

Hebrews 4:3-5

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Faith and obedience will allow us to enter God's rest. God rested on the seventh day when he finished His works; this is a picture of our opportunity to complete the work God has given us.

Having exhorted the "holy brethren" (Hebrews 3:1) who received this letter to be careful to walk in faith, the Pauline Author now speaks of them together with himself as *we who have believed*. He then speaks of two different aspects of "rest" saying:

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,

*"AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,"*

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world (v 3).

The first *rest* that is mentioned is entered into by *we who have believed*.

When believers initially trust God for justification in His presence, we become forever members of His family (John 3:14-15). In this respect, we are like the *works that were finished from the foundation of the world* in that we are new creations in Christ, just as God created a new heaven and earth:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

The author makes a definitive statement that *we who have believed enter that rest*. This speaks of the *rest* of having full possession of the gift of eternal life, and assurance that we will be in heaven forever with God.

However, although those who *have believed* enter the rest of spending eternity with God, there is an additional rest. There is another work to be completed. That work is to walk in faith and receive the reward of the inheritance to reign in service with Christ (Hebrews 4:8-9).

Just as the creation of the world was only the beginning of history, so it is with the new creation that is the new birth of anyone who believes in Jesus. Spiritual birth brings life. There is much more to do in order to fulfill that life. There is another "rest" (work to be completed) to enter. The first work is done by God, giving us new birth through Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). The second work is done by God through us, acting in faith (Ephesians 2:10).

The first generation of Israelites coming out of Egypt was God's people. Yet they did not possess their inheritance by entering the land; God said *I swore in My wrath they shall not enter My rest*. The *rest* that the first generation was not allowed to enter was to possess their inheritance, the Promised Land. They were still His people, but they did not gain the reward of faith.

God swore that those who do not continue in faith will not *enter His rest*. This *rest* refers to possessing the reward of our inheritance as believers. On the seventh day of creation, God rested because *His works were finished from the foundation of the world* (v 3). God rested from His creative work because it was completed.

When we believe on Jesus, God also makes us a new creation in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17). Making believers a new creation and giving them spiritual birth is a completed work in Christ. It is finished, because we are born into His family. But birth is just the beginning of life. God created us for good deeds which He prepared for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10).

In order for us to receive the promised inheritance, *we who have believed enter that rest* (v 3) and must work in faith until the job is finished. It was only at the end of his life that the Apostle Paul finally pronounced that he had finished the race well, and expressed confidence that he would receive the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8).

In the initial verses of Chapter 4, the Pauline Author speaks of the importance of living by faith. He is speaking to believers, calling the letter's recipients "holy brethren" in Hebrews 3:1. He is not asking his audience to place their initial faith in God that results in justification in His presence—that has already been done. Rather, he is asking that they avoid following the bad example of the first generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt. He exhorts them instead to persevere and continue having faith in God in their daily walk.

Because we are born again and are new creations (John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17), we now have the opportunity to continue placing our faith in God daily and be saved from the negative consequences that come from following our sin nature (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

The *we who have believed* may include the Apostle Paul (if he is the author of this letter); Paul has lived an obedient life since he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. But whoever is included, all are inferred to not have finished their work. In the letters where he is the named author, Paul makes this assertion a number of times about himself. For example, in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul says he disciplines himself like an athlete in order to win the race of life and win an imperishable crown that comes from pleasing God (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

A believers' work is finished whenever God decides to take them home to be with Him. Until then we are commanded to continue to walk in faith and obedience.

The phrase *enter that rest* that remains refers to our opportunity to receive a reward of inheritance when we complete the work God gave us to do. Ephesians 2:10 says that God actually prepared specific works for us to walk in, even before we were born. Each one of us has a different job assigned, and God promises an amazing reward if we will walk in the works He prepared for us.

The assigned job of the freed Israelites was to enter and possess the Promised Land. The first generation missed out on this reward because they did not possess their inheritance. This occurred because they did not have faith in God's promise (Hebrews 3:16-19). They instead chose to focus on the difficulties rather than believe in God's provision.

Entering our rest refers to our opportunity to receive a heavenly inheritance. Like the first generation, we can also miss out on possessing our inheritance, our reward, if we lack faith in God's promises and refuse to face the difficulties of life with obedience.

The Pauline Author continues, *For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day*—and then quotes Genesis 2:2, “*And God rested on the seventh day from all His works* (v 4).

The pattern is that God rested when the work was done. Similarly, once we complete our works (our time on earth) as a faithful servant of God, we can then *enter* God's *rest*. If we fail to complete our works, then we are like the first generation of Israel who came out of Egypt—we will not possess the reward of our inheritance.

The first generation of Israelites did not finish their works; they gave up on entering the Promised Land and as a result did not gain or possess their inheritance. *And again in this passage*, [God swore] “*They shall not enter my rest*” (v 5). The Pauline author shifts from quoting Genesis 2:2 to quoting Psalm 95:11, which speaks of the first generation who was not allowed to possess the Promised Land.

If we do not persevere until our assigned job to do the works God assigned us is completed, we will also lose our rest, which is the reward of our inheritance. However, no believer will ever lose their status of being a child of God, and will spend eternity with Him.

Just as God created the world, He creates His people in His image through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). That creative work is finished by Him. Just as God finished the creation of the world and rested, when He creates a believer as a new creation in His image, all who believe enter that rest (2 Corinthians 5:17).

But there is another rest for the people of God, and that is the rest of possessing the reward of our inheritance. The next section will emphasize this additional rest-reward which God desires His people to possess.

Biblical Text

3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, “As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; 5 and again in this passage, “They shall not enter My rest.”