

Hebrews, Part 3

In his defense of the faith, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has presented the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of divine revelation far surpassing the prophets of Israel and angels. He has charged that the recipients of this epistle have heard His words and should pay attention to what He said.

The recipients of this epistle, most likely a sectarian sect like those at Qumran, highly regarded angels and even believed they would have rulership over God's creation in the Kingdom. The writer strongly rejected that idea using Old Testament Scripture as proof. The Kingdom would be ruled by a man who was superior to angels, the man/king Jesus Christ.

And though He was superior to the angelic creation in every way, He was also inferior – at least for a “little while,” He was made lower than the angels when He took on the form of a man. He became flesh in order to become the perfect sacrifice for man's sins, and through His blood, which was superior to the blood of the animal sacrifices, became a propitiation for sin once and forever for those who believed.

So far we have seen that Christ was superior to the prophets and the angels. Now we will see that He is superior to Moses.

The Son Was Faithful

Heb 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus

The readers are here addressed as “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling”. Some expositors have argued that those to whom this epistle was addressed are not true believers; they are only nominal Christians. The fact that the author addresses them as “holy brethren” and “partakers of the heavenly calling” renders that claim as nonsense. Previously we have seen the writer refer to his audience and include himself with the pronoun “we” which implied they shared an eternal destiny. Furthermore, we will later see other references that identify the audience as believers.

They were indeed “brothers,” not only with one another as racial Jews but also with their Captain, 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” as we saw in the previous chapter of Hebrews.

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory...

The word “partakers,” translated “as who share” in some translations, is that same word *metochoi* we saw in 1:9 that was rendered “companions” (also in 3:14; 6:4; 12:8). These partakers, companions, are brothers in Christ and have a heavenly calling. Only believers can have a heavenly calling. In contrast, Israel had an earthly calling. All the promises of the OT given to Israel had to do with the Earth. God promised them rain from heaven; He promised them fertility of the soil and abundant crops. These are physical and earthly blessings. Although He promised them spiritual blessings as well, Israel’s promises of blessings were mostly related to the Earth, and Israel primarily saw the Kingdom in that context.

The brethren who were partakers of the heavenly calling previously had an earthly calling, but now they have entered a new age. In the past, they offered animal sacrifices according to the Mosaic system (the Law), and it was right to do so then. But it is wrong now because the sacrificial system, the shadow of things to come, has been fulfilled in Christ, the reality. They now have a heavenly calling that is Holy Spirit enabled. The author was thinking especially of their high privilege as believers being invited to participate in the future dominion and joy of God’s King/Son – the Kingdom.

“Consider the Apostle...” “Consider” is *katanoeo* and means to perceive, remark, observe, and understand. This is not simply to call to mind. It means to give careful and serious and prolonged thought concerning this Jesus with the understanding of who He is and what He has done and said. The author thought they might not be seriously considering who Jesus was and what He said, or as mentioned back in 2:3 when the writer charged, “how shall we escape if we *neglect* so great a salvation?” That word

translated as “neglect” means to be careless or neglect, implying they were not truly considering what they were about to abandon.

They are to focus their thinking on the One who is both the “Apostle and High Priest” of their Christian profession. “Apostle,” the first of these titles, points to the Lord Jesus as the One sent forth by God as the supreme Revealer of the Father (1:1-2). *Apostolos* means messenger or one who was sent forth with orders. Jesus Christ was an apostle in the very basic meaning of the word. He was sent from God to this world. He is God’s messenger. And they were urged to give deep and careful thought about who He was and all that He said while here. What the writer is suggesting is, if they do give careful consideration to Him and His message, they will not do what they are thinking of doing.

The second title, “High Priest of our confession,” picks up the role mentioned earlier in 2:17-18. This title speaks of His humanity, His identification with mankind. Our high priest understands us, not only because He is God but because, as a man, He experienced all that we experience. He understands our inner thoughts and concerns. You can know something on an academic level, but you don’t truly know *with understanding* until you have experienced it. Our Lord knows us with understanding because He experienced all that we experience.

Interestingly, an apostle, like a prophet, came from God to man with a message; he spoke to man for God. However, a high priest is the reverse of that, going from man to God. He represents man before God. We have an Apostle who came from God with a message for us, and He is also our High Priest who has gone back to God and is there sitting on His right hand representing you and me today.

Christ is Superior to Moses

Moses is a very important person to the Hebrews. Now the writer is going to demonstrate that Christ is superior to Moses.

Heb 3:2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house.

“Who” refers back to Christ in verse 1. The NIV disconnects verse 2 from the previous verse 1 by making it a separate sentence. But it might be better and more simply read: “Therefore ... consider Jesus ... being faithful to the One who appointed Him...” He is even now faithful to God, and there they would find a model for their own fidelity.

The faithfulness of Christ has an Old Testament prototype in Moses – “as Moses also *was faithful*” (v.2). “Was faithful” in italics means it was not there in the original text but implied by the context and supplied by the translator for clarity.

The reference to Moses being faithful in all God’s house was drawn from Numbers 12:7 in which the Tabernacle, not the Temple, was the backdrop. In the Old Testament situation, “house” would be the Tabernacle itself which Moses had constructed in strict obedience to divine directions. Just like Moses Jesus was also faithful to the One who appointed Him – God.

Heb 3:3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.

But Jesus (this One) as a Builder exceeds Moses in honor since Moses was simply a servant carrying out instructions. But what Jesus has built is everything, for God is the Builder of “everything”. Implied here is the Son’s role in Creation and His identification as God. Moses was faithful in God’s house, but the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who built the “house”. He is the Creator; Moses is the creature. But beyond this is also the thought that God’s house (Tabernacle) in which Moses was faithful was a kind of miniature representation of the house Jesus built. It is a type that represents the greater house over which the Son presides at God’s right hand in Heaven. The “Holy of Holies” in the house Moses built was but a shadow of Heaven itself where Christ has now gone “to appear for us in God’s presence” (9:24).

Heb 9:24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

True to God's instructions Moses erected 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 (v. 4 "He who built *all things*"). This is the sphere where the exalted Christ sits faithfully in all His current ministrations as well as past ones, functioning as a Son over God's House.

Heb 3:5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

The writer then moved from the idea of the house as the sphere where priestly activities transpired to the thought of the "house we are" as consisting of the people who engaged in these activities. His readers, he affirmed, comprise the Son's "house" contingent. Believers *are* the house. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" (1 Cor 6:19).

Moses built a physical temple; God builds a spiritual temple in each believer. These "priestly activities associated with this house will continue to function only if the believer "holds fast to their confidence" (*parrēsia* means free and fearless confidence) and the "hope of which they boast". "Hope" is *elpis* and means confident expectation. The "house" represents the sphere of our priestly responsibilities as Church Age believer/priests, *but* we will cease to function as priests *if* we fail to confidently hold onto the things hoped for, that being the promises of Christ, and in this case, His return to establish His Kingdom.

The "if" is in the condition of the third class in Greek, meaning maybe they will confidently hold onto that hope and maybe they won't. That means maybe these "priestly activities" of the believer/priests in the sphere of God's "house" will continue to occur and maybe not, depending on their

fidelity to the promises. But if they do “hold fast,” Christ will reign in this “house” – reign in you. Implied is the abandonment of the superior “house” that Christ built in favor of the inferior one Moses built will result in the loss of the reign of Christ in the spiritual life of that believer/priest.

As the writer will shortly state in 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 as priests in the Son’s priestly house, which is only maintained by holding firmly to their Christian profession. The author did not mean 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 even one who is truly a Christian by new birth may withdraw from his priestly role within the functioning household.** It was precisely this danger that concerned the writer in the present warning passage as well as in later ones.

This does not imply any potential for the loss of salvation. It does not say that. For Moses, the “house” was the Tabernacle in which all priestly activities occurred. For us in this Church Age, the “house” is us, and all “priestly activities” of our spiritual life take place there. The warning is if they revert to their ancestral Judaism abandoning their faith in Christ, they will cease to be spiritually productive and no longer function as priests in the Son’s priestly “house”.

Be Faithful

Heb 3:7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

- 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
In the day of trial in the wilderness,

9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,
And saw My works forty years.
10 Therefore I was angry with that generation,
And said, 'They always go astray in their heart,
And they have not known My ways.'
11 So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My rest.' '

To emphasize 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. It was an era marked by tragic loss and defeat, far from being an ideal period of Israel's history, as some sectarians seem to have held. The readers risked repeating 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 quoted here.

Ps 95:7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice,
8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
10 For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways."
11 Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest."

"For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Ps 95:7). When it was written, this was pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ in a future sense. The author quoted Psalm 95 to make his point against their rebellion. The choice of this psalm is highly appropriate in a context that is concerned with worship and priestly activity. Psalm 95 is essentially a call to worship.

PS 95:1 Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

3 For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.

5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

Heb 3:7 ... Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts
as in the rebellion...

Again, “if” is in the Greek third-class condition, maybe you will hear His voice, and maybe not. “Hear” is *akouo* and means to hear, consider, perceive the sense of what is said, to understand. Today – if you will consider, think about it, understand what He has said, do not harden your hearts. This is a plea to think about the promise and the consequences of their actions and not to harden their hearts.

In Hebrews 3:8-11 we see the consequences of not “hearing His voice”.

Heb 3:11 Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”

For the unfaithful Exodus generation, the promised rest in the land was denied them. They were not allowed to enter the land and experience its bounty and blessings from God. In other words, “If you don’t believe in my promises, you do not deserve to enjoy my blessings.”

These Hebrew recipients of the epistle can expect the same thing. They will not enter the sabbath rest of the faith-rest spiritual life and all the blessings that are associated with that, such as: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Gal 5:22-23). This is the fruit of the Spirit-filled life, the very same lifestyle that Christ lived. THESE are the blessings of the faith-rest life, the life that “walks in the Spirit and does not “fulfill the lusts of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). This is the faith-rest life that, “Against such there is no law” (Gal 5:23), meaning it is far superior to the Law system they were contemplating returning to. God said, in effect, “If you go back, you will not experience that rest.”

Heb 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

“Beware, 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 against genuine believers is not found in the text and is a false interpretation.

Each Christian brother, therefore, should be most careful to guard against a sinful, unbelieving heart that 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 “exhort 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 present, 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 “now while you still have an opportunity.”

Heb 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said:

“Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

The statement, “we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (3:14) might be more literally rendered, “we *are* partners of the Christ”. “Partakers” is *metochos* and means sharing in, partaking of, or partnering. It implies a very close and personal relationship.

That is followed by a conditional “if” clause of the Greek third-class condition. I believe “partakers of Christ” refers to what we discussed above regarding the Fruit of the Spirit, which is “partaking of Christ” in a quite literal sense. We do that *if* we hold onto our faith. To abandon that faith is to sin. The sinning believer is out of fellowship with God and *not* partaking of Christ.

As “partners with Christ,” we should not be tricked into apostasy. The idea being expressed is that we demonstrated faith in Christ in the beginning for our eternal salvation, and we ought to maintain that same level of faith that delivered us from the fires of hell to deliver us through life to find the “rest” that faith promises. Maybe we will, maybe we won’t.

The word “the” found in the original probably gives “Christ” the sense of “*the* Messiah.” In the word “partners” we see once more the Greek *metochoi*, used in 1:9 and 3:1 of the “companions” of the messianic King. Once again, the writer with his use of “we” 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 in the Kingdom.

In verse 15, the quotation of part of the text in Psalm 95 connects with the caution just uttered in Hebrews 3:6 to “hold fast to our confidence”. The readers must hold their confidence firm to the end and not, like the Israelites of old, harden their hearts as ... in the rebellion.

“If you will hear His voice” (v. 15) is in the Greek third-class condition – maybe you will hear and maybe you won’t hear. The writer is stating the

possibility that the recipients of the epistle may or may not hear (or heed) his voice and may or may not abandon their faith in Christ. Like the privilege of serving in the priestly house (v. 6), this 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....” “Overcomes” is sometimes translated as conquer, prevail, or come off victorious and means to make full use of the provisions that enable victorious living. Those who do lead victorious lives will be rewarded in eternity. It has absolutely nothing to do with losing your salvation, only the potential loss of spiritual productivity and any rewards in eternity.

Heb 3:16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

With the questions in verse 16 “For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?” the writer is aware of the notable exceptions of the faith 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 died in that wilderness. They heard but did not believe. They had faith enough to come out of Egypt but not enough faith to enter Canaan.

Now consider how odd that lack of faith was. This bunch had seen the plagues God released on Egypt as He secured their freedom from Pharaoh. They had seen the death angel march through the land. They had seen the Red Sea parted so they could pass through dry-shod. They had seen it close again and swallow their pursuers. They had seen the bitter waters made sweet. They had eaten the mana from Heaven. They had seen the water come from the rock. They had seen the defeat of the Amalekites, They had seen Mt. Sinai and the Tablets from God. They had heard the Law and agreed to obey it. They had seen miracle after miracle,

yet when the chips were down, they refused to enter the land because they were afraid and did not trust that God could deal with the fierce warrior “giants” in the land.

Their disobedience in refusing to enter the Promised Land out of fear and lack of faith, in the words of God, caused Him to swear that they would never enter His rest. They forfeited any rewards for faithful service. This meant, of course, that the faithless generation in the desert was permanently excluded from physically taking possession of their inheritance in Canaan. It had nothing to do with the question of 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 to 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).

There have been times when I have become anxious about these classes, especially when I hit a roadblock and do not feel I fully understand what I am trying to understand in God’s Word and teach about. The anxiety builds, as I feel more and more inadequate for this ministry until I have to walk away from my computer. It is then that I go to God in prayer – and faith – and explain my anxiety and my problem. I tell Him, “I can’t do this! You must!” It is then that He speaks to me – no, I don’t hear voices whispering in my ears, but I do get a sense of ease because I have placed my burden on Him. And He takes that burden off my shoulders and places it on His own. It is then that I receive my promised rest. When I return to my computer and my study, that roadblock is gone, and He shows me what I was missing before, and suddenly it all seems so simple – “Why didn’t I see it before?” I didn’t because I was out of fellowship, anxious, and not faith-resting. I didn’t see it because it was a faith-building test for me. And then I say, “Thank you, Lord, for these amazing victories.”

This is the rest the writer of Hebrews is talking about, the rest of fully trusting God – not only for salvation but for daily living, for the help, and the wisdom, and the strength we need to live the Christian life and fulfill the mission each of us has been called to. The writer is telling his audience that they will not find that back in their ancestral religion.

The writer wished his readers to take it to heart that unbelief (lack of trust) was the reason God's people did not enter the land. The writer is warning his Jewish audience that failing to trust God to deliver the promised Kingdom, even though it has been over 30 years, and abandoning their faith in Christ to revert to Judaism would be like what the Exodus generation did. Walking away from Christ would mean they would have no testimony and zero spiritual production because they would be separated from the Holy Spirit's power and leading by the sin of lack of faith. Zero spiritual production would mean zero rewards in eternity, not to mention temporal chastisement.

Doubting God has consequences. *Unbelief* is what is robbing you and me of many blessings. The writer of this Hebrews epistle is speaking to those who are already saved but have not fully entered into the blessings of the Christian life. They remain babes in Christ, as we will later see. They doubt God, and as a result, they are having a wilderness experience.

Heb 12:1 let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith.

The sin that "so easily ensnares *us*" is not some personal sin that is particular to each of us, yours being different from mine. For the writer of Hebrews, "the sin which so easily ensnares" all of us is the lack of faith. Oh, how easily do we become ensnared in its web.