoll, C. R., & Zuck, R. B. Understanding Christian Theology.: Thomas Nelson Publishers](#)) (Bolding added)

Vine writes that

Faith is the response of the soul to the life-giving word of God, Ro 10:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 ; the work of faith is the initial act of belief on the part of one who hears the voice of the Son of God, Jn 5:24. Faith is contrasted with sight "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2Cor 5:7)

Pulpit Commentary has writes regarding faith... love... hope

"1. **Their order.** Faith is the commencement of the spiritual life, love its progress and continuance, and hope its completion; faith is the foundation, love the structure, and hope the top-stone of God's spiritual temple in the soul. 2. **Their manifestations.** Faith is seen by its works; love, by its self-denying exertions; and hope, by its patience and endurance. 3. **Their reference to time.** Faith refers to the past, love to the present, and hope to the future."

When you hear Ro10:17 occurs so that when God's word is spoken to my heart, faith is energized. We have to respond, to believe, to be fully persuaded to the point that I am willing to wholly commit. Jesus explained this truth to Nicodemus...it's not enough to

"know" but you must "believe". Faith comes from hearing. What is the response? Mt 16:24 Jesus said

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

Jesus teaches the same thing in Lk 14:26, 27, 28, 33. We come on His terms not ours. The fullest expression of faith is obedience. James says that if you say you have faith, show me your works. You don't get saved by works but the works prove that you are saved. When you hear, faith is energized but one still has to respond to what God said. "United" describes the "mixing" of that faith in an inseparable union.

Although this is the first mention of **pistis** in the epistle to the Hebrews, clearly **faith** is a key word in Hebrews.

Study the 31 uses of pistis in Hebrews in context - Hebrews 4:2-note; He 6:1-note, He 6:12-note; He 10:22-note, He 10:38-note, He 10:39-note; He 11:1-note, He 11:3-note, He 11:4-note, He 11:5-note, He 11:6-note, He 11:7-note, He 11:8-note, He 11:9-note, He 11:11-note, He 11:13-note, He 11:17-note, He 11:20-note, He 11:21-note, He 11:22-note, He 11:23-note, He 11:24-note, He 11:27-note, He 11:28-note, He 11:29-note, He 11:30-note, He 11:31-note, He 11:33-note, He 11:39-note; He 12:2-note; He 13:7-note

IN THOSE WHO HEARD: *tois akousasin* (AAPMPD):

[Hebrews 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

It is vital to "hear" the Word, but then it is necessary to "believe" it as well. (Note 2 part action by recipient in Jn 5:24; and true belief is shown by becoming a doer of the Word Jas 1:22-note).

Thomas Brooks wrote...

Reader, remember this: if thy knowledge do not now affect thy heart, it will at last, with a witness, afflict thy heart; if it do not now endear Christ to thee, it will at last provoke Christ the more against thee; if it do not make all the things of Christ to be very precious in thy eyes, it will at last make thee the more vile in Christ's eyes.

"The message they heard" (i.e., "the word of hearing," an expression much like that in 1Th 2:13-note) brought them no profit.

A difficult problem remains at the end of the verse, where the reason for this is given. While there are several textual variants in the MSS, they boil down to two--whether we take the participle of the verb "to combine" or "unite" as singular, in which case it agrees with "word" (in "word of hearing") or as plural, in which case it goes with "them." Only a few MSS have the singular reading, some of them very old, but many scholars favor it on grammatical grounds. If adopted, it gives this sense: "It [the word] was not mixed with faith in them that heard." On the other hand, if we take the plural, the meaning is, "They were not united by faith with them that heard" (i.e., real believers, men like Caleb and Joshua). The resolution of the question is difficult and may be impossible with the information at our disposal. The main thrust, however, is plain enough. The writer is saying that it is not enough to hear; the message must be acted on in faith.

Vine adds that...

However much people may congratulate themselves on receiving God's good tidings, they only produce hardening of the heart unless they are accepted and obeyed. Cp. Matthew 13:13, 41, 15, 16. ([Ibid](#))

Rugh...

The fact that some of the Hebrews have never really trusted Christ as their Savior is clear in Hebrews 4:2...

If the Hebrews had the good news preached to them, what was the problem? The author continues in verse 2; '... but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.' The problem was not that the Hebrews did not hear the good news. The problem was that they did not believe it when it was preached to them. The same is true for us today. Everyone who sits and listens to me preach will hear the good news of Jesus Christ. And anyone who believes the good news, and places his faith in Him as Lord and Savior will be delivered from the bondage of sin, and enter into God's rest. But there will also be those who hear the good news, but they do not profit from the message because they refuse to believe what God says about salvation, and they will not enter into God's rest.

Israel heard the good news, but most of them rejected it and did not enter God's rest. The Hebrews had the 'word' they heard it preached to them, but it went by many of them. These did not accept the truth of God's Word in faith. Tragically, we see this in the church today as well. ([Hebrews 4:1-13 A Perfect Future Rest](#))

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Freud's Exposure to the Truth - Few thinkers in recent times have exerted so pervasive an influence as Sigmund Freud. Although he claimed to be an atheist, he continually speculated about religious issues as if subconsciously haunted by the God whom he denied.

When Freud turned 35, his father sent him a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures he had given to him when he was a boy. Sigmund had read and studied that book, at least for a while. Enclosed in that worn copy of the Scriptures was a note from the elder Freud reminding his son that "the Spirit of the Lord began to move you and spoke within you: 'Go read in My Book that I've written and there will burst open for you the wellsprings of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom.'"

His father expressed the hope that Sigmund might, as a mature man, once again read and obey God's law. We have no evidence, however, that Freud took to heart his father's exhortation. How different his life and influence might have been if he had! ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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Hebrews 4:1-2 - The War Is Over! - The bitter conflict had finally ended between the North and the South. The soldiers of the US Civil War were free to return to their families. But a number of them remained hidden in the woods, living on berries. They either didn't hear or didn't believe that the war was over, so they continued enduring miserable conditions when they could have been back home.

It's something like that in the spiritual realm too. Christ made peace between God and man by dying in our place. He paid sin's penalty on the cross. Anyone who accepts His sacrifice will be forgiven by a holy God.

Sadly, many people refuse to believe the gospel and continue to live as spiritual fugitives. Sometimes even those who have placed their trust in Christ live on almost the same level. Either out of ignorance or unwillingness, they fail to claim the promises of God's Word. They do not experience the joy and assurance that should accompany salvation. They do not draw from their relationship with God the comfort and peace He intends for His children. They are the objects of His love, care, and provision but live as if they were orphans.

Have you been living apart from the comfort, love, and care of your heavenly Father? Come on home. The war is over!—Richard De Haan ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

We fail, O Lord, to realize
The fullness of what You have done,
So help us trust Your saving work
And claim the triumph You have won. —D. De Haan

Christ's victory over death means peace for His saints.

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Hebrews 4:2 - The Choice - You've heard the infamous name of John Wilkes Booth. He assassinated President Abraham Lincoln in 1865. But have you heard about Edwin Booth, John's eldest brother? Edwin, a well-known actor, was waiting at a Jersey City train station when he saw someone slip and fall off the platform. Edwin quickly grabbed the man's collar and pulled him to safety—rescuing him from serious injury or death. Who was the man he saved? Abraham Lincoln's son Robert, a soldier in the Civil War.

How ironic that the man who saved Lincoln's son had a brother who would soon kill the president. One saved a life; one took a life. One chose life; the other chose death.

The Lord gave His people a choice between life and death: They could love Him and obey His commands (Deut. 30:16), or they could worship and serve other gods (Dt 30:17). He told them, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life" (Dt 30:19).

We too have a choice between life and death. We can receive Jesus as our Savior and live with Him forever, or we can reject Jesus and be in darkness forever without Him. The best choice is clear. Receive God's gift of His Son Jesus. Choose life! —Anne Cetas ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The choice we make determines our

Eternal destination;
One leads to everlasting life;
The other, condemnation. —Sper

The choice you make today will determine your tomorrow.

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Addendum - How Should Hebrews 4:1-11 be interpreted? Pastor Steven Cole has an excellent exposition of this section of Hebrews (and of the entire book, with some 59 total messages! [Click here for listing of both audio and written formats](#)). As I have surveyed dozens of evangelical commentaries on Hebrews 4:1-11, I have been surprised to find how many have handled this passage. As alluded to above, many commentators have seen this section as addressed to those who are definitely believers and thus the exhortation is to press on to the fullness of resting in Christ in this present life. While I agree with Cole that this is a valid application of this text, I think the tenor of the the entire letter begs a different interpretation and thus I have included all of the sermon message entitled...

**CULTURAL RELIGION
VERSUS
SAVING FAITH**
Hebrews 4:1-11
Steven Cole

For me, some of the most frightening words in the Bible are Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21-note, Mt 7:22, 23-note:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'"

Clearly, Jesus is warning us that it is possible not only to claim to follow Him, but also to serve Him in some remarkable ways—prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles—and yet be excluded from heaven! Jesus was not talking about pagans, who spent their lives partying and disregarding God. These were men that had spent their lives serving Him, or so they thought. Their cry, "Lord, Lord," shows that they professed Jesus as their Lord. Clearly, they were shocked at being shut out of heaven. They expected to get in, but when they got there, the door was barred! If Jesus' words do not strike fear into your heart, they should!

Both Jesus' words and the words of our text warn us against the danger of cultural Christianity. Cultural Christians go to church. They claim to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Many of them serve in the church. But on that great and terrible day, they will hear Jesus utter the chilling words, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." I want to explain how to avoid being a cultural Christian and how to be genuinely saved.

Hebrews 4:1-11 is a difficult text to understand. While I think that I am on the right track here, I confess that for many years I could not understand these verses. Many pastors and Bible scholars apply these verses along the lines of how believers can experience God's peace or rest in the face of trials in our daily walk (**Ed**: My "present tense salvation" discussed above in Hebrews 4:1 [click for chart](#)). I grant that there may be a valid secondary application in that sense.

But as I have wrestled with these verses in their context, I think that to apply them primarily as an encouragement to believers to rest in Christ in the midst of trials is to misapply them. Rather, I think that the main message is:

All who are associated with the church must beware of the cultural religion that falls short of personally experiencing God's salvation.

In other words, I view them as a warning to professing Christians to make sure that their faith is genuine. I am going to follow the old Puritan approach to sermon structure, first explaining the doctrine and then giving "the use" (applying the text).

**DOCTRINE:
THE TEXT EXPLAINED IN ITS CONTEXT:**

Two statements will help us understand the text:

1. The author is not talking about an experience of inner calm that some believers may lack; rather, he is talking about experiencing God's salvation (Context).

“Therefore” (He 4:1) takes us back to chapter 3, especially to He 3:12-note and He 3:19-note. He is warning against having an evil, unbelieving heart. His readers were Jewish believers in Christ who were tempted in the face of persecution to go back to Judaism. Twice he exhorts them to “hold fast” their confession or assurance of faith (He 3:6-note, He 3:14-note). He cited Psalm 95:7, 8, 9, 10, 11-[note](#), which recounts how the Israelites in the wilderness provoked God and were thereby excluded from entering His place of rest, the Promised Land. They all had applied the blood of the Passover lamb to their doorposts. They all had passed through the Red Sea and escaped from Pharaoh’s army. But even so, with most of them, God was not well pleased, and He laid them low in the wilderness (1Co 10:5).

To understand that story correctly, it is important that we not push the typology too far. We would be mistaken to conclude that all of those who came out of Egypt were true believers who were “living in carnality.” I have often heard the story applied in this way. Those in Israel who grumbled in the wilderness are likened to “carnal” Christians. They are saved, but they just haven’t yet moved into Canaan’s land, which is the experience of victory over sin. Sometimes this is phrased that they are still in Romans 7, but they haven’t yet moved into Romans 8. I contend that that is to misapply this story.

Rather, I think that those who rebelled in the wilderness and incurred God’s wrath represent what I am calling “cultural believers.” They were a part of the people of God (Israel), but their hearts were far from trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are repeatedly described as hardened (He 3:8, He 3:13, He 3:15; He 4:7). They were under God’s wrath (He 3:10, 11-note, He 3:17-note, He 3:18-note; He 4:3-note). Their basic problem is called unbelief (He 3:12-note; He 4:2), disobedience, and sin (He 3:17, 18; He 4:6-note, He 4:11-note).

The author plainly is talking about a person’s response to the gospel, not to an experience of a deeper Christian life. Twice he states that these people, like us, had the good news preached to them (He 4:2, He 4:6-note). Even under the Law of Moses, people were not saved by keeping the Law, but by the righteousness of faith (Ge 15:6; Ex. 34:6,7; Ps. 32:1,2; cf. Ro 4:1, 2, 3, 4ff). But the good news did not profit these people, because it was not united with faith (He 4:2).

Thus when the author exhorts us to fear, lest we may come short of entering God’s rest (4:1), the thing we are to fear is unbelief and its terrible consequences, namely, eternal judgment. We should fear that like these grumbling unbelievers, we may fall through the same example of disobedience (He 4:11-note; cf. He 3:17-note). Either we have entered God’s rest (His salvation) through faith or we are the objects of His wrath through unbelief and disobedience (He 3:10, 11-note, He 3:16, 17, 18; He 4:3-note, He 4:5-note). If we do not believe God’s promises, those very promises turn into frightening threats of judgment!

So I contend that the context shows us that the author’s pastoral concern was not that some “carnal” Christians in the Hebrew church would miss out on the experience of God’s peace in the midst of their trials. His main concern was that some of them may be like those in Israel in the wilderness. They may be a part of the religious crowd, but not true believers. His concern was for their salvation from God’s wrath through genuine saving faith.

A second statement will help us understand our text:

2. God always has offered His salvation to people, and still offers it, under the imagery of rest(He 4:3-10).

The train of thought in He 4:3-10 is difficult, but I think that the author is explaining from the Old Testament how the imagery of God’s rest has been a picture of salvation in four different time periods.

A. At creation, God’s rest on the seventh day was a picture of the rest that we enjoy in Him(He 4:3, 4).

The author begins by stating, “For we who believe enter that rest.” Then he cites again Psalm 95:11, “As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest” (see Heb. 3:11-note). Then he adds, “although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.” He goes on to cite from Ge 2:2, how “God rested on the seventh day from all His works.” F. F. Bruce (Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews [Eerdmans], p. 74) explains the thought connection: “It was not because the ‘rest’ of God was not yet available that the wilderness generation of Israelites failed to enter into it; it had been available ever since creation’s work was ended.”

In other words, the Jewish Sabbath, which was rooted in the creation narrative, was a picture of the rest that God’s people enjoy through His salvation. It was a day to cease from normal labors and to be refreshed through time with God. It was a weekly opportunity for God’s people to stop and reflect on His goodness and care for them. From the beginning, there was a spiritual element to the Sabbath. The soul in harmony with his creator found a sense of satisfaction and rest on that day.

B. At Canaan, the Promised Land was a picture of the rest that God offers through faith in Him(He 4:5, 8).

The author repeats (He 4:3) the last phrase of Psalm 95:11, “They shall not enter My rest,” to refer to the generation that perished in the wilderness. In He 4:8 he shows that even those who entered the Promised Land under Joshua did not experience the fullness of God’s rest, in that David, over 300 years after Joshua, spoke of the need to enter God’s rest. In the Greek text, Joshua is *iesous*, “Jesus,” which means, “Yahweh saves.” So the original readers would have seen the play on the names: the original Jesus (Joshua)

was only a type of the Jesus to come. Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, but that was only a picture of the rest of God's salvation that Jesus Christ provides.

C. Canaan was not God's final rest, since David wrote of a rest available to God's people in his day(He 4:6, 7).

Since those in the wilderness failed to enter God's rest, and since David wrote, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts," there is still a day of opportunity to respond to God's offer of rest. The emphasis here is on the word "today." The gist of the argument here is that God's promises always have a present application to them. Even though Israel in the wilderness failed to appropriate God's rest, God offered it again through David. Every generation has the opportunity to respond in faith to God's promises. This leads to the bottom line:

D. God is still appealing to us to enter His rest through faith (He 4:9, 10).

The author here uses a unique word for rest, translated "Sabbath rest." Some think that he coined the word. It calls attention to the spiritual aspect of God's rest. It goes beyond observing the seventh day as holy. It goes beyond entering the physical Promised Land. This Sabbath rest is a soul-rest. It is what Jesus promised when He said,

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, 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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Mt 11:28, 29, 30)

The author says that this rest remains for "the people of God" (He 4:9). Then he explains that "the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His" (He 4:10). "The people of God" refers to Israel in the Old Testament, and here to all who are associated with God's church. **Bruce** (p. 78) thinks that He 4:9,10 refer to

an experience which they do not enjoy in their present mortal life, although it belongs to them as a heritage, and by faith they may live in the good of it here and now.

He refers to the believers in Hebrews 11, who did not experience the fullness of the promises in their lifetimes, but who were looking for the heavenly city that God prepared for them (He 11:16-note).

Leon Morris ([Gaebelein, F, Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing](#) or [Pradis = computer version](#)) cites Bruce and then comments,

I should reverse his order and say that they live in it here and now by faith, but what they know here is not the full story. That will be revealed in the hereafter. There is a sense in which to enter Christian salvation means to cease from one's works and rest securely on what Christ has done.

The author's point here is that from the beginning God has offered His salvation to people, and still offers it, under this imagery of entering His rest. At the heart of it is that we stop trusting in our works to save us and begin trusting instead in the finished work of Christ to save us. As Paul puts it, "to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Ro 4:5-note).

To sum up, when the author talks of entering God's rest, he is not talking about believers learning to trust God in trials so that they experience His inner peace. Rather, he is talking about God's salvation under this imagery of rest, in line with the Old Testament. He is warning his readers about the danger of being associated with God's people but missing His salvation because they do not respond in faith to the message.

USE: THE TEXT APPLIED TO US:

I offer seven applications. Some of them are repeated from earlier messages, but since the writer hammers these things home through repetition, so will I.

1. Cultural religion (general belief) will save no one; to be saved, we must have personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The Jews in the wilderness believed in God in a general sense. They knew and believed in the story of creation and the history recorded in Genesis. They believed that the covenant with Abraham applied to them as his descendants. They even believed God enough to apply the blood to their doorposts and to follow Moses through the Red Sea. They had heard God's good news, but it did not profit them because they did not believe it personally (He 4:2). When they heard about the giants in the land, they complained that it would have been better to die in Egypt or to die in the wilderness than to be killed by the Canaanites (Nu 14:2, 3). So God granted them their wish; they all died in the wilderness!

It is not enough to grow up in the church and have a general belief in God and in Jesus Christ. Perhaps you've heard the gospel all your life, and intellectually, you believe in Jesus and that He died for your sins. But intellectual belief is not enough! Saving faith trusts personally in the shed blood of Jesus as the only payment for my sins. Saving faith believes that God will be gracious to me in the judgment because my sins are covered by Jesus' blood and that His righteousness has been imputed to me according to God's promise. Make sure that your hope of heaven is not based on your parents' faith or on the fact that you hang out with Christians in a church building! You must see your need as a sinner before God and come personally to the cross in faith to receive God's mercy.

2. Beware of the false peace that comes through cultural religion.

I fear that there are many in our churches today, like those Jesus referred to, who will say, "Lord, Lord," but who will be shut out of heaven. Jeremiah 8:11 warned about false prophets, who healed the brokenness of the daughter of God's people superficially, saying, "Peace, peace," but there is no peace. People today are encouraged to "invite Jesus into their hearts" and then are told that they have eternal life and will never lose it. They are not told that they need to repent of their sins. They are not told that God must change their hearts. Polls show that there is virtually no difference today between the way that "evangelicals" think and live and the way the rest of the population thinks and lives!

Just because a person feels inner peace does not mean that he is truly saved. I encourage you to read Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise on Religious Affections* (a modern English, condensed version is called, *The Experience that Counts*). He analyzes in great detail, with an abundance of Scriptural support, how a person can know which feelings are valid indicators of genuine conversion.

3. Saving faith is a matter of the heart towards God, not of outward religion.

Hebrews 4:7 is the third time the author has repeated the warning about not hardening our hearts (He 3:8-note, He 3:15-note). God looks on the heart, not on the outward performance of religious duties. Salvation is a matter of God doing "heart surgery," replacing our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (Ezek 36:26, 27) that are tender towards Him. If you are truly saved, you know that your heart is different than it was before. It is not that you never sin now, but rather that your attitude towards sin is radically different. Before, you loved it; now, you hate it. Before, you were apathetic towards the things of God. Now, you love God and His Word. The bent of your life is a desire to know Him and love Him more and more.

4. Saving faith is always obedient faith.

As we saw last week, the author uses faith and obedience (or, unbelief and disobedience) interchangeably (He 3:18, 19; He 4:2, He 4:6, He 4:11). It is not that we are saved by works, but rather that true saving faith always results in a life of obedience to God. Again, I'm not talking about sinless perfection. No one lives perfectly this side of heaven. But a true believer strives against sin (He 12:4-note). Instead of being a slave of sin, a believer is a slave of righteousness out of obedience from the heart (Ro 6:17, 18-note). A person who is not growing in obedience to God's Word should question whether his faith is genuine saving faith, or just cultural religion.

5. Saving faith rests completely on the work of Jesus Christ.

If we are depending on anything in ourselves to get into heaven, we have not entered God's rest (He 4:10-note). It is possible even to depend wrongly on your faith, thinking that your faith gets you into heaven. To do this is to turn faith into a work! It becomes the thing you are trusting for eternal life. Don't trust in your faith; trust in Christ. If salvation were based on my faith, then it would be due to something in me, and not according to grace (Ro 11:6-note). God saves us by His grace, based on the merit of Jesus Christ. Faith simply looks to Christ and relies on Him alone.

6. Saving faith is effortless in one sense, but requires diligent perseverance in another sense.

There is a sense of irony in the exhortation (He 4:11-note), "Let us be diligent to enter that rest." While salvation is a gift that we passively receive, there is also an active responsibility on our part to lay hold of it. We must rest from our works (He 4:10-note), but be diligent to enter God's true rest (He 4:11). As I said last week, you can cruise into hell without any effort. Just go with the flow of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and you'll get there. But getting into heaven requires diligence and watchfulness. Jesus said,

"Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Lk 13:24).

Be diligent in seeking God's rest through His Word, so that you do not come short of it.

7. Saving faith results in great confidence in God in present trials and great hope in God for future eternal joy.

The rest spoken of here is both a present reality and a future hope. The present reality is, as Paul said, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ro 5:1-note). It also includes, as he goes on to say, that “we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Ro 5:3-note, Ro 5:4, 5-note). The future hope is the promise of being with the Lord forever in glory, when “He will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; and there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain” (Re 21:4-note).

Conclusion

I hope that this message has disturbed the comfortable and comforted the disturbed. If you came in feeling comfortable in your standing before God because you are associated with this church, or because you serve in some way in the church, or because of anything you do, I hope you are now disturbed because you see that your standing with God is on shaky ground. To base your hope for heaven on any outward religion is to have false hope.

On the other hand, if you came in feeling disturbed because you were despairing of your propensity toward sin, and you knew that if salvation depends on your performance, you will never qualify, I hope that you are comforted with the good news that you can enter God’s eternal rest through faith in Christ alone. Fear the unbelief of cultural Christianity! Trust in the Savior who gives true rest to His people!

Discussion Questions

Do you agree with the interpretation offered? Why/why not?

Do doubts mean that our faith is not genuine? How can we know if our faith is genuine?

What are some marks of cultural religion versus true faith?

How can fear (He 4:1) abide with true faith? See Luke 12:5; Ro 11:20-note; Phil. 2:13-note.

[\(Index of Expository Messages by Pastor Steven Cole from Flagstaff Christian Fellowship -Highly Recommended!](#)