

"Let Us Fear ..."

"... Therefore, lest haply a promise being left of entering into his rest, anyone of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good tidings preached unto us even as also they: but the word of hearing did not profit them, because it was not united by faith with them that heard" (Heb. 4:1f).

When the writer urged the Hebrews to fear that somehow they might come short of a rest afore promised by God, he calls upon Israel to serve as an example as to what might happen if they did not fear. Israel came out of bondage, bound for the promised land. Yet, most of them failed to enter Canaan; failed because of their disobedience or their unbelief (Heb. 3:18f). The writer speaks of a promise being left of entering into His rest (4:10). It is to Christians he writes, and this promised rest is part of the gospel's appeal. Not only can man have peace through forgiveness of sins, he can have hope of rest from the trials and toils of earth. Jesus promised, *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Mt. 11:28). Jesus promised, *"In my father's house are many mansions, ... if it were not so, I would have told you"* (John 14:1f). One of the beatitudes of Revelation states, *"Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord ... they shall rest from their labors ..."* (14:13).

The writer's warning to Christians from Israel is couched in these words: *"For indeed we have had good tidings preached unto us, even as also they, but the word of hearing did not profit them because it was not united by faith with them that heard."* The word "good tidings" is also translated "gospel" and because the writer says that the "gospel" was preached unto us, just as unto they, some conclude that the wandering Israelites had the good news of Christ's redemptive work preached to them. To so conclude is to ignore two important truths. First, Israel's promised rest was a type of the Christian's. It was "gospel" to them. Although God had promised them Canaan (which included His power and ability to give it to them) they did not believe. Second, the gospel written about Christ, the church and plans for man was a mystery, unknown and unperceived by man although prophets sought to understand it (Eph. 3:8-11; 1 Tim. 3:16f; 1 Cor. 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:7-12).

It is true, of course, that God had a "greater rest" for these Israelites (as well as for us) that Israel's unbelief in the promised land of Canaan which prevented them from entering there, likewise closed the door to their entering that greater rest. The oath of God cited by David in Psalms 95:7f., *"Today, if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the trials in the*

wilderness ... as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest," came many years after Israel's entrance into Canaan. It was written to warn a generation in Canaan to take heed lest they provoke God as their fathers had provoked Him, lest they suffer the fate of their fathers: forbidden to enter His rest. Yes, ancient worthies, even before the wilderness wandering, looked for "a city which has the foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). And, the inspired observation of the writer, "For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God," proves the accuracy of the statement that ancient worthies did look for a rest beside the rest of Canaan (Heb. 4:9f).

All which leads to this truth. If there was no real danger of falling short of entering into the promised rest, the writer wastes space and time to warn his reader against such a danger! And further, the second appeal of this chapter to us to beware lest we lose our promised rest adds to the above stated truth. The writer urged, "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest," that no one fall after the same example of disobedience (4:11). The writer's use of the word "us" shows that this warning was issued to those who were as he: Christians, children of God, saved. We, as he (Paul?) can lose our rest as did Israel long ago. Are we listening to the warning of the Spirit?

Jim McDonald