

Hebrews 3
February 28, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: If you were a Jew with a strong upbringing in the Torah, who are the forefathers of your faith that you might greatly admire and why? [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob]

Next to Abraham, Moses was undoubtedly the man most greatly revered by the Jewish people. Remember that the writer of Hebrews is communicating to a discouraged group of Jewish Christians who want to go back to the Law, which meant going back to Moses. The readers of this Letter to the Hebrews were sorely tempted to do just that. It was important that the writer convince his readers that Jesus Christ is greater than Moses, for the entire system of Jewish religion came through Moses.

Transition: As we read the author's reasoning as to why Christ is superior to Moses, I want you to consider that **all of us can encourage one another to keep our faith in Christ alone by reminding ourselves of the reasons why our faith should be in Jesus.**

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.1:

- Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

V.2:

- He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.

V.3:

- Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.

V.4:

- For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.

V.5:

- Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future.

V.6:

- But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.1: What is the "therefore" there for? [The author has given a compelling argument as to why Christ is superior to even the angels over the first two chapters of his epistle.]

Q: Who are these Jewish Christians to fix their thoughts on and why? [Jesus – because He is an apostle and the high priest to whom we confess.]

Q: What does it mean that Jesus was an “apostle?” We rarely hear that title assigned to Jesus. [“one sent with a commission.”]

Q: What did Jesus do that allowed Him to become our High Priest? [He came to earth to make atonement for our sin. He was our sinless sacrifice.]

Q v.2: How does the author describe Jesus? [He was “faithful to God who appointed Him”]

Observation v.3-5: Because these Jewish Christians were tempted to gravitate back to the old sacrificial system and be under the Law, the author compares Jesus to Moses, because the Jews highly respected Moses as their leader. So let’s look at some REASONS as to why Jesus was even greater than Moses:

- Jesus had greater honor than Moses because He built the house. [The builder is the one we celebrate – not the house itself.]
- Jesus was faithful as a “son over God’s house,” whereas Moses was only a “servant” in the house of God.

Observation v.5: The Greek word translated “servant” (Heb. 3:5) is not the usual New Testament word for servant or slave. This word carries the meaning of “*a voluntary servant who acts because of affection.*” In the New Testament, it is used only of Moses. At the beginning of his ministry, Moses was a bit hesitant and resisted God’s call. But once he surrendered, he obeyed out of a heart of love and devotion.

Q v.6: How does the author describe the family of God? [As believers, *we are His house*. We are the living stones!] X-REF I Peter 2:4-10

Q: Let’s summarize. What are some REASONS that Jesus is superior to Moses?

- Christ is an apostle - “one sent with a commission.” Moses was called and commissioned by God, but Jesus Christ was *sent* as God’s “last Word” to sinful man.
- Christ is our High Priest - Moses was a prophet who on occasion served as a priest (see Ps. 99:6), but he was never a high priest.
- Moses was a *servant in the house*, while Jesus Christ is a *Son over the house*. Moses was a member of the household, but Jesus *built* the house!
- The Prophet Moses spoke about things to come, but Jesus Christ brought the fulfillment of these things (Heb. 3:6).

Transition: The wandering of Israel in the wilderness is a major topic in this section. Two men in that nation—Caleb and Joshua—illustrate the attitude described in Hebrews 3:6. Everybody else in Israel over the age of twenty was to die in the wilderness and never enter the Promised Land (see Num. 14:26–38). But Caleb and Joshua believed God and God honored their faith. For forty years, Caleb and Joshua watched their friends and relatives die; but those two men of faith had confidence in God’s Word that they would one day enter Canaan. While others were experiencing sorrow and death, Caleb and Joshua rejoiced in confident hope. As believers, we

know that God is taking us to heaven, and we should reveal the same kind of joyful confidence and hope.

[Read Heb 3:7-19]

V.7:

- So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice,

V.8:

- do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert,

V.9:

- where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.

V.10:

- That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’

V.11:

- So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ”

V.12:

- See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

V.13:

- But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

V.14:

- We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

V.15:

- As has just been said: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”

V.16:

- Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?

V.17:

- And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?

V.18:

- And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?

V.19:

- So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.7-11: Why was God angry at the Israelites? [The writer quotes from Psalm 95:7–11, which records God’s response to Israel’s tragic spiritual condition. God had delivered His people from Egypt and had cared for them, revealing His power in many signs and wonders. Israel saw all of this and benefited from it, but the experience did not bring them closer to God or make them trust Him more. All that God did for them did not benefit them spiritually. In fact, just the opposite took place: they hardened their hearts against God!]

Q: How do hearts go “astray?” Are we just as vulnerable to our hearts going astray as the Israelites? [When we depend less on God and His Word]

Q: If you were in God’s shoes, wouldn’t you be exasperated after demonstrating your power and might and providing for His children every step of the way – only to be met with lack of faith in Him?

Q v.11: The Scripture reads, “I declared an oath in anger, ‘they shall never enter my rest.’” This verse tends to unsettle people. Is the author saying that the Israelites who hardened their heart went to hell? [No, but let people wrestle with the phrase “rest.”]

Share Wiersbe: It was not God’s will that Israel remain either in Egypt or in the wilderness. His desire was that the people enter their glorious inheritance in the land of Canaan. But when Israel got to the border of their inheritance, they delayed because they doubted the promise of God (Num. 13–14). “We are not able” wept the ten spies and the people. “We *are* able with God’s help!” said Moses, Joshua, and Caleb. Because the people went backward in unbelief instead of forward by faith, they missed their inheritance and died in the wilderness. It was the new generation that possessed the land and entered into their rest.

But here’s what we need to understand about the phrase “enter my rest”: The writer mentioned two different “rests” found in Old Testament history: (1) *God’s Sabbath rest*, when He ceased from His Creation activities (Gen. 2:2; Heb. 4:4); (2) *Israel’s rest in Canaan* (Deut. 12:9; Josh. 21:43–45; Heb. 3:11). But he saw in these “rests” illustrations of the spiritual experiences of believers today. The Sabbath rest is a picture of our rest in Christ through salvation (Heb. 4:3; see Matt. 11:28). The Canaan rest is a picture of our present rest as we claim our inheritance in Christ (Heb. 4:11–13; note the emphasis on the Word of God). The first is the rest of salvation; the second is the rest of submission.

Q: So what is the takeaway for believers? [No believer today, Jew or Gentile, could go back into the Mosaic legal system since the temple is gone and there is no priesthood. But every believer is tempted to give up his confession of Christ and go back into the world system’s life of compromise and bondage.]

Note v.12: The sin of Israel is stated in Hebrews 3:12—“departing from the living God.” The Greek word gives us our English word “apostasy.” This is the only place this word is used in Hebrews. Does “apostasy” mean abandoning one’s faith and therefore being condemned forever? That does not fit into this context. Israel departed from the living God by refusing God’s will for their lives and stubbornly wanting to go their own way back to Egypt. God did not permit them to return to Egypt. Rather, He disciplined them in the wilderness. God did not allow His people to return to bondage.

Q v.13: What does the author suggest we do to avoid moving toward a “sinful, unbelieving heart?” [Encourage one another DAILY while you have the opportunity.]

Q v.14-15: The writer is trying to be a cheerleader in a sense. What is the carrot he's holding out to his readers? [Note "share in the heavenly calling" in v.1. the writer reverted to the supreme privilege of being among the "many sons" whom God is bringing to the glory of shared dominion over the created order which Christ is destined to rule.]

Reinforce real message of v.16-19: Naturally it had nothing to do with the question of their going to hell, so it would be wrong to allege that the entire Exodus generation was unregenerate. But exclusion from Canaan was a consequence of their lack of faith in the power of God to bring them into it in victory over their enemies, a failure that in principle might be repeated by the readers of Hebrews if they forgot Messiah's ultimate triumph over His enemies and theirs (cf. 1:13-14).

LOOK:

All of us experience times when our faith is challenged. There are times that we can get discouraged in our spiritual journey. What the writer of Hebrews has suggested is that we need one another. When we notice a brother or sister in Christ going through trials or discouragement, we are exhorted to seize the opportunity to encourage one another. We need to remind one another of Christ's superiority and the promises He's already given us.

Let's do that "as long as it is called Today!"

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 285–289). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Next to Abraham, Moses was undoubtedly the man most greatly revered by the Jewish people. To go back to the Law meant to go back to Moses, and the recipients of this Letter to the Hebrews were sorely tempted to do just that. It was important that the writer convince his readers that Jesus Christ is greater than Moses, for the entire system of Jewish religion came through Moses. In this section, we learn that Jesus Christ is superior to Moses in at least three respects.

Christ Is Greater in His Person (Heb. 3:1–2)

The twofold description of the readers makes it clear that they were converted people. “Holy brethren” could only be applied to people in the family of God, set apart by the grace of God. That the writer was referring to people in the church, the body of Christ, is clear from his use of the phrase “partakers of the heavenly calling.” No unconverted Jew or Gentile could ever claim that blessing! The word translated “partakers” here is translated “partners” in Luke 5:7, where it describes the relationship of four men in the fishing business: they were in it together.

True Christians not only share in a heavenly calling, but they also share in Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:14). Through the Holy Spirit, we are “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph. 5:30). True believers are also “partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. 6:4). “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9). Because we are God’s children, we also partake in God’s loving chastening (Heb. 12:8). Not to be chastened is evidence that a person is not one of God’s children.

Because these people were holy brothers and sisters, and partakers of a heavenly calling, they were able to give a “confession” of their faith in Jesus Christ. The word simply means “to say the same thing.” All true Christians “say the same thing” when it comes to their experience of salvation. Twice in this epistle, the writer exhorted the readers to hold fast to this confession (Heb. 4:14; 10:23, NASB). It was this same confession that they were “strangers and pilgrims” on the earth that characterized men and women of faith in the ages past (Heb. 11:13).

It was not Moses who did all of this for the people addressed in this epistle; it was Jesus Christ! The writer did not exhort them to consider Moses, but to consider Christ. The word means “to consider *carefully*, to understand fully.” This is no quick glance at Jesus Christ! It is a careful consideration of who He is and what He has done.

That Christ is superior to Moses in His person is an obvious fact. Moses was a mere man, called to be a prophet and leader, while Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent by the Father into the world. The title *apostle* means “one sent with a commission.” Moses was called and commissioned by God, but Jesus Christ was *sent* as God’s “last Word” to sinful man. You may want to read some of the verses in the Gospel of John where Jesus is referred to as “sent from God” (John 3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3; and note also 13:3).

Jesus Christ is not only the Apostle, but He is also the High Priest. Moses was a prophet who on occasion served as a priest (see Ps. 99:6), but he was never a high priest. That title belonged to his brother Aaron. In fact, Jesus Christ has the title “great High Priest” (Heb. 4:14).

As the Apostle, Jesus Christ represented God to men; and as the High Priest, He now represents men to God in heaven. Moses, of course, fulfilled similar ministries, for he taught

Israel God's truth and he prayed for Israel when he met God on the mount (see Ex. 32:30–32). Moses was primarily the prophet of Law, while Jesus Christ is the Messenger of God's grace (see John 1:17). Moses helped prepare the way for the coming of the Saviour to the earth.

However, the writer of Hebrews notes that Moses and Jesus Christ were *both* faithful in the work God gave them to do. Moses was not sinless, as was Jesus Christ, but he was faithful and obeyed God's will (Num. 12:7). This would be an encouragement to those first-century Jewish believers to remain faithful to Christ, even in the midst of the tough trials they were experiencing. Instead of going back to Moses, they should *imitate* Moses and be faithful in their calling.

Christ Is Greater in His Ministry (Heb. 3:3–6)

The word “house” is used six times in these verses. It refers to the people of God, not to a material building. Moses ministered to Israel, the people of God under the Old Covenant. Today, Christ ministers to His church, the people of God under the New Covenant (“whose house are we,” Heb. 3:6). You find an illustration of this dual use of “house” in 2 Samuel 7. David wanted to build a temple for God, a house in which God could dwell. But God told David that He would build David's house (household, family) and make a covenant with David's descendants.

The contrast between Moses and Christ is clear: Moses was a *servant in the house*, while Jesus Christ is a *Son over the house*. Moses was a member of the household, but Jesus *built* the house! By the way, the truth in these verses is a powerful argument for the deity of Jesus Christ. If God built all things, and Jesus Christ built God's house, then Jesus Christ must be God.

There is another factor in Christ's superiority over Moses: the Prophet Moses spoke about things to come, but Jesus Christ brought the fulfillment of these things (Heb. 3:6). Moses ministered “in the shadows,” as it were (see Heb. 8:5 and 10:1), while Jesus Christ brought the full and final light of the Gospel of the grace of God.

The Greek word translated “servant” (Heb. 3:5) is not the usual New Testament word for servant or slave. This word carries the meaning of “a voluntary servant who acts because of affection.” In the New Testament, it is used only of Moses. At the beginning of his ministry, Moses was a bit hesitant and resisted God's call. But once he surrendered, he obeyed out of a heart of love and devotion.

The “if” clause (Heb. 3:6) needs to be understood in the light of the total context, which is Moses leading Israel out of Egypt and to the Promised Land. The writer is not suggesting that we, as Christians, must keep ourselves saved. This would contradict the major theme of the book, which is the finished work of Christ and His heavenly ministry guaranteeing our eternal salvation (Heb. 7:14ff). Rather, the writer is affirming that those who hold fast their confidence and hope are proving that they are truly born again.

The word “confidence” literally means “freedom of speech, openness.” When you are free to speak, then there is no fear and you have confidence. A believer can come with boldness (same word as “confidence”) to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16) with openness and freedom and not be afraid. We have this boldness because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:19). Therefore, we should not cast away our confidence, no matter what the circumstances might be. We should not have confidence in ourselves, because we are too prone to fail; but we should have confidence in Jesus Christ who never fails.

Because of this confidence in Christ and this confession of Christ, we can experience joy and hope (Heb. 3:6). The writer exhorted these suffering saints to *enjoy* their spiritual experience and not simply *endure* it. Jesus Christ is the beloved Son over His house, and He will care for each

member of the family. He is the faithful High Priest who provides all the grace we need for each demand of life. As the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:19–20), Jesus Christ is using the experiences in His people’s lives to equip them for service that will glorify His name.

In other words, those who have trusted Christ *prove* this confession by their steadfastness, confidence, and joyful hope. They are not burdened by the past or threatened by the present, but are “living in the future tense” as they await the “blessed hope” of their Lord’s return. It is this “heavenly calling” that motivates the believers to keep on living for the Saviour even when the going is tough.

The wandering of Israel in the wilderness is a major topic in this section. Two men in that nation—Caleb and Joshua—illustrate the attitude described in Hebrews 3:6. Everybody else in Israel over the age of twenty was to die in the wilderness and never enter the Promised Land (see Num. 14:26–38). But Caleb and Joshua believed God and God honored their faith. For forty years, Caleb and Joshua watched their friends and relatives die; but those two men of faith had confidence in God’s Word that they would one day enter Canaan. While others were experiencing sorrow and death, Caleb and Joshua rejoiced in confident hope. As believers, we know that God is taking us to heaven, and we should reveal the same kind of joyful confidence and hope.

Christ Is Greater in the Rest He Gives (Heb. 3:7–4:13)

This long section is the second of the five exhortations in this epistle. In the first exhortation (Heb. 2:1–4), the writer pointed out the danger of *drifting* from the Word because of neglect. In this exhortation, he explains the danger of *doubting* and *disbelieving* the Word because of hardness of heart. It is important that we understand the background of this section, which is the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and their experiences of unbelief in the wilderness.

To begin with, we must understand that there are spiritual lessons in the geography of Israel’s experiences. The nation’s bondage in Egypt is an illustration of a sinner’s bondage in this world. Much as Israel was delivered from Egypt by the blood of lambs and the power of God, so a sinner who believes on Christ is delivered from the bondage of sin (Col. 1:13–14). Jesus Christ is “the Lamb of God” whose death and resurrection have made our deliverance from sin a reality.

It was not God’s will that Israel remain either in Egypt or in the wilderness. His desire was that the people enter their glorious inheritance in the land of Canaan. But when Israel got to the border of their inheritance, they delayed because they doubted the promise of God (Num. 13–14). “We are not able” wept the ten spies and the people. “We *are* able with God’s help!” said Moses, Joshua, and Caleb. Because the people went backward in unbelief instead of forward by faith, they missed their inheritance and died in the wilderness. It was the new generation that possessed the land and entered into their rest.

What does Canaan represent to us as Christians today? It represents our spiritual inheritance in Christ (Eph. 1:3, 11, 15–23). It is unfortunate that some of our hymns and Gospel songs use Canaan as a picture of heaven, and “crossing the Jordan” as a picture of death. Since Canaan was a place of battles, and even of defeats, it is not a good illustration of heaven! Israel had to cross the river by faith (a picture of the believer as he dies to self and the world, Rom. 6) and claim the inheritance by faith. They had to “step out by faith” (Josh. 1:3) and claim the land for themselves, just as believers today must do.

Now we can understand what the wilderness wanderings represent: the experiences of believers who will not claim their spiritual inheritance in Christ, who doubt God’s Word and live

in restless unbelief. To be sure, God is with them, as He was with Israel; but they do not enjoy the fullness of God’s blessing. They are “out of Egypt” but they are not yet “in Canaan.”

With this background, we can now better understand one of the key words in this section—*rest* (Heb. 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3–5, 8–11). The writer mentioned two different “rests” found in Old Testament history: (1) *God’s Sabbath rest*, when He ceased from His Creation activities (Gen. 2:2; Heb. 4:4); (2) *Israel’s rest in Canaan* (Deut. 12:9; Josh. 21:43–45; Heb. 3:11). But he saw in these “rests” illustrations of the spiritual experiences of believers today. The Sabbath rest is a picture of our rest in Christ through salvation (Heb. 4:3; see Matt. 11:28). The Canaan rest is a picture of our present rest as we claim our inheritance in Christ (Heb. 4:11–13; note the emphasis on the Word of God). The first is the rest of salvation; the second is the rest of submission.

But there is a third rest that enters into the discussion, that *future rest* that all believers will enjoy with God. “There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). This word for rest is the Greek word *SABBATISMOS*—“a keeping of a Sabbath”—and this is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. When the saints enter heaven, it will be like sharing God’s great Sabbath rest, with all labors and battles ended (Rev. 14:13).

We may diagram these rests in this way:

<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
God’s Sabbath rest	Salvation rest	Heaven
Israel’s Canaan rest	Submission rest (victory in Christ)	

With this background of Israel’s history and the “rests” involved, we may now examine the passage itself. The writer gives a threefold admonition.

Let us take heed (vv. 7–19). Take heed to what? To the sad history of the nation of Israel and the important lesson it teaches. The writer quotes from Psalm 95:7–11, which records God’s response to Israel’s tragic spiritual condition. God had delivered His people from Egypt and had cared for them, revealing His power in many signs and wonders. Israel saw all of this and benefited from it, but the experience did not bring them closer to God or make them trust Him more. All that God did for them did not benefit them spiritually. In fact, just the opposite took place: they hardened their hearts against God! They put God to the test and He did not fail them; yet they failed Him.

The heart of every problem is a problem in the heart. The people of Israel (except Moses, Joshua, and Caleb) erred in their hearts (Heb. 3:10), which means that their hearts wandered from God and His Word. They also had evil hearts of unbelief (Heb. 3:12); they did not believe that God would give them victory in Canaan. They had seen God perform great signs in Egypt. Yet they doubted He was adequate for the challenge of Canaan.

When a person has an *erring* heart and a *disbelieving* heart, the result will also be a *hard* heart. This is a heart that is insensitive to the Word and work of God. So hard was the heart of Israel that the people even wanted to return to Egypt! Imagine wanting to exchange their freedom under God for slavery in Egypt! Of course, all this history spoke to the hearts of the readers of this letter because they were in danger of “going back” themselves.

God’s judgment fell on Israel in the wilderness at Kadesh Barnea. That entire generation was condemned to die, and only the new generation would enter the land. God said, “They shall not enter into My rest” (Heb. 3:11). But what message does this bring to a believer today? No

believer today, Jew or Gentile, could go back into the Mosaic legal system since the temple is gone and there is no priesthood. But every believer is tempted to give up his confession of Christ and go back into the world system's life of compromise and bondage. This is especially true during times of persecution and suffering. The fires of persecution have always purified the church because suffering separates true believers from the counterfeit. True believers are willing to suffer for Christ and they hold firmly to their convictions and their confession of faith (see Heb. 3:6, 14). We are not saved by holding to our confession. The fact that we hold to our confession is proof that we are God's true children.

It is important that we take heed and recognize the spiritual dangers that exist. But it is also important that we encourage each other to be faithful to the Lord (Heb. 3:13). We get the impression that some of these believers addressed were careless about their fellowship in the local assembly (see Heb. 10:23–25). Christians belong to each other and need each other. Moses, Caleb, and Joshua did try to encourage Israel when the nation refused to enter Canaan, but the people would not listen.

It is clear from this section that God was grieved with Israel during the entire forty years they wandered in the wilderness. The Jews had not been out of Egypt long when they began to provoke God (Ex. 16:1ff). After He supplied bread for them, they complained about a lack of water (Ex. 17:1–7). Moses called that place “Massah and Meribah” which means “provocation and trial.” These same words are used in Hebrews 3:10.

The sin of Israel is stated in Hebrews 3:12—“departing from the living God.” The Greek word gives us our English word “apostasy.” This is the only place this word is used in Hebrews. Does “apostasy” mean abandoning one's faith and therefore being condemned forever? That does not fit into this context. Israel departed from the living God by refusing God's will for their lives and stubbornly wanting to go their own way back to Egypt. God did not permit them to return to Egypt. Rather, He disciplined them in the wilderness. God did not allow His people to return to bondage.

The emphasis in Hebrews is that true believers have an eternal salvation because they trust a living Saviour who constantly intercedes for them. But the writer is careful to point out that this confidence is no excuse for sin. God disciplines His children. Remember that Canaan is not a picture of heaven, but of the believer's present spiritual inheritance in Christ. Believers who doubt God's Word and rebel against Him do not miss heaven, but they do miss out on the blessings of their inheritance today, and they must suffer the chastening of God.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 785-787). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

1. THE CALL FOR FAITHFULNESS (3:1–6)

3:1. The readers were now addressed as **holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling**. This form of address gathered up the strands of truth which the author dealt with in chapter 2. They were indeed “brothers” (cf. 3:12; 10:19), not only with one another but with their Captain (2:11–12), and they were “holy” because He had made them so (2:11). They did “share in the heavenly calling” because God was “bringing” them “to glory” (2:10). The words “who share” are rendered “companions” in 1:9 (*metochoi*; this Greek word is also used in this epistle in 3:14; 6:4; 12:8). The author was thinking especially of their high privilege of being invited to participate in the future dominion and joy of God's King-Son.

It was as such people that they were to focus their thinking on the One who is both **the Apostle and High Priest** of their Christian profession. The first of these titles probably points to the Lord Jesus as the One sent forth by God as the supreme Revealer of the Father (cf. 1:1–2), while the second picks up the role just mentioned in 2:17–18.

3:2. The NIV disjoins this verse from the previous one by making it a separate sentence. But connecting it as in the original with verse 1, the statement may read: “Contemplate Jesus ... being faithful to the One who appointed Him.” Taken in this way, the readers are urged to fix their gaze on the person of Christ who is even now **faithful** to God. Thus they would find a model for their own fidelity. The faithfulness of Christ, moreover, has an Old Testament prototype in Moses.

The reference to **Moses** being **faithful in all God’s house** was drawn from Numbers 12:7 in which the tabernacle furnished the backdrop. Hence God’s “house” in the Old Testament situation would be the tabernacle itself which Moses had constructed in strict obedience to the divine directions. It was a prophetic testimony “to what would be said in the future” (Heb. 3:5).

3:3–6a. But **Jesus** as a **Builder** excels **Moses** in **honor** since Moses was simply a servant carrying out instructions. But what Jesus has built is, in fact, **everything**, for **God is the Builder of “everything.”** Implicit here is the Son’s role in Creation (cf. 1:2, 10) and indeed His identification as God (cf. 1:8). But beyond this is the thought that **God’s house** in which **Moses was faithful** was a kind of miniature representation of “everything,” that is, of the greater **house** over which the Son presides at God’s right hand in heaven (cf. 1:3 with 4:14). The “holy of holies” in **His** earthly **house** was but a shadow of heaven itself where Christ has now gone “to appear for us in God’s presence” (9:24). Moses’ fidelity consisted in erecting that shadow house, the tabernacle, so that it could properly prefigure the future order of priestly activity which now has the universe itself as its proper sphere. This is the sphere where the exalted **Christ** sits **faithful** in all His current ministrations as well as past ones, functioning **as a Son over God’s house** (3:6a).

3:6b. By a natural semantic shift to which the Greek word for **house** naturally lends itself, the writer moved from the thought of the house as the sphere where priestly activities transpired to the thought of the “house” as consisting of the people who engaged in these activities. His readers, he affirmed, comprise **His** (the Son’s) “house” contingent, however, on one important consideration: **if they hold on to their courage** (*parrēisian*, used four times in Heb., here and in 4:16; 10:19, 35) **and the hope of which they boast.** As in the earlier warning passage (2:1–4), the writer used “we” and thus included himself within the scope of his admonition. As he will shortly state (3:12), he was concerned that there might be in some of his Christian “brothers” an “unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” Should any of his readers do this, they would forfeit their roles in the Son’s priestly house, which is only maintained by holding firmly to their Christian profession (cf. also v. 14 and 10:23–25, 35–36). The author did not mean, of course, that his readers could forfeit their eternal salvation; it is an error to identify the word “house” with the body of Christ, the true universal church. As the context and the Old Testament background show, the author was thinking in priestly terms. He was also thinking functionally. The exalted Son presides over a priestly apparatus which is an operative reality. As long as the readership held firmly to their Christian commitment, they also functioned within this priestly arrangement. But just as one who was a true Levite by birth could withdraw from participation in the tabernacle of Moses’ day, so too one who is truly a Christian by new birth may withdraw from his priestly role within the functioning household. It was precisely this danger which concerned the writer, in the present warning passage as well as in later ones.

2. THE ADMONISHMENT FROM ISRAEL'S FAILURE (3:7–4:11)

3:7–11. To drive home his call to fidelity and to warn of the consequences of unbelieving infidelity, the author referred to the classic failure of Israel at Kadesh Barnea which led to their 40-year detour in the wilderness. Far from being an ideal period of Israel's history, as some sectarians seem to have held, it was an era marked by tragic loss and defeat. The readers were not to repeat such an experience in their own lives.

The text chosen by the writer to enforce the lesson he had in mind was taken from Psalm 95. Verses 7–11 of that psalm are quoted here. The choice of this psalm is highly appropriate in a context that is concerned with worship and priestly activity. For Psalm 95 is, in fact, essentially a call to worship (cf. Ps. 95:1–7). The psalmists' invitation, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care" (Ps. 95:6–7), ideally reflects the author's perspective with regard to his readers. The material quoted in Hebrews immediately follows these words and, most naturally, must be understood against this background.

3:12–13. **See to it, brothers** introduces the author's application of his text to his Christian readership. Neither here nor anywhere else in his letter did the writer betray the slightest suspicion that his audience might contain people who were not real Christians. Instead, they were regarded as "brothers" (as here) or as "holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling" (v. 1). The widespread view that he was concerned about mere professors of the faith as over against genuine believers is not found in the text.

Each Christian brother, therefore, should be most careful to guard against a **sinful, unbelieving heart** which God's flock in the wilderness displayed, the kind of heart **that turns away from the living God**. One preventative against such a tendency would be a spirit of mutual concern and admonition among the Christian brotherhood. Accordingly they were to **encourage one another daily ... so that none would be hardened by sin's deceitfulness** (v. 13). This exhortation is still completely pertinent to any local congregation at the present time, where the hardening tendencies of sin can often be counteracted by truly concerned fellow Christians. The expression **as long as it is called Today** alludes to the "Today" in Psalm 95:7 and means something like "while you still have opportunity."

3:14. The statement, **we have come to share in Christ** might be more literally rendered, "we are partners with the Christ." The word "the" found in the original probably gives to "Christ" the sense of "the Messiah." In the word "partners" the reader meets again the Greek *metochoi*, used in 1:9 and 3:1 of the "companions" of the messianic King. Once again, the writer reverted to the supreme privilege of being among the "many sons" whom God is bringing to the glory of shared dominion over the created order which Christ is destined to rule. But again too, like the privilege of serving in the priestly house (v. 6), this role is contingent on continuing fidelity: **if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first**. In this connection, Revelation 2:26–27 comes readily to mind: "To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—he will rule them with an iron scepter."

3:15. The renewed quotation of part of the writer's text in Psalm 95 connects with the caution just uttered in Hebrews 3:6. The readers must hold their confidence firmly to the end and not, like the Israelites of old, **harden their hearts as ... in the rebellion**.

3:16–19. Having alluded again to the passage he wished to expound, the author then began doing so. The questions in verse 16 seem more naturally read as statements: "For some, when they had heard, did provoke; howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses." The writer is aware of the notable exceptions of Joshua and Caleb, who did not take part in the general failure.

But then he asked, **With whom was God angry for 40 years?** The answer is that He was angry **with those** in the wilderness congregation **who sinned** and who died in that wilderness. Their disobedience in refusing to enter the Promised Land caused **God** to **swear that they would never enter His rest**. This meant of course that the sinful generation in **the desert** was permanently excluded from taking possession of their inheritance in Canaan. Naturally it had nothing to do with the question of their going to hell, so it would be wrong to allege that the entire Exodus generation was unregenerate. But exclusion from Canaan was a consequence of their lack of faith in the power of God to bring them into it in victory over their enemies, a failure that in principle might be repeated by the readers of Hebrews if they forgot Messiah's ultimate triumph over His enemies and theirs (cf. 1:13–14). The writer wished his readers to take it to heart that **unbelief**, lack of confidence in God, was the reason God's people did not enter the land.