

Week of October 30 – November 4

The Promise of Spiritual Rest (Hebrews 4:1-13)

The term 'rest' is used to represent the spiritual rest in the kingdom of God, and the chapter seems to me to show that the rest promised to the Jews of the Old Testament didn't refer to the rest God spoke of as having taken place on the seventh day of creation. It's a spiritual rest in Heaven that is yet to come to believers. Some believe the rest is what the true believer finds and has in Christ, that his conscience has rest.

The author says that although God's promise still stands that all might enter his place of rest, we ought to tremble because some may be on the verge of not getting there. He adds that the message that God wants to save us was 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. God said, "I have sworn in my anger that those who don't believe me will never get in," even though He has been ready and waiting for them since the world began.

The author explains, "The promise remains, and some get in, but not those who had the first chance because they disobeyed God. He set another time for coming into this 'rest,' and that time is now. He announced this through David years after man failed to enter, saying, 'Today when you hear Him calling, do not harden your hearts against him.'"

This place of rest he's talking about doesn't mean the land of Israel where Joshua led them. If that's what God meant, He wouldn't have spoken afterward about "today" is the time to get in. Complete rest is waiting for the people of God. Christ has already entered there, resting from His work, just as God did after the creation.

"What God says to us is full of power, sharper than a two-edged sword, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires, exposing us for what we are. He knows about everyone everywhere. Everything about us is bare and wide open to God. Nothing can be hidden from him, and we must explain all that we have done.

Jesus Is The Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-5:10)

"Jesus is our High Priest who is in Heaven to help us. Let us never stop trusting Him since He understands our weaknesses because He had the same temptations we have, though He never once sinned. Let us come boldly to the throne of God and stay there to receive His mercy and grace to help us in times of need.

"A Jewish high priest is merely a man, but he's chosen to speak for men in their dealings with God. He presents his gifts and offers God the blood of animals sacrificed to cover the people's sins and his sins. Since he's a man, he can deal with men, even though they're foolish and ignorant, since he is also surrounded by the same temptations and understands their problems.

Another thing to remember is that no one can be a high priest just because he wants to be. He has to be called by God for this work in the same way God called Aaron. That's why Christ didn't elect himself to be High Priest. He was chosen by God who said to Him, "My Son, today I have honored you."

Another time God said to Him, "You have been chosen to be a priest forever, with the same rank as Melchizedek." While Christ was here on earth, He pleaded with God, praying with tears and

agony to the only one who would save him from death. And God heard His prayers because of His strong desire to obey God at all times. And even though Jesus was God's Son, He had to learn from experience what it was like to obey even if it meant suffering. It was after he'd proved himself perfect in this experience that Jesus became the Giver of eternal salvation to all those who obeyed him.

Warning against Falling Away (Hebrews 5:14-6:12)

"There's much more I would like to say along these lines," the author adds, "but you don't seem to listen, so it's hard to make you understand. You've been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others, but instead, you've dropped back to the place where you need someone to teach you all the very first principles in God's Word. You're like babies who can drink only milk, not old enough for solid food. And when a person is still living on milk, it shows he isn't far along in his Christian life and doesn't know much about the difference between right and wrong. He's still a baby Christian! You'll never be able to eat solid spiritual food and understand the more profound things of God's Word until you become better Christians and learn right from wrong by practicing doing what is right.

"Let's stop going over the same old ground again and again. Let's go to other things and become mature, as strong Christians ought to be. We don't need to speak about the foolishness of trying to be saved by being good or about the need for faith. You don't need further instruction about baptism and spiritual gifts and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. The Lord willing, we'll go on to other things.

"There's no use trying to bring you back to the Lord again if you've once understood the Gospel and tasted the good things of Heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, and know how good the Word of God is, and felt the powers of the world to come, and then have turned against God. You can't bring yourself to repent again if you've nailed Christ to the cross again by rejecting him, holding Him up to mocking and public shame.

"Dear friends, even though I'm talking like this, I don't believe what I'm saying applies to you. I'm confident you're producing the good fruit that comes with your salvation. God isn't unfair. How can He forget your work for Him or how you used to show your love for Him by helping His children? We're anxious for you to keep loving others as long as life lasts, so you'll get your full reward. Then you won't become bored with being a Christian or spiritually dull and indifferent, but you'll be anxious to follow the example of those who receive all that God has promised them because of their faith and patience.

God's Promise to Abraham (Hebrews 6:13-20)

"God made a promise to Abraham and took an oath in His name, since there was no one greater to swear by, that He would bless Abraham again and again, and give him a son and make him the father of a great nation of people. Then Abraham waited patiently until finally, God gave him a son, Isaac, just as He had promised.

"When a man takes an oath, he's calling on someone greater than himself to force him to do what He has promised or to punish him if He later refuses to do it. God also bound himself with an oath so that those He promised to help would be sure and never wonder whether He might change his plans. He's given us His promise and His oath, and God can't tell a lie. Flee to Him to save you. You can know He will provide you with the salvation He has promised you.

Melchizedek and Christ (Hebrews 7)

“Melchizedek was king of Salem and a priest of the Most High God. When Abraham was returning home after winning a battle, Melchizedek met him and blessed him, and Abraham took a tenth of all he had won in the battle and gave it to Melchizedek.

“Melchizedek is the King of Justice; and the King of Peace because of the name of his city, Salem, meaning ‘Peace.’ He had no father or mother, and there’s no record of his ancestors. He was never born and never died, but his life is like the Son of God – a priest forever.

“Abraham, the first and most honored of all God's chosen people, gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils he had. One could understand why Abraham would do this if Melchizedek had been a Jewish priest since God’s people were required by law to give gifts to help priests because the priests were their relatives. But Melchizedek wasn’t a relative, and yet Abraham paid him.

“Melchizedek placed a blessing on Abraham, and as everyone knows, a person who has the power to bless is always greater than the person he blesses. The Jewish priests, though mortal, received tithes, but we are told that Melchizedek lives on. One could say that Levi himself, the ancestor of all Jewish priests, paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham. Although Levi wasn't born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham when Abraham paid the tithes to Melchizedek.

“If the Jewish priests and their laws had been able to save us, why then did God need to send Christ as a priest with the rank of Melchizedek instead of sending someone with the rank of Aaron, the same rank all other priests had?

“When God sends a new kind of priest, His law must be changed to permit it. Christ didn’t belong to Levi but came from Judah, which hadn’t been chosen for priesthood. We can see that God's method changed since Christ, the new High Priest who came with Melchizedek's rank, didn’t become a priest by belonging to Levi's tribe, but based on power flowing from a life that cannot end. The psalmist points this out when he says of Christ, "You are a priest forever with the rank of Melchizedek."

“God took an oath that Christ would always be a Priest, although He never said that of other priests. He said of Christ, ‘The Lord has sworn and will never change His mind: You are a Priest forever, with the rank of Melchizedek.’

“Under the old arrangement, many priests existed so that the system could be carried on by others when the older ones died. Jesus lives forever and continues to be a Priest, so no one else is needed. He can save all who come to God through him. He will always be there to remind God that He has paid for their sins with His blood.

“Therefore, He is exactly the kind of High Priest we need, holy and blameless, unstained by sin, undefiled by sinners, and to Him has been given the place of honor in Heaven. He never needs the daily blood of animal sacrifices, as other priests did, to cover their sins and then the people's sins. He finished all sacrifices once and for all when He sacrificed himself on the cross. Under the old system, the high priests were weak and sinful men who couldn’t keep from doing wrong, but God appointed His Son, who is perfect forever.

The High Priest of The New Covenant (Hebrews 8)

The author explains, "What we are saying is this: Christ is our High Priest and is in Heaven at the place of greatest honor next to God himself. He ministers in the temple in Heaven, the true place of worship. And since every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, Christ must make an offering, too. The sacrifice He offers is far better than those provided by the earthly priests. Their work is connected with an earthly model of the real tabernacle in Heaven. When Moses was getting ready to build the tabernacle, God warned him to follow the heavenly tabernacle pattern on Mount Sinai. But Christ, as a Minister in Heaven, has been rewarded with a far more important work than those who serve under the old laws because the new agreement that He passes on to us from God contains far more wonderful promises.

"The old agreement didn't work. If it had, there would have been no need for another to replace it. But God found fault with the old one and said, "The day will come when I will make a new agreement with the people of Israel and the people of Judah. It won't be like the old one I gave to their fathers. They didn't keep their part of the agreement, so I had to cancel it. But in the new agreement, I will make with the people of Israel. I will write my laws in their minds so that they will know what I want them to do, and these laws will be in their hearts, and they will want to obey them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And I will be merciful to them in their wrongdoings, and I will remember their sins no more."