Hebrews 4:11-13

**Digging Deeper in the Word**

Wyn Laidig & Andrew Warner

March 2019

***Hebrews 4:11–13*** (ESV)  
**11** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. **12** 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. **13** 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.

1. Briefly summarize Hebrews 4:1-10.

Ch 1: Yeshua sits at the right hand of God. He reigns with God and as the Son of God reigns as God himself. He is greater than angels (messengers), therefore His words and teachings are greater than any message from messengers (whether heavenly or earthly).

Ch. 2: If the Torah given through messengers was reliable and to be followed, how much more so should we then follow the words of the Messiah. Even though Yeshua is greater than the angels, and his message is greater than that given by the angels to Moses, yet Yeshua was for a while lower than angels, having become man, in order to save man from slavery to fear and death. He was sent from God to be our merciful and faithful high priest.

Ch 3: Yeshua is an apostle and high priest, greater than Moses. Moses was a servant. Yeshua was the son. We must hold fast our faith in Him, and not allow sin to harden our hearts like our ancestors did when they disobeyed Moses. And we know the result of that! None of those who were disobedient were allowed to enter the promised land. Encourage one another not to fall away. Don’t be like your ancestors who didn’t listen to Moses, and didn’t receive God’s promises. NOW, listen to Yeshua, who is greater than Moses and who brings a message greater than that of Moses.

Heb 4:1-10. The Sabbath rest was for God’s people if they obeyed His Word. They would have entered the promised land, and would have totally conquered it, and would have rested. Just as the Father rested after creation on the Sabbath. But because of their disobedience, they never reached that rest. The land was never totally theirs. They were eventually exiled. But TODAY, the promise is still here. If we choose to obey His Word, we may still rest. The Son conquered sin and death for us… He made the way for us, since our forefathers failed to do it.

1. Look at Heb 4:11. Consider the parallel between the situation in Moses’ day with the situation of the Hebrews at the time of the writing of this letter. In Moses’ day, when the people were commanded to enter the promise land (and enter His rest), who wanted to obey and who didn’t? **Who** is author of Hebrews encouraging the people to be like, and **why**?

They were supposed to be like Joshua and Caleb, who had the faith required to enter the promised land, even when it seemed too hard, and even when everyone else opposed them. Everyone else (all their brothers “in the faith”) disobeyed and ended up not receiving the promise. Only Joshua and Caleb were willing to stand against the voice of all their brothers. And only those two were allowed to enter the promised land.

1. Recall that prior to the time of the writing of Hebrews, Jacob, the brother of Yeshua, who was the leader of the Way, had just been murdered by the traditional Jewish leadership. What socio-religious pressures would the believers in Messiah have felt during this time? How was their situation similar to that of Joshua and Caleb in Moses’s day?

The majority opinion said Yeshua was a false prophet and deserved his death. The majority opinion said the followers of the Way were heretics, and that they should forget about “that man”. There was huge social and religious pressure upon the early believers to give in and join “in harmony” with the rest of their Jewish brothers and sisters.

They are urged to be like Joshua and Caleb, to not listen to the strong opposing voice of all their brothers. The situation is the same as in Moses’ day. Once again, all their brothers will not enter into His rest, but will perish. The choice is before them. Will they repeat the mistake of their forefathers or will they stand like Joshua and Caleb?

1. Verses12 and 13 present a different thought. What is the main point of these two verses?

The main point seems to be that the Word is powerful and God sees all, including the thoughts and intentions hidden in one’s heart. Furthermore, we will have to give account to Him for how we live our lives.

1. How does Heb 4:12-13 connect with the prior passage? Why is the author writing these things here?

It seems that the desired response of Heb 4:12-13 is for the people to obey God’s word. They disobeyed in the past. That was equated with disbelief in God’s word. Now they have a chance to obey. To believe is to obey. Verse 11 encourages them not to fall into disobedience (from disbelief in the Word). Now they are being told that the Word is truly powerful and that God sees all, and that will all have to give account to him. Therefore, obey! Obey the Word of God!

1. In Heb 4:12, what is “the word of God” the author is referring to? “Word” is translated from the Greek **logos**. Where else has **logos** been used in Hebrews so far? Also refer back to the very beginning of Hebrews.

***Hebrews 2:2*** (ESV)  
**2** For since **the message** declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,

***Hebrews 4:2*** (ESV)  
**2** 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.

“The **logos** of God” clearly refers to the Torah in Heb 2:2 and 4:2. But the author is constantly making comparisons between the **logos** heard “then” and “now”. “**For the good news came to us just as to them.”**

***Hebrews 1:1–2*** (ESV)  
**1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, **God spoke to our fathers by the prophets**, **2** ~~but~~ in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son…

God speaks his word. His **logos.** Clearly from the onset of Hebrews we see the author equating God’s logos through Moses and prophets (the Torah and the Tanach) with the God’s logos spoken through the Messiah.

Here, while the statements about God’s word can apply to both the Torah and the logos of Yeshua, it seems the main emphasis is for the people to take it to be the latter. They are being encouraged to live in obedience to the words of Messiah, which as we know teach the way of obedience to the Torah.

1. Looking at Heb 4:12, in what way is the Word “living”? The same term is used in 1 Pet 1:23. Consider also 1 Cor 2:7-13.

***1 Peter 1:22–25*** (ESV)  
**22** Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, **23** since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through **the living and abiding word of God**; **24** for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, **25** but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

***1 Corinthians 2:7–13*** (ESV)  
**7** But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **8** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9** But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— **10** **these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God**. **11** For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but **taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths** to those who are spiritual.

The Word produces life! Like a seed planted. It does not return void. We are alive in Yeshua and He is alive in us!

God’s word – that spoken by Moses as well as that spoken by Yeshua – is alive in that continues to exist and have effect in people. (It abides – resides within people). It is also alive in that it continues to be communicated differently – first by Moses, then by Yeshua, and now by the Holy Spirit. It is not that the Word itself is different, but rather that the way it is communicated is different. Yeshua did not communicate something different from the Word of YHWH given to Moses, nor does the Spirit of God today communicate something different. Moses, Yeshua, and the Spirit help us to understand the unchanging Word so that we know better HOW we may live for Him.

1. In Heb 4:12, what is the Greek word translated as “active”? How is God’s Word “active”? Consider Isaiah 55:10-11.

***Isaiah 55:10–11*** (ESV)  
**10** “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, **11** so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but **it shall accomplish that which I purpose,** and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

This comes from the Greek “energes”. This is where our English word “energy” derives. This word denotes action. God’s Word is not passive – it brings about action. It puts His will into motion. God’s word does not come back empty but rather always accomplishes His purpose. This is “active.”.

1. In Heb 4:12 states the word of God is “sharper than a two edged sword”. What is the purpose or advantage of a two edged sword over a regular single edged word? What does this imply about the Word? Consider 2 Cor 2:14-16.

***2 Corinthians 2:14–16*** (ESV)  
**14** But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. **15** For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, **16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life**. Who is sufficient for these things?

A two edged sword cuts in either direction – coming and going. It implies the two-fold nature of the **use** of the Word. The Word has its intended effect, regardless of the “direction”. Used upon believers it brings peace, joy, grace and forgiveness, resulting in intimacy with the Father and eternal life. To the one who refuses to believe, it only brings more turmoil, guilt, and the growing weight of sin, resulting in separation from the Father and eternal death.

1. Look at various uses of soul (HB nefesh, GR psuxe) and spirit (HB ruach GR pneuma) in the Scriptures. Minimally consider Mat 16:26, Eph 6:6, Phil 1:27, Ex 25:21, Matt 26:41. How would you distinguish between the “spirit” vs “soul” of a person? How are they both the same?

***1 Thessalonians 5:23*** (ESV)  
**23** Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

***Matthew 16:26*** (ESV)  
**26** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his **soul**? Or what shall a man give in return for his **soul**?

***Ephesians 6:6*** (ESV)  
**6** not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the **heart** (lit. **soul**)

***Philippians 1:27*** (ESV)  
**27** Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one **spirit**, with one **mind** (lit. **soul**) striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

***Exodus 35:21*** (ESV)  
**21** And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose **spirit** moved him, and brought the Lord’s contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments.

***Matthew 26:41*** (ESV)  
**41** Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The **spirit** indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

While there are some differences, it seems that both spirit and soul can refer to the “inner self”. They both refer to that part of a person which is not physical -- not the body. So, in that sense they are the same. Yet they are somewhat different, in that spirit tends to emphasize the spiritual nature of man – his relationship with God, and his ability to commune with God. The soul tends to emphasize the mind, thoughts and emotions of man. There is much overlap between the two, yet the focus is slightly different.

1. Heb 4:12 speaks of the Word like the sword, in some way “distinguishing” (dividing, distributing, discerning) between three pairs of terms:  
    a) soul and spirit  
    b) joints and marrow  
    c) thoughts and intentions  
   How are the two terms in each pairs the same or different? What is the connection between them all? Recall again the main point of this verse.

Soul and spirit we discussed above. They both refer to the inner self. That which is not seen on the outside. Joints and marrow likewise refer to the inner, unseen part of the body. It does not say bones and marrow, but rather joints and marrow. Both of these are “inside the bone”, hidden deeply inside the body. The same also with thoughts and intentions. These are hidden things within the mind. Totally unseen.

The emphasis with each of these pairs is really:

a) the similar nature of each term, and

b) that both terms in each pair refer to something that is hidden deep within.

This, the word of God penetrates to the most hidden depths. **It discerns even at the level of that which is outwardly indiscernible**. Nothing is hidden from Him.

1. Some argue that man is composed of three distinct parts -- body, soul, and spirit -- based on Heb 4:12 and 1 Thes 5:23. What do you think of this, in light of the above discussion?

It is not really justified from Scripture. Heb 4:12 really focusses the fact that soul and spirit are both deeply hidden -- and the word exposes even the most hidden parts of a person. Actually it seems this passages more aptly argues for the similarity of the terms, and that they are nearly indiscernible in nature.

1. Heb 4:13 brings an end to this argument. What is his final point?

God’s word penetrates the depth of one’s being. And he sees everyone. Nothing can be hidden from Him.

1. In Heb 4:13, the last phrase is usually translated “to whom we must give account”. This is actually an interesting “word-play” with one of the key words in our passage. What is the actual Greek word for “account” here? What is the literal translation of this phrase? Compare to similar usage in Matt 12:36. What is the word play being used?

***Hebrews 4:13*** (ESV)  
**13** 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.** (lit. **to whom [is] the word /** GR logos)

***Matthew 12:36*** (ESV)  
**36** I tell you, on the day of judgment people will **give account** (lit. **give back the word** / GR logos) for every careless word they speak,

To give “the word” is an idiom for “giving account.” So GR **logos** is used here in that sense. The entire passage is about the **logos** of God. The **logos** of God sees everything in everyone. Those who refuse to **shema** his **logos** will have to **give logos** to Him for their action.