

## Hebrews 3:1-4:13: The Danger of Unbelief

### Overview

We now move from the Person of the Son, higher than the angels and yet humbled to serve as our Redeemer and Priest, to his Work, focusing on a comparison of his priesthood with that of Aaron (Figure 1, chart, note changes). Chapters 3-10 grow out of the seed in 2:17,

17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a **merciful** and **faithful high priest** in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

The writer returns to the *merciful* high priest in ch. 4, explaining our Lord's priesthood by saying that we can come to this *merciful* high priest to *find mercy*,<sup>1</sup>

4:16 Let us therefore **come** boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain **mercy**, and find grace to help in time of need.

But first, in 3:1-4:13, he exhorts us based on the Lord's *faithfulness*. This section is marked by a concentration of words related to "believe" (Figure 2, chart), variously translated "faith, believe, faithful, belief, unbelief." The plot shows clearly two major concentrations of these words in Hebrews. The first is ch. 3-4, which we are now beginning.

The second is in ch. 11, the register of the OT heroes of faith.

These concentrations are bracketed by exhortations to focus our attention on the preeminent example of faith, our Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry. In 3:1-2, we are to consider him, the faithful high priest, so that we might be faithful and not fall into unbelief. In 12:1-2, after the OT heroes, we are reminded that he is the chief leader of faith, and also the only one so far who has finished the race of faith.

This organization of the book makes two important points.

First, faith is not primarily mental assent to a creed, but an attitude of trust in God.

<sup>1</sup> The only two instances of this root in Hebrews

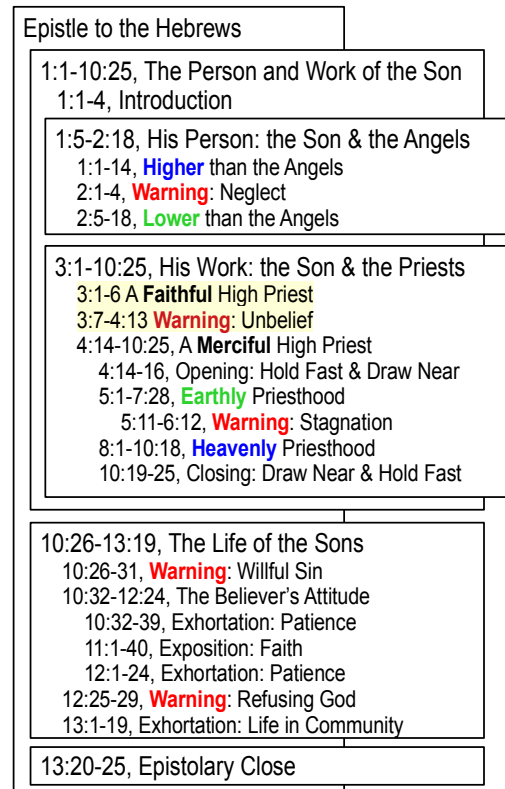


Figure 1: Initial Structure for Hebrews

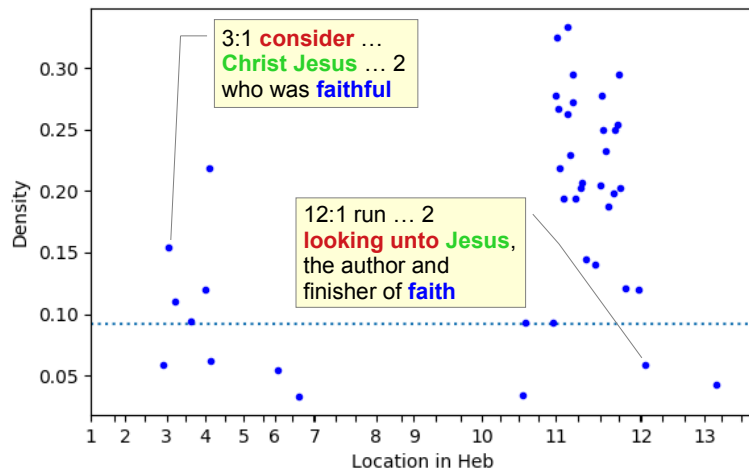


Figure 2: Words for "faith, believe" in Hebrews: faith πίστις G4102, believe πιστεύω G4100, faithful πίστος G4103, unbelief ἀπιστία G0570.

Second, the secret to steadfastness in our faith is focusing our attention on our Lord Jesus.

3:1-4:13 has two main sections (Figure 3, chart), each starting with an imperative addressed to “brethren.”<sup>2</sup>

- 3:1, “brethren, ... consider”
- 3:12, “take heed, brethren”

Each section is followed by a reference to the Word of God.

### 3:1-6, Positive Exhortation

The initial verse of this section is packed with links to the previous chapter.

**3:1 Wherefore ὁθεν, holy ἅγιος brethren,**--This title recalls our sanctification and title as brethren from 2:11,

2:11 For both he that **sanctifieth** ἀγιάζω and they who are **sanctified** are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them **brethren**,

**partakers μέτοχος of the heavenly calling,**--The notion that we partake of what is above answers to our Savior’s partaking in 2:14,

2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise **took part μετέχω** of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

Because he partook of our low state, we can partake of his heavenly position as Son and heir.

**consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;**--To the title of “high priest,” already introduced in 2:17, the writer adds that of “apostle.” This is the only use of the term in Hebrews, and the only instance in the NT where it is applied to our Lord. Apostle (ἀποστολός G652) means “one sent,” and invites the question, “Who sent him?” The answer, from John 20:21, is the Father (chart)

Joh 20:21 Then said Jesus to them again, ... as my Father hath **sent** (ἀποστέλλω G649) me, even so **send** I you.

The first part of his statement justifies calling him an apostle, sent by the Father, in Heb 3:1. But the second part describes the Eleven as sent by him, making them apostles of the Lord Jesus. When he appeared directly to Paul on the road to Damascus and sent him to the Gentiles, Paul also became “an apostle of [one sent by] Jesus Christ,” as he often reminds his readers,

1Co 1:1 Paul, called to be **an apostle of Jesus Christ** through the will of God,

But the NT calls others “apostles” who are sent neither by the Father, nor by direct personal appearance of the Son. Barnabas is called an apostle during the first missionary journey:

Acts 14:13 Then the priest of Jupiter, ... would have done sacrifice with the people. 14 Which when the **apostles**, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, ...

And Paul, in prison in Rome and writing to thank the saints in Philippi for a gift they sent to him, describes the one who carried that gift as “your apostle,”

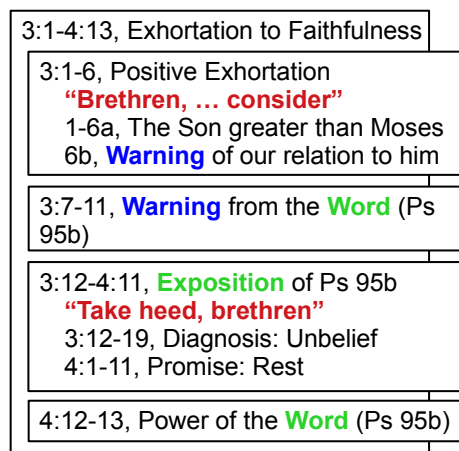


Figure 3: Structure of 3:1-4:13

<sup>2</sup> The only other instance in Hebrews of an imperative with vocative ἀδελφός is 13:22.

Phi 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your **messenger ἀποστολός**, and he that ministered to my wants.

Barnabas and Epaphroditus were apostles because they were sent by the churches—Barnabas by Antioch in Acts 13, Epaphroditus by Philippi. Acts 13 clearly calls out the Spirit’s direction in sending out Barnabas and Saul, and it is likely that the brethren in Philippi

Examples:	References:	Who Sends?	How Many?
The Lord Jesus	Heb 3:1	The Father	1
John, Paul	1 Cor 1:1	The Son	12
Barnabas, Epaphroditus	Acts 14:14; Phil 2:25	The Spirit through the church	Many

*Table 1: Three Kinds of Apostle in the NT*

were guided by the same Spirit in sending their gift to Paul in Rome. So we can recognize a third group of apostles, those sent by the Spirit through the churches (Table 1).

Do we still have apostles today? There is only one apostle of the Father, our Lord Jesus, who abides forever. The Eleven with Paul are the only ones directly sent by the Son. But the apostles of the Spirit through the churches abound. They are the missionaries sent out to plant new churches. Brother Korah was our apostle when he took our gift to flood victims in India.

Our writer describes the unique, apostle of the Father. Our Lord’s titles in this verse complement each other. As apostle, he represents God to men. As high priest, he represents men to God.

**2 Who was faithful to him that appointed him,**--5:4 will remind us, “no man taketh this honour unto himself.” One purpose of combining the titles “apostle” and “high priest” is to remind us that he can be high priest only because God has sent him in this capacity, and so he owes to God the faithful performance of the duties that are assigned him.

**as also Moses was faithful in all his house.**--The notion that our Lord is faithful, and that in this characteristic he reflects Moses, comes from the alignment of two OT passages, one describing Moses, the other the Messiah (chart).<sup>3</sup>

The faithfulness of Moses “in all his house” comes from Numbers 12, when the Lord explains why he speaks to Moses face to face, and not through dreams and visions:

Num. 12:7 My servant Moses is not so, who is **faithful in all mine house**.

In Numbers 12, the possessive pronoun refers to God, not Moses. “His” in Heb 3:2 corresponds to “mine” in Num 12:7, and that in turn leads to the notion of appointment by God of someone over God’s house, God’s people.<sup>4</sup>

What leads the author to recognize that our Lord shares this faithfulness? God’s promise to David through Nathan, in the version in Chronicles, reads in our version,

1Chr. 17:14 But I will **settle** him in mine **house** and in my kingdom for ever:

<sup>3</sup> D’Angelo insists that 1 Chr 17:14 is primary. But “all” is from Numbers, and her arguments for excluding it are weak. It seems more likely to me that the author wants to draw out the parallel between the two passages, the only two in the that combine a cognate of πιστεύω with οἶκος μου.

<sup>4</sup> The adjective “all” would be superfluous in a reference to the tabernacle or temple (K&D). V. 6 picks up this sense, “whose house are we.”

Two things make this passage attractive to the writer. First, the LXX translates “settle” in this place, uncharacteristically,<sup>5</sup> with the verb πιστόω G4104,<sup>6</sup> “to make faithful, to appoint.” Second, there are many references in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17 to David’s house (2 Sam 7:16, 18, 25; 1 Chr 17:23), but here God is speaking of his own house, in support of the idea that he appoints or sends (“apostle”) someone to care for it.

A third passage also joins together the notions of faithfulness and the house, God’s prophecy through Samuel concerning the future of the priesthood.<sup>7</sup>

1 Sam 2:35 I will raise me up a **faithful πιστός priest**, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a **sure πιστός house**

The house here is the priest’s, not God’s, but our writer will nuance this in v. 6.

Thus we have three passages, one describing Moses, the other the Messiah, and a third the promised priest, all referring to God’s house and all using a derivative of πιστεῶ.

Thus far the writer is comparing our Lord and Moses, in keeping with God’s promise to Moses to raise up “a prophet like unto thee” (Deut 18:18; cf. v. 15). But these two men differ.

**3 For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses,**--In Chapter 1 we learned that our Lord is better than the angels. Now we will learn of his superiority to Moses. He basis this claim on the relation of these two men to “mine house” in Numbers and 1 Chronicles.

**inasmuch as he who hath builded<sup>8</sup> the house hath more honour than the house.**--The basis for this claim grows out of the “house,” the people of God, with which both Moses and Messiah are associated. If a house has a builder, naturally the builder is superior to the house itself. The builder exists before the house, conceives the house, and controls its form and purpose.

**4 For every house is builded by some man;**--In fact, all houses have builders. Who is the builder of this one? We ought to know from the possessive pronoun “mine house,” but in case there is any ambiguity, the writer reminds us,

**but he that built all things is God.**--God built all things. So in particular, he built the household over which he appointed Moses, and later the Messiah.

Now the argument returns from the house to Moses and the Messiah.

**5 And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant,**--Returning to Num 12:7, Moses’ relation to God’s house is as a servant.<sup>9</sup> “My servant Moses” is a common designation for Moses in the OT.

**for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after;**--The point of this emerges from the context of Num 12:7. Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses’ unique authority:

Num 12:2 And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?

<sup>5</sup> עמד, elsewhere overwhelmingly translated with ἵστημι or a derivative

<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere corresponding mostly to אמן

<sup>7</sup> D’Angelo, who also notes the relevance of Zech 6:11 and the promised priest “Jesus.”

<sup>8</sup> κατασκευάζω, corresponding to עשה (three times), ברא and יצר (two each); οικοδομέω, used throughout 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17, is overwhelmingly (338x) used for בנה, and is thus much more closely tied to a physical structure.

<sup>9</sup> The word “servant” θεράπων G2324, only here in the NT and quoting Num 12:7, describes service out of loyalty, in contrast with δοῦλος G1401, which emphasizes bondage, but still represents a subordinate position.

The Lord responds:

Num 12:6 If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. 7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. 8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold:

The Lord speaks to Moses face to face, not in visions, so they should give special heed to what he says in the future (including his judgments, and his final sermon on the Plains of Moab). (There may be an echo here of the exhortation in 2:1-4, based on the things “spoken by the Lord” who is here compared with Moses.)

**6 But Christ as a son over his own house;**--Moses is a servant—an exalted and honored servant, but still a servant. But we have known since 1:2 that Messiah is a Son (based on the promise to David discussed in 1 Chronicles 17), and as our Lord told the Pharisees,

Joh 8:35 the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

Thus far, the text is an exposition justifying the description of our Lord as a “faithful high priest” (2:17). It is interesting that in expounding a characteristic of our Lord as priest, the writer should draw in Moses rather than Aaron, since Israel’s priests were drawn from the descendants of Aaron, Moses’ brother. The writer focuses on Moses because of the parallel that he finds between Chronicles and Numbers. Moses, not Aaron, is described as faithful in God’s house. But we should remember that Moses is called a priest in Psalm 99:

Psa 99:6 Moses and Aaron **among his priests**, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them.

He functioned as a priest before Aaron was ordained,<sup>10</sup> and as a priest outside of the Aaronic line, he is like Melchizedek, who will figure prominently in the sequel.

**whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.**--Suddenly, we turn from comparing our Lord with Moses, to an exhortation for us. We are the house in which our Lord is a faithful son, but only on the condition that we hold fast our confidence and hope.

The conditional nature of this warning disturbs some, but it is completely consistent with our Lord’s teaching (chart):

Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Even more pointedly,

Joh 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews **which believed** on him, **If ye continue** in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

Paul makes the same point, in Colossians, which in so many ways anticipates Hebrews:

Col 1:21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: 23 **If ye continue** in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel,

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<sup>10</sup> See notes for discussion of his priestly functions.

These texts do not teach works salvation. They do teach that salvation works. We *are* saved by grace through faith, plus nothing. But we *know* we are saved by the Spirit's work in our lives:

1Jo 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

### 3:7-4:13, Warning

He amplifies 3:6b into a warning, based on Psalm 95. As with Psalm 8, he first quotes a portion of the Psalm, then amplifies selected words and phrases. The message has two parts: diagnosis of the condition of unbelief, and description of the blessing that awaits those who do believe.

### 3:7-11, Quotation of the Word

**7 Wherefore διό (as the Holy Ghost saith [Psalm 95], To day if ye will hear his voice, 8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: 9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. 10 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in *their* heart; and they have not known my ways. 11 So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.**--NT writers do not quote the OT out of context. While they may cite only a verse or two, they know the context, and expect their readers to recall the rest of the passage.

Psalm 95, The Test of True Worship
1-5, Worship in <b>Praise</b> 1-2, Call to Praise 3-5, Cause: Creation
6-7a, Worship in <b>Posture</b> 6, Call to Bow Down 7, Cause: Exodus
7b-11, Worship in <b>Obedience</b> 7-9, Call to Obey 10-11, Cause: Judgment

Figure 4: Structure of Psalm 95

Recall the structure of the Psalm (Figure 4, chart): three imperatives each with a motive. The first two invite the people to worship the Lord in their words (1-5) and their posture (6-7a). But at 7b the tone changes abruptly, and they are warned of the consequences of disobedience.

In other words, the whole structure of the Psalm reinforces the caveat from 3:6b. Words and posture can be only outward, and are meaningless if not accompanied by actions.

This analysis shows that the Psalm aligns with 3:6. The readers would be comfortable with the first seven verses of the Psalm. Like the Jews in John 8 who “believed on Jesus,” or the Colossians who were meeting with other believers, they thought of themselves as Christians. They would join in hymns of praise (Psalm 95:1-2) and bow down before the Lord (95:6). But they need to worship the Lord, not only in word and posture, but in their whole conduct.

To understand the writer's exposition of the Psalm, we should recall the historical episode that it describes, recorded in Numbers 13-14. In ch. 13, at the Lord's direction, Moses sends out a team to survey the land that the Lord is giving them:

Num 13:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.

The spies return with samples of the rich produce of the land—grapes, pomegranates, and figs—and reported two characteristics: its bounty, but also the strength of its current inhabitants:

Num 13:27 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. 28 Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

In the eyes of the people, the threat of the defenders outweighs the bounty of the land.

Num 14:1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. 2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! 3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? 4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

Caleb and Joshua encourage the people to claim the land that God has promised them, and warn,

Num 14:9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

In the LXX, this verse twice uses a Greek root from which we get our word “apostasy.” The Hebrews must not “rebel against the Lord,” מרד H4775, regularly translated ἀφίστημι G868 and here by the derivative noun ἀποστάτης “deserter” (not used in the NT), because their “defense” (מִלְחָמָה, literally “their shadow,” but the same consonants as “idol”) has abandoned ἀφίστημι them. In other words, the choice they face is between the Lord God of Israel and the gods of Canaan.

The people refuse to hear Caleb and Joshua, a decision the Lord characterizes as “unbelief”:

Num 14:11 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be **ere they believe me**, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

The Lord describes their rejection as the culmination of a long series of sinful actions:

Num 14:22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and **have tempted me now these ten times**, and have not hearkened to my voice;

Then he declares the penalty:

Num 14: 23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: ... 32 But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. 33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. 34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

After quoting the Psalm, the writer first diagnoses the failure of the people whom it describes, then explains the blessing that they forfeited. In 3:12-4:11, he repeats many words and phrases from the Psalm (underlined in the citations below), and makes many allusions to Numbers 14 (yellow highlight). The passage is a good example of meditating on a passage of Scripture.

The Psalm goes beyond Numbers 14 in one respect. At first, its last words, “enter into my rest,” appear to refer simply to the entry into the land, which the OT often describes as “the rest,” e.g.,

Deu 12:9 For ye are not as yet come to **the rest** and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. 10 But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he **giveth you rest** from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; 11 Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there;

But the Psalm refers, not to “the rest,” but to “my [God’s] rest,” and 4:8 will tell us that Joshua did not bring the people into the rest described in Psalm 95. He did bring them into the land, but there is something more. We will see that God’s rest is the sanctuary. His desire is not simply to bring Israel into the land, but to bring them with him into his house, the sanctuary—to make them members of his household, the subject of the exhortation in 3:6.

### 3:12-19, Diagnosis of Unbelief

Two imperatives, in vv. 12 and 13, now call the readers to compare themselves with Israel in the wilderness. We can compare these in several ways (Table 2, chart):

- Together, these develop the words of v. 8, “harden not your hearts.” The first imperative expands “heart,” and the second, “harden.”

	3:12 Take heed, brethren	3:13 Exhort one another
Relation to 8, “harden not your hearts”	lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief	lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin
Responsibility	Individual	Toward others
Relation to 1 Corinthians 11:	11:28 let a man examine himself,	11:29 not discerning the Lord's body.

*Table 2: The Imperatives of 3:12, 13*

- The first describes our individual responsibility; the second, our duty toward each other.
- Thus they correspond to the twofold source of unworthiness at the Lord’s Table in 1 Cor 11, failure to examine oneself, and failure to discern the body.

**12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief,**-- First he directly exhorts them to consider the implications of their desire to withdraw from the assembly and rejoin the synagogue. “Heart” comes from v. 8, “Harden not your hearts,” what happened in the wilderness. Guided by Num 14:11, the writer characterizes their sin as “unbelief.”<sup>11</sup> He goes on to characterize their unbelief:

**in departing**—The writer draws this word (ἀφίστημι, G868) from Num 14:9 “rebel not ye.” this is his definition of “unbelief.”

Our Lord and Paul also make this connection. Luke<sup>12</sup> records our Lord’s parable of the soils:

Luk 8:13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while **believe πιστεύω**, and in time of temptation **fall away ἀφίστημι**.

<sup>11</sup> An analysis anticipated by Moses (Deut 1:32) and Ps 106:24.

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting that this pairing appears in Luke, which is more oriented toward Greek readers, presumably like the community in view in Hebrews.



And Paul warns Timothy,

1Ti 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall **depart** **ἀφίστημι** from the **faith πίστις**, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

Note that Paul's warning attributes this turning away to "seducing spirits and ... devils." Our writer would agree. He characterizes their departure this way:

**from the living God.**--This title for God emphasizes the contrast between the true God and the pagan idols (see note). Only within the church is the true God to be found. Anything that might draw people away from the truth, including rival religious systems, is motivated by "devils," the spiritual forces that lie behind idolatry.

Recall Caleb's exhortation in Num 14:9, that "their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us." The people's unbelief amounted to honoring the "defence" of the unbelievers more than "the LORD."

This criticism can be true even of systems that were originally vessels of the truth. In particular, our Lord rebukes the Jewish rulers,

John 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil,

In turning back to the synagogue and abandoning the new covenant revelation brought by the Son of God, the Hebrews would be reversing the trajectory of the Thessalonians. They

1Th. 1:9 turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

Now the Hebrews are at risk of turning from the true God to formal Judaism, from which the Spirit of God has departed, to be replaced by seducing spirits.<sup>13</sup>

The first exhortation, "Take heed," invites them to self-examination with respect to their hearts. The second reminds them of the need, brought by hardening, to exhort one another.

**13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day;**--In the original Psalm, the Psalmist exhorts the Israelites of his day, based on Israel's experience in the wilderness. The Psalm names no author, but our writer will later note (4:7) that it appears "in David," that is, in the collection ascribed to him. David lived four centuries after the events of Numbers 13-14, yet that experience still provided a valid basis for exhorting the people. If the Psalmist can extend the Exodus experience to what was for him "To day," so can we. The lesson still holds:

**lest any of you be hardened**--The first exhortation was drawn from the word "heart" in v. 8, "harden not your hearts," and the second comes from the verb in that clause, "harden." The reason that we need to "exhort one another" is that our own perception may be dulled through a hard heart.

The prototype of a hard heart is Pharaoh. More than half of the OT verses that use the Greek words for "heart" and "harden" together refer to Pharaoh. Against this background, it is striking that the author of Psalm 95 would use this expression to describe Israelites! They are at risk of becoming no better than the tyrant who held them in bondage.

**through the deceitfulness of sin.**--How does this hardening happen? It is the result of tolerating sin in our lives. Numbers 14 was not by any means Israel's first sin in the wilderness; 14:22 describes it as the tenth in a series.<sup>14</sup> Sin deserves God's full wrath. Because of the redemption he has provided in his Son, his chastisement of his people does not manifest that full judgment, but

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<sup>13</sup> Compare the principle of Matt 12:44, 45.

the result is that we become complacent. Twice the OT explains a hard heart as a failure to fear the Lord as we ought:

Pro 28:14 Happy is the man that **feareth** alway: but he that **hardeneth his heart** shall fall into mischief.

Isa 63:17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and **hardened** our heart from thy **fear**?

The readers of Hebrews have been tolerating sin, in the form of a compromised testimony and refusal to take a distinct stand for the Lord, and as a result their hearts are at risk of hardening. This hardening makes them unable to see their own sin, so they need to exhort one another.

**14 For we are made partakers of Christ**,--What is at stake is their participation in Christ, as described in 3:1; their being members of his household (3:6). The verb is perfect, “We have been made partakers,” looking at a past, finished work with enduring consequences. But as in 3:6, assurance of this blessed state depends critically on evidence of the Spirit’s work in their lives.

**if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end**;--The conditional here picks up v. 6. The translators have obscured the parallel: “hold ... stedfast unto the end” here is exactly the same phrase as “hold fast ... firm unto the end” in v. 6, and all the words occur together and in the same order in each case.

In light of the parallel, it is worthwhile considering just what it is that we are to hold fast.

In 3:6, it is “the confidence (boldness, *παρρησία* G3954) and the rejoicing (boasting, *καύχημα* G2745) of the hope.” Under persecution, the readers were tempted to keep quiet about their faith. But our Lord’s last charge to us before returning to heaven is to be witnesses unto him. We are to hold our hope, not privately, but with boldness and boasting. As Peter exhorts his readers,

1Pe 3:15 be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you

In 3:14, it is “the beginning of the [not your] confidence.” We should not be misled by the repetition of the English word “confidence” here from v. 6. The two represent different Greek words (here, *ὑπόστασις* G5287). Here, the term refers not to our subjective attitude of confidence, but to the reality on which our confidence rests. Hebrews uses the term again twice::

Heb 1:3 [The Son] being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his **person**

The point here is that the Son is the image of the reality that is God. Later, we read

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the **substance** of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

In both cases the term has the meaning “substance, underlying reality,” and so we should understand it here.<sup>15</sup> But what is “the beginning of the substance”? It probably refers to the preaching that they have heard, “which at the first [beginning, *ἀρχή* G746, as in 3:14] began to be spoken by the Lord” (2:3). So while 3:6 exhorts them to hold fast to their boldness and boasting in their subjective experience, 3:14 urges them not to let go of the objective revelation on which that experience rests, the “substance” (Heb 11:1) of the faith described in v. 6.

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14 For one enumeration, see <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2014/what-is-meant-by-these-ten-times-in-numbers-14-20-23>; Ex 14:10-12; 15:22-24; 16:1-3; 16:19-20; 16:27-30; 17:1-4; 32:1-35; Num 11:1-3; 11:4-34; 14:1-3.

15 Following Köster in TDNT.

Once more in Hebrews, we are exhorted to “hold fast.”<sup>16</sup>

Heb 10:23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith [better, “hope”] without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

Of 53 instances of ἐλπίζ G1680 in the AV, this is the only place it is rendered “faith.”<sup>17</sup> The usual translation is “hope.” The difference is important. Faith is more general, and can apply to any aspect of our belief. The first two references to “holding fast” look back, to the preaching that we received (3:14) and our boldness and rejoicing in that understanding (3:6). But in 10:23, we look forward to what has been promised, and we are enjoined not to lose sight of future.

**15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.**--The conjunction “while” marks this clause as an adverbial modifier of some preceding verb.<sup>18</sup> The closest eligible verb is “hold fast” in 3:14, which makes excellent sense: “Hold fast to what was revealed to you from the first, during that period of time in which it is still being<sup>19</sup> said, ...”<sup>20</sup> In 3:13 we saw that the “today” written by the Psalmist indicates that the exhortation continues in effect, long after the events of Numbers 14. The exhortation not to harden our hearts was not just for the readers of the Psalm, but for us as well.

Our version translates the next verse as a statement. But it is grammatically parallel to vv. 17-18, each beginning with a pronoun that represents a question.<sup>21</sup> If we take these three verses as parallel questions, in each case the question is drawn from Psalm 95, while the answer comes from the language of Numbers 14<sup>22</sup> (Table 3, chart). Thus these three questions tie the Psalm back to the historical event.

Heb 3:16-18	Heb 3:7-11 < Psalm 95	Numbers 14
16 Who, when they <b>heard</b> , did <b>provoke</b> ? Was it not <b>all</b> that came out of <b>Egypt</b> by <b>Moses</b> ?	7 To day if ye will <b>hear</b> his voice, 8 Harden not your hearts, as in the <b>provocation</b>	2 And <b>all</b> the children of Israel murmured against <b>Moses</b> and against Aaron: and <b>the whole</b> congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of <b>Egypt</b> !
17 But with whom <b>was he grieved forty years</b> ? <i>was it</i> not with them that had <b>sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness</b> ?	9 Wherefore <b>I was grieved</b> with that generation,	33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness <b>forty years</b> , and bear your whoredoms, until your <b>carcasses be wasted in the wilderness</b> . ... 40 for we have <b>sinned</b> .
18 And to whom <b>sware</b> he that <b>they should not enter into his rest</b> , but to them that <b>believed</b> not?	11 So I <b>sware</b> in my wrath, <b>They shall not enter into my rest</b> .	11 How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they <b>believe</b> me, ...

*Table 3: Citations of Psalm 95 and Numbers 14 in Heb 3:16-18*

16 These are the only three instances in Hebrews of κατέχω G2722; 4:14 is a different Greek word, κρατέω G2902

17 A most unusual translation, since both the Geneva and Bishops’ Bibles use “hope.” I’d love to know the translators’ reason, since their first charge was to stay with these two where they agree.

18 Taking it forward, as do Delitzsch and others, is at best awkward because of the following γαρ.

19 Present tense, thus marked, see Note to ch.1-2

20 Barmby, Pulpit Commentary

21 The accentuation differs between the relative and the indefinite sense, but is not always written in the manuscripts, and in printed editions reflects the interpretation of the editor. Stephanus and Hodges-Farstad have the interrogative accentuation τίνας, while Robinson-Pierpont opt for the relative τινές.

22 Barmby, Pulpit Commentary, p. 90.

There is a progression, both in the questions and in the answers. Notice first the questions, then the answers.

**16a For some who, when they had heard, did provoke?**--The first question describes what the people did. They heard (the report of the spies), yet provoked the Lord by refusing to believe his promise to bring them into the land. The next two questions describe how the Lord responds to this provocation.

**17a But with whom was he grieved forty years?**--The Lord's first response is to grieve. We do not sufficiently realize that our sin is painful to God. He delights in the loving obedience of his children; he is grieved when they disobey him. In this question, the author brings in the "forty years" from Numbers 14, the entire period during which they disobeyed the Lord.

**18a And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest,**--His private grief leads to an oath<sup>23</sup> that they would not enter into "his rest."<sup>24</sup>

Now we turn to the answers, which draw on Numbers 14 and again show a progression.

**16b ~~however~~ Was it not all that came out of Egypt by Moses?**--The writer does not impugn Caleb and Joshua, the only two of the Exodus generation who entered the land. He is echoing the universal language of Numbers 14. The first definition of those whom God judged is that they had experienced the miraculous deliverance from Egypt. The sense is very much in line with Paul's reflection in 1 Corinthians 10:

1Co 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ... 12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

**17b was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?**--Now he adds more detail to the description, recalling (in words from Numbers 14) both their offense, and the penalty that God imposed on them.

**18b but to them that believed not?**--His final description brings us to Num 14:11, and the theme of this section: they did not believe the Lord.

**19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.**--This is his final conclusion. Unbelief kept the people out of the land of promise. But the next section shows that it excluded them from much more, and threatens us with a much greater exclusion as well.

## 4:1-11, Promise of Rest

After recalling God's judgment on those who believed not, the author now turns our attention to the reward of "God's rest" that the Israelites failed to enter, and that is still ("today") open to us.

This section becomes clearer if we recognize how the OT describes "God's rest." "The rest" is what God promised Israel in Canaan, but "my rest" (Ps 95:11), "rest" with a possessive referring to God, is generally the temple. Moses hinted at such a distinction in Deuteronomy:

<sup>23</sup> Following Deut 1:34-35, which recognizes the oath formulas the Lord uses in Num 14:23 אָמַן and 28 הִיאֵם יְיָ.

<sup>24</sup> We will consider this expression in much more detail in 4:1-11, but it probably refers, not just to the land, but to the presence of God in the temple (see Note).

Deu 12:9 For ye are not as yet come to **the rest** and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. 10 But when ye go over Jordan, and **dwelt** [שב׳ H3427] in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; 11 Then **there shall be a place** which the LORD your God shall choose to cause **his name to dwell** [שכן׳ H7931 “tabernacle”] there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD: 12 **And ye shall rejoice** before the LORD your God ...

*The rest is the land beyond the Jordan, where Israel will “dwell.” But within that land will be another place. God won’t quite “dwell” there—earth is too small to contain him. But his name will “tabernacle” there, in Zion.*

We know from our studies in Psalms that this promise wasn’t realized until David conquered Jerusalem 400 years after Joshua brought the people into the land. He dedicated the land and material for the temple, which Solomon his son built. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon invites the Lord,

2Ch 6:41 Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into **thy resting place** ἡ γῆ κατάπαυσίς σου, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness.

The people have had “the rest” for 400 years, but only now does the Lord enter *his* resting place, described in the LXX with the same word κατάπαυσίς G2663 that dominates Hebrews 3-4.

Psalm 132, celebrating David’s plans for the temple, echoes this verse in 132:8, and also describes the Lord’s response:

Psa 132:13 For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. 14 This is **my rest** מנוחתי κατάπαυσίς μου for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.

Isaiah 66 adds the word “place” to make clear that a location is in view:

Isa 66:1 Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of **my rest** מנוחתי κατάπαυσίς μου?

Throughout this section, except for v. 9 (a different Greek word), “rest,” going back to “my rest” in Ps 95:11, refers to God’s dwelling place, his house. We should not be surprised. The exposition of Psalm 95 grows out of 3:6, the condition under which we can be considered members of the house(hold) of Christ, who is the Son in God’s house. Entering into God’s rest is entering into his sanctuary, the heavenly temple.

We should not miss the imagery of Eden in the temple.<sup>25</sup>

- The curtains around the tabernacle, and the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, were embroidered with images of cherubim (Ex 26:1, 31), known previously in the Bible only as the guardians to keep Adam and Eve from reentering Eden (Gen 3:24).

25 For a detailed exposition of this insight, see G.J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story.” *World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9,A (1985) 19-25, reprinted in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (ed. R.S. Hess and D.T. Tsumura; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399; G.K. Beale, *JETS* 48/1 (March 2005) 5-31; G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, IVP Press, 2014 (Kindle; paper 2004). Beale and Wenham also mention the use of התהלך to describe God’s movement (though the later references they cite are not restricted to the tabernacle); the eastward orientation; the fatal holiness of the ark and the tree of life; the river of Eden and of Ezekiel 47; etc.

- Adam is commanded “to dress עבד H5647 ... and to keep שמר H8104” the garden, verbs that are later used to describe the work of the priests in the tabernacle (Num 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6; cf. 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14),<sup>26</sup> making him a prototypical priest.
- The lampstand was a seven-branched almond tree with buds and flowers (Ex 25:31, 33).
- The robes of the high priest were bordered with pomegranates (Ex 28:33).
- When Solomon built the temple, he decorated the interior walls “with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers” (1Ki 6:29).

The priests in the temple found themselves back in Eden, walking in the garden with God. The rest of us are excluded ... for now. But the Psalmist anticipates that God’s people may enter, not just “the rest” of Canaan, but God’s resting place, his sanctuary, in fellowship with him.

Numbers 14 says nothing about the temple, only about the people not entering the land. But the Psalmist recognizes their entry into the land as preparation for an even closer approach to God, in “his rest,” the sanctuary he would occupy in the land. From the first, God’s purpose has been to bring us back to Eden.

**4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest κατάπαυσις, any of you should seem to come short of it.**--This opening exhortation forms an internal inclusio with 4:11 (chart):

- Let us (fear, labor)
- Issue: entering into the rest
- Warning: lest (come short of the promise; fall through unbelief)

For the first time in the book, he mentions the promise, a key theme that is concentrated at the end of ch. 6 and in ch. 11 (Figure 5, chart). This notion is natural enough in a section about faith: the promise is what faith accepts and seizes. But remarkably, he derives this promise from the curse, “They shall not enter into my rest.”

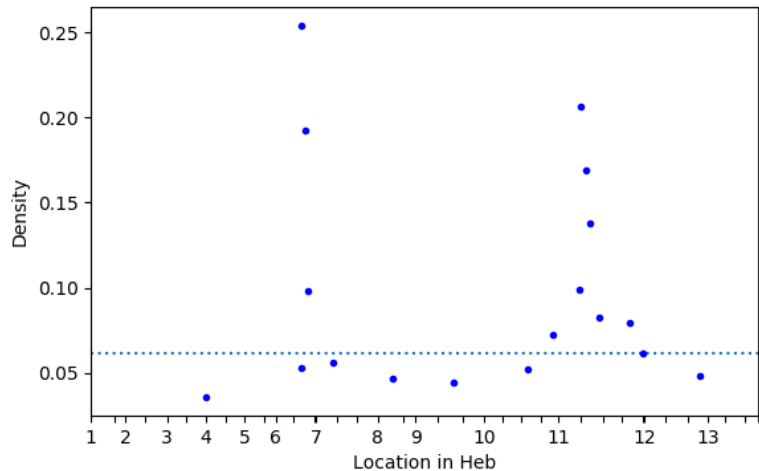


Figure 5: "Promise" in Hebrews

**2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them:**--The good news to the Israelites was the report of the spies: a land of bounty, with many giants to overcome. This is the Christian hope that we have received as well:

Acts 14:22 we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

**but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.**--“The word” was the encouragement from Caleb and Joshua (chart).

Num. 14:8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a

<sup>26</sup> Though Wenham is wrong to say that the Numbers references are the only places in the Pentateuch besides Gen 2:15 where the two verbs occur together; Deut 13:5 (ET v. 4), like numerous later passages, makes them the responsibility of all Israel with respect to God’s commandments. It is true that they are the only other passages that do not use שמר with reference to God’s מצות.

land which floweth with milk and honey. 9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

But they would not receive it.

**3 For we which have believed do enter into rest κατάπαυσις**,--The verb “enter” is present tense, describing an ongoing process: “we ... are entering into rest” and implying that we are not there yet. Ch. 11 will pick up the theme of promise with this observation about the OT saints:

Heb. 11:39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

That’s where we are now—pursuing the promise, though we are not there yet.

The rest of this verse summarizes the argument that leads to this conclusion.<sup>27</sup> It has two components, drawn from two OT texts.

**as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest κατάπαυσις**:--The first is God’s solemn oath in Psalm 95 that the Israelites would not enter into his rest.

One grammatical detail needs attention (chart). The expression “If they shall enter” is a literal translation of Ps 95:11 in both Hebrew and Greek. Hebrew oaths are in the form of curses upon oneself if one should break the oath. We see the full form of an oath in David’s statement while mourning the murder of Abner by Joab:

2Sam. 3:35 David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down.

He doesn’t specify just what God would do to him, but clearly it’s something bad, if he breaks his fast before sundown. So “if I taste bread” means, “I will not taste bread.”

Similarly, to make a positive promise, one says “if not.” Thus David promises Amasa,

2Sam. 19:13 God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab.

In other words, “You shall certainly be captain of the host.”

In the same way, God’s words, “If they shall enter into my rest” are a stereotyped form of the promise, “They shall not enter into my rest.” As we have seen, this goes beyond a statement that they would not enter the land; it recognizes that because of their sin, they cannot return to Eden.

How can this curse be a promise? The very fact that God makes this oath implies that if they had behaved differently, they *would* have entered into the rest. The curse implies that they had abandoned a possible blessing.

**although the works were finished from the foundation of the world**.--The second OT text is Gen 2:2, where the LXX translates the singular “work” with the plural “works”:

Gen. 2:2 And on the seventh day God ended his **work** which he had made; **and he rested** on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

“And he rested” uses the same Greek root as Psa 95:11 “my rest” (though the Hebrew words are different), while “works” picks up 95:9 “saw my works.” In meditating on one text about God’s

<sup>27</sup> Thus Barmby.

works and God's rest, the writer recalls another, and sets the two side by side (chart).<sup>28</sup>

These two verses, Psa 95:11 and Gen 2:2, pose a dilemma: for the curse of Psalm 95 to be meaningful, God's rest must still be available, yet God entered his rest on the seventh day of creation, implying that it is accomplished.<sup>29</sup> The following verses work out this dilemma, leading to a recap of the original exhortation (4:1) in 4:11.

**4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest καταπαύω the seventh day from all his works. 5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest κατάπαυσις.**--He repeats the two contrasting verses.

**6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein,**--That is, the possibility must still be open for God to deny it to people.<sup>30</sup>

**and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:**--That is, the children of Israel in the desert. (The notion that the entry into God's rest was "preached" to the Exodus generation implies that the purpose of God to bring them, not only into the land, but into his sanctuary, was active even then.)

**7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time;**--The fact that this exhortation is recorded in Psalms, traditionally attributed to David, four hundred years after the event, indicates that it is still relevant.

**as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**--Once more he repeats the key temporal phrase. It is for "today," which leaves it open to the readers.

**8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.**--"Jesus" is the Greek form of "Joshua," though the readers would recognize the pun and be led to think of our Lord as well. The reference is to the conquest of Canaan.

The writer asserts that Joshua did not give the people rest. Surprisingly, the OT says that by the end of his ministry, they did enjoy rest in the land (chart):

Josh. 21:44 And the LORD **gave them rest** round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers:

Josh. 22:4 And now the LORD your God **hath given rest** unto your brethren, as he promised them:

Josh. 23:1 And it came to pass a long time after that the LORD **had given rest** unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age.

These statements refer to the conquest of the land. Joshua *did* bring the new generation into the land, as God promised in Num 14:31. But "rest" in v. 8 must be understood as in the Psalm, "my rest." The Lord intended to give Israel not just access to the land, but to *his* rest, his personal presence. His judgment on their sin excluded them not just from the land, but from his rest, and Joshua did not bring them *that* rest, for it remains in the "today" of Psalm 95.

**9 There remaineth therefore a rest σαββατισμός<sup>31</sup> to the people of God.**--Up to now, "rest" has been the root from Psa 95:11 and Gen 2:2, which emphasizes a location, God's presence in

28 A Jewish exegetical principle known as *gezerah shavah* meaning "same law, [same verdict]"

29 Lane takes another view: because Gen 2:2 mentions both God's work and his rest, saying that the work is finished *implies* that the rest remains. But this seems to undervalue the *καίτοι* of Heb 4:3 (cf. Delitzsch).

30 "Must" is misleading; "it remains for some to enter in"

31 First here in Greek; from LXX σαββατίζω "to keep the Sabbath," thus "a Sabbath-keeping."



the sanctuary. Now he shifts to a word that he appears to have made up, for this is the earliest place that it appears. It comes from the Hebrew word “Sabbath,” and in particular from a verb σαββατιζω that appears 9x in the LXX (7x in the canonical books) in the sense, “Keep the Sabbath.” So the noun would mean, “the keeping of a Sabbath.” 4:6 said that access to the place of rest “remains.” Repeating this verb (in Hebrews, only in these two places and 10:26), he now shifts our attention from the place to what goes on there, the celebration of the Sabbath.

We may think of the Sabbath law in negative terms, specifying what people cannot do. But the OT emphasizes that it is to be a time of joy.

Is. 58:13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and **call the sabbath a delight**, the holy of the LORD, honourable;

Recall the longing of the sons of Korah, exiled from Jerusalem with David under Absalom:

Ps 42:4 ... for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, **with the voice of joy and praise**, with a multitude that kept holyday.

The reason for putting away other distractions was to enable people to focus their attention on the Lord and delight in him. Against this background, this passage stands in a close relationship with our destination as described in Hebrews 12,

Heb 12:22 But ye are come ... 23 To the **general assembly** [better, “to an innumerable company of angels in festal assembly ...] <sup>32</sup> and to the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,

We are on our way to a great heavenly celebration.

**10 For he that is entered into his rest κατάπαυσις, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his.**--Who is “he that is entered into his rest”?

Most commentators assume that the singular pronouns are used generically, “one who is entered into his rest ... .” But throughout this section, both the readers and the people in Numbers 14 are described in the plural. Note 4:1 “let us fear,” v. 2 “so we see,” v. 3 “we which have believed,” v. 9 “the people [pl] of God.” It is far smoother to understand the pronoun here as referring to a distinguished individual, the Lord Jesus.<sup>33</sup> In our modern office culture we work seated, but in a culture dominated by physical work, sitting down means that your work is finished. Compare:

Heb 1:3 when he had by himself purged our sins, [he] **sat down** on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Heb. 10:12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, **sat down** on the right hand of God;

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32 See commentaries, especially Delitzsch. The καί following πανήγυρις, consistently used in these verses to separate successive items in the list, should be understood so here also. He goes further, to make both the angels and the church subordinate to the “innumerable company.” Trench: πανήγυρις reflects a gathering for festival, while ἐκκλησία reflects a gathering for business).

33 For a full exposition, see [https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/special/easter/mp3/11\\_OurSaviorsRest.mp3](https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/special/easter/mp3/11_OurSaviorsRest.mp3), [https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/special/easter/notes/11\\_OurSaviorsRest.pdf](https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/special/easter/notes/11_OurSaviorsRest.pdf). The usual objection to this interpretation is that we might expect the author to identify him explicitly. But perhaps the ambiguity is meant to emphasize the *fact* of entering into rest, rather than to *identify* the person involved. “Someone has in fact already entered the rest. You’ll learn more about him in due course.” In addition, he has just named “Jesus” of the OT, and might expect his readers to be making the link to the NT Jesus. See Alford for history and defense of this view.

His work was to purge us from our sins. Having completed that work, he entered into his rest, at the right hand of the Father. So the sequence of thought is:

1. God rested on the seventh day, Gen 2
2. The Son of God, having finished his work, sat down at the right hand of God
3. We will one day enter that rest

**11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest *κατάπαυσις*, lest any man fall after the same example of *unbelief*.**--In view of his successful completion of his task, we should be encouraged to press on, and not lose our faith in the promised rest.

## 4:12-13, Power of the Word

This paragraph closes off the warning that began in 3:7 with a reminder of God's curse on the nation at Kadesh Barnea.

**12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword,**--The historical reference of Psalm 95 was the refusal of Israel in Numbers 14 to enter the land, from fear of the "sword" of the inhabitants (chart):<sup>34</sup>

Num. 14:3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the **sword**, that our wives and our children should be a prey?

But of far greater danger to them was God's curse, which lies behind Ps 95:11

Num. 14:23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:

That "word of God" led to the very sword that they sought to escape, and to far worse evils:

Num 14:43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the **sword**: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you.

The "word of God" in question is God's oath from Num 14:23, echoed in Ps 95:11, which 3:7 attributes to "the Holy Spirit."

**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.**--Wielded by the author, this divine word reaches far beyond Joshua's contemporaries, down to the readers of Hebrews. It discerns their "thoughts and intents," and in particular the unbelief that plagued them.

**13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight:**--The antecedent is "God," not "word," in the phrase "word of God."

1 Sam 16:7 for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

**but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.**--The last phrase is literally, "To whom we must give the word," that is, an account of ourselves. God's word to us demands that we return our word of response to him.

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34 LXX renders "sword" in v. 3 as *διαπαργή* "robbery, plundering." The likely source of the writer's *μάχαρα* is the historical record in 14:43 (Lane)

## Notes

### Moses as a Priest

Rawlinson in Pulpit Commentary:

Moses, though not called a priest in the Pentateuch, performed many priestly acts, such as sprinkling the blood of the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exo 24:6-8), setting in order the tabernacle (Exo 40:18-33), consecrating Aaron and his sons (Lev 8:6-30), interceding for the people (Exo 32:30-32; Num 14:13-19), etc.

Kirkpatrick in Cambridge Commentary thinks the emphasis is rather on his intercessory function, with another set of examples:

It was the office of the priests to intercede and mediate between God and man. This priestly function was exercised by Moses when Israel was fighting with Amalek (Exo 17:11 ff.), when they sinned by worshipping the calf (Exo 32:30 ff.; Deu 9:18 ff.), and when they murmured on the return of the spies (Num 14:13 ff.). It is to such occasions as these that the Psalmist refers, rather than to his exercise of priestly functions in the ratification of the covenant at Sinai (Exo 24:6 f.), or in the dedication of the Tabernacle (Exo 40:22 ff.), or in the consecration of Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8). For an example of Aaron's mediation see Num 16:46 ff.

But most of these are after the ordination of Aaron, and while priests do intercede, it is not distinctively their function: 1 Ki 13:6 (man of God); 1 Sam 12:23 (Samuel, explicitly contrasted with priests in Ps 99); Gen 20:7 (Abraham, specifically as a prophet); Amos 7:2-6; Neh 1:4-9.

### Living God (3:12)

Hebrews uses this title more than any other book in the Bible (3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22). Every OT instance can be related to the contrast between the true God and the false gods of the nations, as can numerous of the NT instances. Except for Matthew's two instances and Rev 7:2, these all appear in epistles to believers living in Gentile areas, where the conflict with idolatry would be particularly intense, and given the uniform OT sense of the expression, it makes sense to understand it throughout as bringing this contrast into focus.

### OT Instances

The underlying Hebrew phrase takes three forms:

**אל חי**

Jos. 3:10 And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the **living God** is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Gergashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. *Contrast with false gods of the pagans*

Ps. 42:2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the **living God**: when shall I come and appear before God? *Written in David fleeing from Absalom, in Transjordan, separated from the sanctuary where he longs to be, 42:4; 43:3, 4*

Ps. 84:2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the **living God**. *In the Book of Desolation, longing for return from idol-laden Babylon to the true sanctuary.*

Hos. 1:10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the **living God**. *Recall the context of the book as a whole: Israel is “not my people” because they have gone after Baal, but when they return, they will be children of the true and living God.*

### **אלהים חיים**

Deut. 5:26 For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? *Comparison with “all flesh” invites contrast with their idols. They don’t hear from their gods the way we have heard from ours. “They speak not” (Ps 115:5). LXX brings the expression into 4:33 as well.*

1 Sam. 17:26 And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? *Contrast with worshipper of false gods*

1 Sam. 17:36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. *As in 17:26*

Jer. 10:10 But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. *In contrast with the idols of 10:8, 9. Note parallel with “true God.”*

Jer. 23:36 And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God. *contrasting his word through true prophets with the words of false prophets*

### **אלהים חי**

These are all part of the Rabshakeh incident. Rabshakeh’s words (18:33-35) recall the impotence of the gods of all the other nations. A contrast with Jehovah is definitely in order. The mismatch in number, compared with the previous two expressions, is meant to emphasize the uniqueness of Israel’s God.

2 Ki. 19:4 It may be the LORD thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left.

2 Ki. 19:16 LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.

Isa. 37:4 It may be the LORD thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left.

Isa. 37:17 Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God.

## NT Instances

Matt. 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the **living God**.

Matt. 26:63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the **living God**, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

Acts 14:15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto **the living God**, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: *Classic contrast in the OT vein*

Rom. 9:26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the **living God**. *Citation of Hos 1:10*

2 Cor. 3:3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the **living God**; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

2 Cor. 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the **living God**; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. *Classic contrast in OT vein*

1 Thess. 1:9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the **living and true God**; *Classic contrast in OT vein—close paraphrase of Jer 10:10*

1 Tim. 3:15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the **living God**, the pillar and ground of the truth.

1 Tim. 4:10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the **living God**, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

Heb. 3:12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the **living God**.

Heb. 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the **living God**?

Heb. 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the **living God**.

Heb. 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the **living God**, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

Rev. 7:2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the **living God**: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, *Emphasis in 7:1, 2 on international scope of their work; they represent the true God, in contrast with the false gods who claim dominion over all the nations*

## 3:14, Partakers of Christ?

What does it mean to be a “partaker of Christ” (3:14)?

The noun is not common in the Bible. A few instances in the OT, some mistranslated (1 Sam 20:30); a good example is

Ecc 4:9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his **fellow**: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.

The only instance in the NT other than Hebrews is

Luk 5:7 And they beckoned unto their **partners**, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

In light of this, it is surprising to find the word five times in Hebrews. The first is in quoting Ps 45:7, which addresses the Messianic king:

**Heb. 1:9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.**--Messiah has a circle of close friends. This is the royal wedding Psalm; his fellows are his groomsmen, his closest companions. (The bridesmaids are mentioned later in the Psalm.) And we are members of that circle.

Joh 15:15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you **friends**; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

The other references focus on what it is that we share in.

**Heb. 3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;**--God has called us to himself:

Rom 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also **called**: and whom he **called**, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Paul calls it a “holy calling” because it sets us apart from other people:

2 Ti 1:8 the power of God; 9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an **holy calling**

This calling is “heavenly” in two senses. First, it comes from God’s throne in heaven. Second, it summons us to join our High Priest there: compare

Php 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the **high [upward] calling** of God in Christ Jesus.

The next three instances describe our relation to the three members of the godhead, respectively:

**Heb. 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;**--The use of the title suggests the Messianic scenario in Psalm 45 from 1:9. We are that circle of fellows, the groomsmen of the Messiah.

**Heb. 6:4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,**--The great endowment of the New Covenant; the power that delivers us from our sin:

Eze 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

This is the Comforter whom the Lord promised, the one by whom he continues to be present with us in our daily lives:

Joh 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because

it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

**Heb. 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.**--The third partaking highlights our relation to the Father. Suffering in this life, far from being a sign of his displeasure, proves his love and his purpose to make us like his Son.

## God’s Resting Place

Inspired by Laansma’s discussion of the Rest, can we distinguish “the resting place” (the land) from “God’s resting place” (the temple)? Where are מנוח, נוח, and κατάπαυσις followed by a possessive pronoun?

2Ch 6:41 Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into thy resting place נוּחַ κατὰπαυσίς σου, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness.

Psa 95:11 Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest מנוחתִי

Psa 132:8 Arise, O LORD, into thy rest מנוחתך ἀνάπαυσίν σου; thou, and the ark of thy strength.<sup>35</sup>

Psa 132:13 For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. 14 This is my rest מנוחתִי κατὰπαυσίς μου for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.

Isa 11:10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest מנוחתו ἀνάπαυσις αὐτοῦ shall be glorious.

Isa 66:1 Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest מנוחתִי κατὰπαυσίς μου?<sup>36</sup>

In every case a reference to the temple is possible, and in some cases unavoidable. The language of 95:11 appears to echo Deuteronomy 12, where however the pronoun is lacking, and the reference is clearly to the land:

Deu 12:9 For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you.

## ἀναπαυ\* and καταπαυ\*

These are in complementary distribution in the NT, with the latter only in Hebrews and Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, the former used elsewhere (Figure 6).

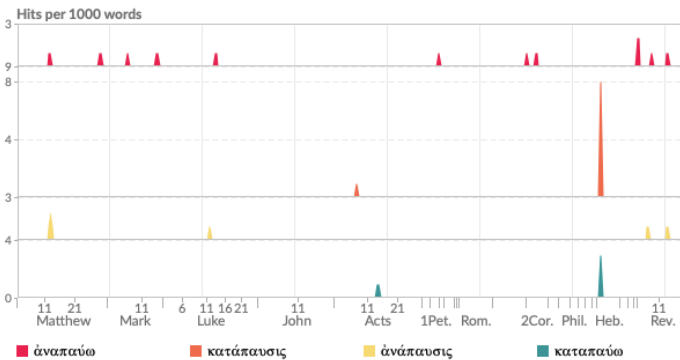


Figure 6: ἀναπαυ\* and καταπαυ\* in the NT

35 It is curious that LXX diverges here from 2 Ch 6:41.

36 Isa LXX uses ἀνάπαυσις 29x, but κατὰπαυσις only here.