
Words of Truth

Hebrews 4:1

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At the conclusion of the previous chapter, as it is divided up in our Bibles, the writer of this letter was drawing them back to the disbelief of Israel in the wilderness. Those that did not believe were not permitted to enter into the land promised to the children of Israel (Hebrews 3:15-19; cf. Numbers 13:1-14:38). From the points made there, we then read this: *“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it”* (Hebrews 4:1).

As we all should do in our studies of the Scriptures, it was time for the folks addressed in this epistle to learn from things that occurred in the past (Romans 15:4, I Corinthians 10:1-13, II Timothy 3:14-17, and James 5:10-11). Consider that God winked at ignorance in those times (Acts 17:30). If they were not allowed to enter into their reward, what does that mean for those whom have been enlightened through the Gospel (I Peter 4:17-19)?

The Holy Spirit moved the penman of this letter to use clear terminology. He wrote the aforementioned things to bring about fear. We have already studied that God sent Jesus into this world to, in part, deliver the faithful from the bondage of the fear of death (Hebrews 2:9-15). The Hebrew writer is not trying to undo what Jesus did. He is not trying to bring about a fear that is not productive. The writer of this letter is working to bring about the fear that moves one to obedience. Later in this letter we will read this: *“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith”* (Hebrews 11:7).

Think about the purpose of the fear that this text is supposed to bring about. When Moses was giving the beginning of the old law (Exodus 20:1-17), we read this: *“And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was”* (Exodus 20:18-21). Solomon wrote: *“Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil... The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death... By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the*

LORD men depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:7, Proverbs 14:27, Proverbs 16:6). In the epistle to the congregation in Philippi, we read this: *“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Philippians 2:12).

From the Scriptures we have just read through, we can see clearly that godly fear can be profitable in keeping us from erring from the Lord. Later, in the letter of Hebrews we find this: *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire”* (Hebrews 12:28-29). Such principles were not foreign to Jews who obeyed the Gospel of Christ (Deuteronomy 6:13, Deuteronomy 10:12, Deuteronomy 13:4, Psalms 2:11, Psalms 89:7, etc.).

One of the problems among Jews in the first century was that they continued in the sinful ways of their fathers (Luke 11:45-48 and Acts 7:51-53). Converting into Christ did not wholly deal with that problem. The goal in this text, and even throughout the whole letter, is to prevent a repeat of the past. They needed to look backwards at the errors of those that came before them and learn from them. For saints, there is the promise of eternal life (I John 2:25). It was terrible that a generation did not enter into the land promised to their fathers. However, we are talking about eternity now. Heaven and Hell hang in the balance (Matthew 25:31-46).

The language of “come short of it” should cause some thought just as much as the instruction concerning fear. The Greek term that phrase comes from is “ὕστερέω”. It means: “to be later, i.e. (by implication) to be inferior; generally, to fall short (be deficient): — come behind (short), be destitute, fail, lack, suffer need, (be in) want, be the worse. Behind; to come late or too tardily; to be left behind in the race and so fail to reach the goal, to fall short of the end; metaph. fail to become a partaker, fall back from to be inferior in power, influence and rank; of the person: to be inferior to; to fail, be wanting; to be in want of, lack; to suffer want, to be devoid of, to lack (be inferior) in excellence, worth” (Strong’s # 5302).

The man commonly known as the “Rich Young Ruler” (Matthew 19:16-30) used this term when he asked Jesus: *“what lack I yet?”* (Matthew 19:20)? Later in this Hebrew letter, this term appears in Hebrews 12:15 when the warning was not to *“fail of the grace of God.”* This applies to saints. Specifically, those who are on the way to the finish line, but don’t make it. Paul finished the course (II Timothy 4:6-8) as he was determined to (I Corinthians 9:19-27). With that thought, consider this as our conclusion: *“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul”* (Hebrews 10:35-39).