

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Teaching Plan
March 2, 2013
Hebrews 4:1-11
“God’s Rest”

Memory Verse

“There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” Hebrews 4:9 (NIV)

The Big Idea:

Sermon Scripture: Entering God’s Rest (Hebrews 4:1-11)

Sunday School Scripture: Hebrews 3:16-19; 4:1-11

Sunday School Title: “God’s Rest”

ESS: Just like the Israelites had an opportunity to enter God’s rest in the Promise Land, we too have the opportunity to enter God’s rest through faith in Christ.

REVIEW: Take a moment to review what we’ve learned so far from our study of Hebrews.

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| WEEK 1 | Who is the author of Hebrews? | <i>Unknown</i> |
| | Who was the intended audience of Hebrews? | <i>Jewish Christians</i> |
| WEEK 2 | What was the author’s warning in the beginning of chapter 2? | <i>Don’t drift away from Christ</i> |
| WEEK 3 | In Hebrews 2:10, Jesus is called the _____ of Salvation. | <i>Author</i> |
| WEEK 4 | In Hebrews 3, Jesus is superior to Moses because Jesus is the _____ of the house, whereas Moses is just a _____. | <i>Builder, servant</i> |
| WEEK 5 | What mistakes did the Israelites make during their desert wanderings that we want to avoid? (See Hebrews 3:8-15) | <i>hardness of heart, complaining, unbelief</i> |

Last week we studied how the Israelites developed hard hearts of unbelief towards God. As a result, an entire generation of the Israelites were never able to see or enter God’s Promise Land. This week, as we study Hebrews 4, we’ll continue to look at the Israelites and dig a bit deeper to see exactly what they forfeited when they missed the Promised Land.

What’s your favorite way to rest or relax?

We all need some time and space to relax every once in a while. However, even the best vacation in the most relaxing location can’t provide us with the emotional and spiritual rest we need to live life joyfully and productively for God. Today, we’ll talk about the unique rest God provides and how we can obtain it.

READ Hebrews 3:16-19; 4:1-11 (This is a long passage, but read it all together at once. Then, as specific verses come up in each main point, re-read the assigned Scripture again.)

GOD’S REST

1. DEFINITION OF REST

First, let’s establish a basic understanding of the *rest* talked about in this passage from Hebrews. The Greek noun used for *rest* in the majority of this passage is *katapausis*. This noun means:

- **a spiritual and emotional rest, not necessarily a physical rest**
- **to stop trying to earn salvation by human effort**
- **to be free from worry**
- **to have peace with God**
- **to be established in your faith, not tossed around by various doctrines, but settled and confident**

So, God's rest as described in the passage we'll study today is a spiritual and emotional peace that grounds us and permeates our life, even in times of emotional distress or physical discomfort.

Based on this definition of rest, is it possible to be busy yet at rest? How so?

2. PICTURE OF REST: THE PROMISE LAND

The Promise Land is the picture of rest that the author uses to begin this passage. The author chooses this image because he is writing to a specific audience: struggling Jewish believers (and those who called themselves such but may not have been saved). In chapter 3, the author reminds the readers of the struggles of their Israelite ancestors. Since the readers of Hebrews were Jewish, they would easily remember the account of the desert wanderings, and they could envision the rest that the Promise Land offered. The author reminds his audience that God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and led them in the desert, but many of them lacked faith in God. After 40 years of wandering in the desert, that entire generation of Israelites died without ever entering the Promise Land. It's almost as if the author is saying, "*You know the Promise Land, right? Well, they never got there. Never. Think of all they must have missed out on! Can't you just see it? A land flowing with milk and honey. A place of peace and abundance. A land to rest in, call your own, and prosper. Just picture it!*"

Envision yourself living in the Promise Land God offered the Israelites. What would a land of "REST" look like for you?

3. REQUIREMENTS OF REST: FAITH

Read Hebrews 4:1-2

Just as God offered the Israelites rest in the Promise Land, he still offers us rest today. Verse 1 says his offer still stands! But like the Israelites, God requires something of us if we are to enter into His rest. If you have ever read the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, you know that God preformed many miraculous signs and wonders to reveal His character to the Israelites. He freed them, led them, provided for them, and protected them time and time again. Despite this, the Israelites refused to put their trust in the Lord. Similarly, we have heard the gospel story and read the Bible. We know that God the Father sent His Son Jesus to save us from our sins. Many of us have much knowledge, but, like the Israelites, the gospel has no value for us because we fail to combine it with faith. God's one requirement for entering into His rest is *faith*. In order to have God's rest, we must put our complete confidence and trust in Him and Him alone. We cannot rely on ourselves or our resources. We must be totally convinced that God IS who He says He is, and we must live our lives in total reliance upon God.

Is there a specific area of life where you are not fully relying on God? How could you change this?

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF REST:

Read Hebrews 4:4 & 9-10

In this passage, the author indirectly describes the type of rest available to us. He illustrates this rest by referring to the Sabbath rest God took on the seventh day of the creation account. There are two important characteristics of this rest:

- **CONTINUATION OF TIME** – "The seventh day is unlike the six days used for Creation, for it has no night to close it, and it continues even to the present. Also, the noun used for the Sabbath in verse 9 is *sabbatismos*. It comes from a verb meaning *I keep the Sabbath*, and its ending, *-mos*, indicates a continuous action."¹ God's rest after creation is continuous and will continue on into Heaven in the future. He offers us rest today in this world and eternal rest with Him in Heaven.
- **ASSURANCE OF SECURITY** – Verse 10 says "anyone who enters into God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His." Just as God accomplished creation, Jesus accomplished our salvation. All we have to do is put our full faith in Him. When we do this, our work is done. We no longer have to continue working to earn our salvation. Our salvation and rest are secure! The only work we must do for God's rest is to trust in and rely on Him!

¹ Community Bible Study, *Hebrews*, Lesson 5 Commentary by Dr. Erwin Rudolph. Published by Community Bible Study, Colorado Springs, CO, 2011.

4. TIME FOR REST: TODAY!

Read Hebrews 4:6-7

God designated a day for the Israelites to enter the Promise Land, but an entire generation missed it due to their disobedience and lack of faith. The good news is, God continues to offer us rest today through the sacrifice of Jesus! Let's not miss out on this! Verse 7 says God designated a day for entering into His rest, and called that day TODAY! This means God's salvation and rest is available now, wherever and whenever His invitation is responded to by faith. TODAY is the day for salvation! TODAY is the day of rest! Have you trusted God TODAY for salvation and rest?

5. ESSENTIALS FOR REST: MAKE EVERY EFFORT

Read Hebrews 4:11

This verse encourages us to "make every effort to enter that rest." At first, that can seem a bit contradictory. Didn't we just learn that God's rest can only be found when we stop working for salvation and put our faith in Jesus? If so, why would we be encouraged to *make every effort*? The author of Hebrews is encouraging Christians to be alert and watchful. While Christians do not work to earn their salvation, they must make an intentional effort to value it and keep it a priority. The faith that saves us and provides God's rest for us is nourished by the Word of God. To continue resting in God, it is essential that we increase our faith by reading, memorizing, and practicing God's Word! Faith is the effort we must make to rest in God's rest, and faith grows by the Word of God.

CONCLUSION: Just like the Israelites had an opportunity to enter God's rest in the Promise Land, we too have the opportunity to enter God's rest through faith in Christ.

Apply:

The *rest* spoken of in Hebrews 4:1-11 is a spiritual rest. God does not promise us freedom from physical suffering or hardship in this life--in fact, He warns us to expect it (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:12). If you're discouraged because being a Christian hasn't brought you health, wealth and an easy life, meditate on Paul's instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1-10. Ask God to give you the grace to follow His way, even when it isn't the easiest way. Ask Him to help you rest in Him.

STUDY NOTES:

(These are for your personal study. This is NOT the lesson.)

"Entering into God's Rest"

A Study Guide written by John McArthur on Hebrews Chapters 3 & 4

Available for use and download on <http://www.gty.org/resources>

Hebrews 4:1-13

INTRODUCTION

Chapter four continues the warning to unbelievers that began in Hebrews 3:7. Throughout this section, the writer of Hebrews illustrates his point with the nation of Israel. Israel left Egypt, but was stopped short of the Promised Land by their failure to believe God. An entire generation never entered the full rest of Canaan. The warning is not to do what Israel did, but to enter God's rest through faith in Jesus Christ.

A. The Availability of Rest

The rest of Canaan pictures the spiritual rest that comes by faith in Christ. God has a rest that is far greater than Canaan--eternal rest available by faith in Christ.

B. The Definitions of Rest

The dictionary gives the following definitions of rest:

1. To cease from action - The word rest means to cease from labor or exertion. Applying that to God's rest, it means no more self-effort--no more trying to please God by your fleshly works. Rest involves cessation from legalistic activity; we rest in free grace.
2. To be free from worry - Some people are never at peace because they're always bothered about something. To rest means to be free from whatever disturbs you, or causes you to worry. It means in this sense to be quiet, still, peaceful, and free from

guilt. To enter God's rest means to be at peace with God--to possess the perfect peace that God gives. It means to be free from guilt, because our sin is forgiven.

3. To be settled - God's rest is the kind of rest where a man is established in Christ, and does not run from philosophy to philosophy. He is no longer blown about by every wind of doctrine, but is rooted and grounded in the truth of Christ.
4. To be secure - To enter God's rest is to be secure, having absolute trust and confidence in God's care for you.
5. To have something to lean on - To enter God's rest means that you can lean on Him. You can rely on God for support, trusting Him to supply all your needs. There are two final definitions of rest not found in a dictionary. The Bible speaks of rest in the millennial kingdom and rest for eternity in heaven. That's what God is promising and that's what He calls rest. Many people fail to believe in God's promises, and thus do not enter into rest because of their unbelief.

I. THE AVAILABILITY OF REST (v. 1)

"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."

A. The Forfeiture of Rest

"Therefore" takes us back to what the writer has said previously about Israel. The unbelieving, fence-sitting Jews whom the writer is addressing had reason to fear after being reminded of Israel's forfeiture of rest. Unbelief brings about fearful consequences. Scripture indicates that Christians don't need to fear. Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Paul told Timothy that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear" (2 Tim. 1:7). However unbelievers have reason to fear. It's not a trifling thing to fool around with the rest that God offers, "for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).

B. The Promise of Rest

1. To Israel - Verse 1 says, "A promise being left for us." The "us" is a reference to the Jewish people. What the writer of Hebrews wants to make clear is that when Israel fell because of unbelief, that didn't mean the end of God's rest for them. When Israel failed in the wilderness, God didn't forsake them and start over with another people.
2. To the church
 - a. By exercising faith in Christ - There is a perfect rest available to us through faith in Christ. In Matthew 7:26-27 Jesus says, "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell; and great was the fall of it." Jesus warns against missing grace by failing to exercise faith in Him.
 - b. By acknowledging our sin to God - Some people fear they are too great a sinner to be forgiven, but that's not true. People who acknowledge their sin are the kind of people God likes to deal with. Paul says of himself in 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." You may be too much of a sinner to deserve salvation--no one deserves salvation--but you're not too much of a sinner for the grace of God to handle (Rom. 5:6-8, 20; Matt. 9:12-13).

II. THE BASIS OF REST (vv. 2-7)

A. Personal Faith (vv. 2-5)

"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. For we who have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest; although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spoke in a certain place of the seventh day in this way, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest."

"Gospel" (v. 2) should be translated "good news." That word has a specific connotation in the New Testament, but here refers to the good news about rest preached in the Old Testament.

1. The necessity of faith - Although the good news about God's rest was preached to Israel, it did them no good because they failed to believe it. Some people have the mistaken idea that they can become a Christian through osmosis just by being in the church. However, hearing the gospel doesn't mean anything unless you believe it with your whole heart. It's tragic to realize that hell is going to be populated with people who will say to Jesus, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out demons? And in thy name done many wonderful works?" only to hear Him reply, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:22-23).
2. The rest of faith
 - a. Rest defined
3. In verse 3 God defines the rest as "my rest." God's rest is not a rest of weariness or inactivity but of finished work. God's rest began after the sixth day of creation. After creating the universe, the earth, and all life (including man) in six literal twenty-four-hour days, God rested. His rest is described in verses 3-4: "Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spoke in a certain place of the seventh day in this way, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works" (cf. Gen. 2:1-2).
 - a. Rest forfeited

4. There was only one condition for Adam and Eve to remain in God's rest, and that was to believe God. However, they chose to believe Satan's lies instead and by their unbelief forfeited rest.
 - a. Rest recovered

The rest of the Bible records God's efforts to get man back into His rest. To do that, He had to deal with man's sin. The coming of Jesus Christ took care of the sin issue, and through the death of Christ, men may enter back into God's rest. Christ bore the sins of those who lived prior to the cross as well as those of us who live after the cross.

Verse 5 reiterates the statement of verse 3 that the unbelieving Israelites failed to enter God's rest. I believe that the people who sinned in the wilderness not only forfeited Canaan, but also forfeited the eternal life Canaan symbolized unless they exercised personal faith in God.

B. Divine Decree (v. 6)

"Seeing, therefore, it remaineth that some must enter into it, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief" The second basis of rest is divine or sovereign decree. We are saved not only by our personal faith, but also by God's sovereign choice before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Jesus puts both elements of salvation together in John 6 when He says, "No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him" (v. 44), and "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (v. 37). How those two doctrines can be harmonized is beyond our limited ability to understand.

Hebrews 4:6 gives us the balance to what the writer said previously in this passage regarding personal faith. By God's sovereign decree, rest still remains. God does not design things for no purpose. Since He designed that there be a rest, He has always preserved a remnant throughout history to enjoy it. Although the way is narrow and few find it (Matt. 7:14), some do. Paul writes of Israel in Romans 11:5, "At this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace." God has selected a remnant to enter His rest, and they enter it by personal faith.

C. Immediate Action (v. 7)

"Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time, as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

The age of grace will not last forever. That's why the apostle Paul said, "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Right now is God's today. In Genesis 6:3 God says, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." There is a limit to His patience. The pre-Flood civilization is an example of that.

"Today" refers to the day salvation is offered. The Spirit of God urges immediate action in verse 7 because today doesn't last forever. This is the day that rest is available. Don't delay and risk missing out on God's rest.

III. THE NATURE OF REST (vv. 8-10)

"If Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from his."

A. It Is Spiritual

The rest spoken of in this passage is not the physical rest of Canaan. Verse 8 says that Joshua failed to give Israel rest, yet he took them into Canaan. The true rest comes not through a Moses, a Joshua, or even a David; it comes through Jesus Christ. Many cults promise happiness, health, and wealth in this life, but that's never the emphasis of the Bible. Many of God's people are busy, hardworking, or even afflicted with physical suffering, yet they are in God's salvation rest.

B. It Is for Israel

The term "people of God" may refer generally to anyone who knows God, but in this passage context reveals that it refers specifically to Israel, the people of God in the Old Testament. God's rest is promised to Israel and I believe that He will not be finished with them until they come into His rest.

C. It Is Future

There is a final rest coming when we will cease from our work. In Revelation 14:13 John says, "I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors." I believe Hebrews 4:10 is a reference to that final day when we cease from our labors and enter into the presence of Jesus Christ.

IV. THE URGENCY OF REST (vv. 11-13)

"Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

The Greek word translated "labor" means "to make haste" or "to work diligently." The passage is not teaching that you can work your way to salvation, but that you diligently seek to enter God's rest by faith.