

Fact Sheet for **“What Is ‘Rest’ Again?”**  
**Hebrews 4:1-13**

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ESV <sup>1</sup> ¶ Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. <sup>2</sup> For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

*By the way, the good news doesn't always mean “the gospel”. For those in Numbers 14 it meant the good news of the Promised Land.*

<sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, ‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,’”<sup>1</sup> although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS.”<sup>2 5</sup> And again in this passage he said, “THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.”<sup>3 6</sup> Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,<sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, “TODAY,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “TODAY, IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”<sup>4 8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.<sup>9</sup> So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,<sup>10</sup> for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Hebrews 4:1-13 is actually a continuation of 3:7-19. The *English* word “rest” appears twelve times in these twenty-six verses. One Greek word for “rest” is found twice in the third chapter (verses 11, 18) and nine times in the fourth chapter (verses 1, 3, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 10, 11). In addition another *very different* Greek word translated “Sabbath rest” is used in 4:9. The word “rest” appears nowhere else in this book.

It's absolutely important that we get the meaning of this word right or we will be thrown off track with Hebrews. Here's the critical question. Does “rest” *equal* “salvation”? *If it does*, then there are two common ways of interpreting these verses.

**1. It is possible to lose your salvation.**

There are verses in this section like 3:12 and 4:6.

**2. These verses are evangelistic.**

In other words, these verses are directed to those who have not yet believed. The eternal security of the believer is not being discussed. But he seems to be addressing Christians in this book.

However if “rest” does not *equal* salvation, but instead means something different, though related, then there is a third option, as we shall see. Let's begin with those OT references to “rest”. Psalm 95 figures heavily in these 26 verses. The “rest” that this Psalm refers to is Israel's “rest” once they enter the Promised Land. Psalm 95:11 was referring to the tenth time the people of Israel grumbled against God when they received the bad report from 10 of the 12 spies (Numbers 14:22-23). Although the specific word “rest” does not appear in that passage from Numbers it does appear later in passages such as Deuteronomy 12:9. As God was angered by this tenth time they grumbled against Him He swore in His wrath that all those aged 20 and older<sup>5</sup> (other than Joshua and Caleb) would not enter the Promised

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 95:11.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:2.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 95:11.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 95:7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Numbers 14:29.

Land. This was the “rest” that Psalm 95 refers to. *By the way, this did not mean that all those 20 and older were not saved. A whole generation wasn’t lost.* The author of Hebrews also meant something different than Promised Land residence in Hebrews 4:1. Then he quotes Genesis 2:2 about God resting on the seventh day of creation. He cites this passage from the creation account specifically for one word, found twice that verse. “work”. Think about it. The author of Hebrews is not using the identical contextual meanings of “rest” from those OT passages. Instead he is using the word “rest” from those passages to illustrate his thoughts. But again, does “rest” *equal* salvation? Let me pull three illustrations.

### Biblical History

The Jewish mindset was geared to the Mosaic Law. What many missed was that salvation was still by faith. When Jesus was crucified for our sin and rose again from the dead, salvation by faith instead of works was so very difficult for a Jewish person to wrap their minds around. Many Jewish believers were tempted to return to a works-based attempt to be acceptable to God. There is a NT book dealing specifically with this, Galatians. Take a moment to read 1:6-7; 2:16; 3:1-3, 6; 4:9; and 5:1.

### Church History

The Reformation produced three great statements: *Sola scriptura* – by Scripture alone, *Sola fide* – by faith alone, and *Sola gratia* – by grace alone. What’s amazing is that it took so long for this to be said so strongly.

### Recent Theology

Lordship Salvation – Read about this at [www.gotquestions.org/lordship-salvation.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/lordship-salvation.html). Notice how close the line between faith and works is. It’s easy to fall off the line of this theology to either way.

For the author of Hebrews this is his point. Do we confidently “rest” in a faith-based salvation, or are we bound to a works-based feeling of how to be acceptable to God? I take this “rest” in a faith-based salvation to be the “Sabbath rest” mentioned earlier.

But the author of Hebrews is also careful to present God’s balance between faith and works.

That “rest” is only to be found in a faith-based salvation, and a works-based salvation will always fall short when you think of God’s standard of holiness.

<sup>11</sup> ¶ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. <sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

This standard of holiness goes far beyond the Mosaic Law.

But here’s the balance. Even though we rest in a salvation by faith we still must give an account of our lives one day to God.

**to whom we must give account** – This is a better English translation than the KJV & NASB “with whom we have to do”

**account** – the same Greek term for **word** at the beginning of verse 12. It is also the same word used in Romans 14:12.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 14:12** So then each of us will give an **account** of himself to God.

“Rest” in these 26 verses of Hebrews *does not equal* salvation. Instead it is a reference to our “resting” in, or our enjoyment of, a faith-based salvation. But that faith-based salvation still comes with the promise that one day we will give an account of ourselves to God. Don’t let anyone shake you from this balance!