

Hebrews 4:1-2

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We can miss out on entering God's rest (receiving our inheritance); hearing God's word must be united with faith in order to possess the greatest rewards of life.

It is made clear in these verses that while the Pauline Author's audience of believers has entered God's rest of being spiritually born again, they have not yet entered another rest, which is receiving the reward of their inheritance. However, they still have the opportunity to enter that rest, and receive that reward. This particular "rest" refers to the ultimate reward God has for those who finish the work He gives them to do (Ephesians 2:10). That reward is to join Jesus in the glory and honor of gaining the reward of sonship (Hebrews 2:10).

When the previously enslaved Israelites were delivered from Egypt and traveled across the wilderness, they heard the *good news* that God would give them the Promised Land as their inheritance and provide them the help they needed to possess it. But they did not have sufficient faith that these promises were true to act upon them (Numbers 14:7-9). So the first generation did not enter into and possess the land. To possess the land is to enter God's rest (Psalm 95:10-11).

Similarly, the Pauline Author's audience has been told *good news*, that they have the opportunity to share in Christ's inheritance if they hold fast. The Pauline Author tells his audience, *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* (v 1).

The author includes himself, saying *let us fear*. The *fear* of losing the immense opportunity to gain the great reward and inheritance of sonship should drive every believer to walk in obedience. The phrase *enter His rest* here refers to God's promised reward of inheritance.

The first generation of Israelites in the Old Testament did not prove themselves faithful to God, so they did not possess the land as their inheritance. If New Testament believers fail to prove themselves faithful, they will also *come short* of receiving their inheritance (Hebrews 3:6). In the case of New Testament believers, the inheritance they can possess is sharing in Christ's reign over the earth in love, harmony, and service, according to God's original design (Hebrews 2:7-9).

The *fear* addressed here is godly fear. Fear is a primary driver of human behavior. This verse presumes that the perspective believers choose creates a hierarchy of fear. In this case, believers are exhorted to prioritize the *fear* of falling *short* of possessing their inheritance through faithful obedience to God's word.

This reflects God's admonition to Israel while on Mount Sinai, where He encouraged them to not prioritize fear of physical death to drive their behavior, but rather to elevate the fear of the consequences of sinning by disobeying God's commands (Exodus 20:20).

God's covenant and prophetic engagement with Israel expands on this point substantially, asserting that following pagan ways of self-indulgence and the illusion of control leads to mutual

exploitation, abuse, and violence. God's law for Israel is based on loving one another and seeking the best interest of others (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-39). God told Israel they would have a fearful expectation of judgment for violating His commands (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). He will make the same exhortation to the Jewish believers and sons of Israel receiving this letter (Hebrews 10:27).

Believers enter God's *rest* of being a new creation in Christ simply by believing (2 Corinthians 2:17). However, there is another "rest" that goes beyond going to heaven and spending eternity with God (Hebrews 4:8-9). That is the "rest" of the reward of the inheritance, to reign with Christ (Hebrews 2:10).

The unfaithful Israelites of the first generation in the Old Testament did not enter God's rest of possessing their inheritance, but they were still God's people. God still took care of them miraculously in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:3-4). In a similar way, New Testament believers are made new creations in Christ, which is a completed work. They are God's children regardless of subsequent behavior.

The Pauline Author's audience receiving this letter had already placed their faith in God, which is why he calls them "holy brethren" (Hebrews 3:1). There is no doubt these people belonged to God and will spend eternity with Him. What is in question is their reward—the consequences from their choices in life. Whether or not they will possess the reward of their inheritance (Colossians 3:23). They are exhorted to pursue this additional "rest" (Hebrews 4:8-9).

The *rest* here is referring to the opportunity to receive an inheritance as a reward for completing the work God gives us to do (Ephesians 2:10). God will not allow us to enter this *rest* if we are disobedient. In order to receive the inheritance that is available to us as a reward, we must have faith, be obedient to God, and finish the job; God rested when He finished what He set out to do (Genesis 2:2). God has given each believer work to do. This work includes being faithful to pursue pleasing God in all areas of our lives (Colossians 3:23).

The Pauline Author is not saying that his audience could miss out on spending eternity with God, he is saying that they could miss out on the reward of possessing the inheritance that has been granted to them. Paul himself asserted that no amount of a believer's bad behavior could cause God to reject us. In fact, Paul asserts that because believers are placed into Christ when they are born again, if God rejected a believer He would be rejecting Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

However, in spite of our new birth being unconditionally given, in order to possess the reward of our inheritance we must mix faith with hearing and continue to exercise a daily, abiding faith in God, and be obedient to Him. The Israelites were promised by God that he would give them the Promised Land—but *the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard* (v 2). In other words, they did not act upon what God told them, and therefore failed to receive their inheritance of possessing the Promised Land.

The Pauline Author is exhorting his readers to hear the *good news* of our opportunity to receive the reward of the inheritance as a "son" in like manner as Jesus received that reward for faithfulness (Hebrews 1:5, 8,13). The author wants them to hear and unite the hearing with faith, and act upon what they heard.

The example Jesus gave us is to have faith in the promises of God (Philippians 2:5-9): *For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they (the Israelites) also, but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard* (v 2).

The *good news* God gave the Israelites was that God had chosen them as His people, granted them the land as an inheritance, and would be with them and give them divine help to enter and possess the land (Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:8, 7:7-8).

The *good news* God has given New Testament believers is that we are redeemed and placed into His family by faith (John 3:14-15) and then have been granted an inheritance He has laid up for us, to be joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17b).

This was expressed in Chapter 2 as Jesus bringing “many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10). New Testament believers are exhorted to possess their inheritance through uniting their knowledge with faith to walk in obedience in their daily lives. It is in this manner that New Testament believers possess the full reward of their inheritance.

In Chapter 3, the Pauline Author explained that the promise of the inheritance given to the Israelites did not benefit them since they did not walk in faith (Hebrews 3:18–19). Similarly, the promises of God also have no benefit to us without faith to walk in them. In order to possess God’s promises, we must act upon them. Without faith in God, we cannot be obedient to Him; faith is required to gain the reward of our inheritance (Hebrews 3:18–19).

As described in Hebrews 2, all authority has been given to Jesus because He was obedient, even to death on the cross (Hebrews 2:9-10). He desires to share that authority with all who trust and follow Him, suffering rejection from the world as He did (Hebrews 2:10). The Pauline Author warns that this immense blessing requires finishing well in life, enduring in our walk of faith. To miss out on this opportunity is to miss out on being fulfilled in our design to reign in the earth in harmony with God, nature, and one another (Hebrews 2:7-9).

Biblical Text

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. 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.