

Message Seven: The Second Warning, Part II

Hebrews 3:7-4:13 — Understanding Hebrews Series, Part 7

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

We left the wilderness generation at the border of the land, redeemed but refusing to go in. That story was never told for its own sake. The author of Hebrews has been building toward a single word this whole time, and now he finally says it plainly: *rest*. Not rest as most of us casually use the word — a nap, a vacation, a day off. A very specific, very costly rest, one an entire generation of God's own redeemed people died without ever entering.

This is the heart of the second warning, and it will take the rest of chapter three and all of chapter four to unpack it. Stay with the argument. By the end, you'll see that "rest," "land," "inheritance," and "glory" are four names for the very same reality — and that the door to it is still standing open, marked by one word: today.

I. "Today, If You Will Hear His Voice"

The warning turns a corner at verse 7: "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways." So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest"' (Hebrews 3:7-11).

This is a quotation from Psalm 95 — written by David, generations after the wilderness generation had already died out, and addressed to yet another generation of Israelites still capable of making the same mistake. God did not warn His people about this once and move on. He warned them again, centuries later, through a different writer, to a different audience. And now, through the author of Hebrews, a third time, to us. When God repeats a warning across multiple centuries and multiple writers, He is not being redundant. He is telling you how seriously to take it.

And notice what "rest" meant on the ground, historically, for Israel. Moses told them plainly: "until the LORD gives rest to your brethren as to you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them" (Deuteronomy 3:20). Joshua repeated it: "The LORD your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land" (Joshua 1:13). Rest was never abstract. It meant living, securely, in the land God had promised — the inheritance itself.

II. "Take Care, Brethren"

The warning then turns from history to direct address: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it

is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion'" (Hebrews 3:12-15).

Notice the remedy prescribed for a hardening heart: not private willpower, but daily, mutual exhortation. This is not something you're expected to fight alone. And notice, too, how closely verse 14 echoes what we already read back in verse 6 — "we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end." The Spirit says the same thing twice, in almost the same words, within a few verses of each other. That kind of repetition is not accidental. It's emphasis.

III. Why They Could Not Enter

The author then presses the question home with a rapid series of rhetorical questions: "For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:16-19).

Read that last line again — "they could not enter in because of unbelief." Not because their redemption failed. Not because they were somehow un-redeemed on the far side of the Red Sea. Unbelief kept them from the rest. It never touched what had already been settled at Passover.

IV. Two Gospels, Not One

This is where the warning becomes uncomfortably practical: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Hebrews 4:1-2).

Think back through the story. In Egypt, Israel heard and believed one piece of good news — that a lamb had to die, its blood applied, and they would be spared. That was the gospel of grace, and they believed it, and it saved them. But at Mount Sinai, they were given a second piece of good news: why they had been redeemed. Not merely to escape Egypt, but to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" — a people through whom God Himself would reign among the nations. That second word — the gospel of the kingdom, of the glories still to come — is exactly the word they refused to mix with faith at Kadesh Barnea.

Paul modeled the full shape of this gospel for the Ephesian elders: he testified "to the gospel of the grace of God" AND "preaching the kingdom of God," saying that he had declared to them "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:24-25, 27) — not one half of the good news, *but both*. And Peter applies the very same Sinai language to the Church that God once spoke to Israel: "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood... a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The offer Israel received at Sinai and failed to unite with faith is the very offer standing in front of the Church right now. Most

believers know the first half of the gospel by heart. Fewer have ever heard, let alone believed, the second.

V. A Sabbath Rest Remains

Now the author tells us exactly what kind of rest is in view: "For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest,"' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'... There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:3-4, 9-11).

Be careful here, because this rest is often misread as one of two things it plainly is not. It is not some present, spiritual rest you already possess in Christ — the passage itself tells you to be "diligent to enter" it, language that only makes sense for something still ahead of you. And it is not simply your eternal salvation, your secure standing before God — that was finished and settled the moment you believed, and nothing about it needs to be striven for or entered through diligence. This rest is tied, specifically, to the seventh day of creation — the pattern God set at the very beginning, when six days of work were followed by one day of rest. That pattern was never only about a calendar. It was a sign pointing forward to the age still to come, when the earth itself will finally, fully enter the rest it has never yet known, under the reign of the King this whole letter has been describing from its first chapter.

VI. Rest, Land, Inheritance, Glory — One Thing Under Four Names

Follow the thread all the way through and you'll find these words are not four separate ideas — they're four names for one reality. Rest is tied to the land: "The LORD your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land" (Joshua 1:13). And rest is tied to glory: "His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10) — the Hebrew text there literally reads, His rest will be glory. The Son's own inheritance is the nations and the uttermost parts of the earth, and Paul tells us plainly that believers stand in that same category of inheritance — heirs of the world (Romans 4:13). And the author of Hebrews connects that inheritance directly to a city: "Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance... for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:8, 10). "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come" (Hebrews 13:14) — the same city David already longed for: "the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place" (Psalm 132:13), "the joy of the whole earth... the city of the great King" (Psalm 48:2).

Land is the inheritance. The inheritance is the rest. The rest is His glory. And the glory is the land — the whole chain circles back on itself. To enter the rest is to share His glory. That is the reward the King Himself describes: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you

from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). And that is exactly what an entire redeemed generation walked away from at Kadesh Barnea — not their place among God's people, but this whole tightly bound cluster of land, inheritance, rest, and glory, forfeited through nothing more dramatic than unbelief.

VII. Applying "Today, If You Will Hear His Voice"

So take the remedy this passage actually gives you: "exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today'" (Hebrews 3:13). Hardening is slow and mostly invisible from the inside, which is exactly why it needs other voices speaking into your life on a regular basis, not just your own periodic self-examination.

And ask yourself honestly which gospel you've actually received. Have you believed the first half — that Christ died for your sin — and stopped there, never taking seriously the second half, the call to press on toward an inheritance that requires faith and diligence to enter? Israel believed the blood on the doorpost and still perished in the wilderness. Believing the first half of the good news has never been the same thing as entering into the second.

The word "today" is doing real work in this passage, and it is doing the same work right now. The door has not closed. Whatever ground was lost through drifting, through hardened attention, through unbelief — it can still be recovered, because the promise Hebrews 4:1 speaks of "remains." Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.

Looking Ahead

Next, we move to the third of Hebrews' five warnings, in chapters five and six — the most debated passage in the entire letter, and the one that introduces us at last to the mysterious priest-king named Melchizedek.