

HEBREWS CHAPTER 3

[II] THE TRUE HOME (REST) OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD (3:1 - 4:13)

1. Christ as Apostle and High Priest is greater than Moses as servant (3:1-6).

3:1. Therefore (Greek: οθεν): The following arguments could be deduced from the conclusion reached above.

Who are 'the people of God'? (cf. 3:6b).

The believing Israelites were 'the people of God' during the Old Testament period. The believers from all nations together, including the believers in Israel, are 'the people of God' since the first coming of Jesus Christ. Together they are called 'the Church of Christ' (Mt 16:18; Rom 16:16; 1 Thes 1:1), 'the Church of God' (1 Cor 1:2), 'the Church' (Act 5:11; 9:31), 'disciples of Christ' (Mt 28:19; Act 9:1), 'the kingdom of God' (Mt 21:43), 'the kingdom of Christ' (1 Cor 15:24; Eph 5:5), 'the flock of Christ' (Jn 10:16), 'all the believers together' (Act 3:44), 'those belonging to the Way' (Act 9:2), 'Christians' (Act 11:26), 'the cultivated olive tree with its root and branches' (Rom 11:16,24), 'the Body of Christ' (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 1:22-23), 'the Jerusalem that is above' (Gal 4:26), 'Mount Zion', 'the heavenly Jerusalem', 'the Church of the firstborn' (Heb 12:22-23; cf. Heb 11:10,16; 13:14), 'one new man out of the two': believers from Israel and believers from the Gentiles (Eph 2:15), 'fellow citizens with God's people' (Eph 2:19), 'members of God's household' (Eph 2:19), 'a holy temple in the Lord' (Eph 2:21; cf. Rev 11:1), 'heirs together with (believing) Israel', 'members together (with believing Israel) of one body, 'sharers together (with believing Israel) in the promise in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:6; cf. 2 Cor 2:20), 'God's family in heaven and on earth' (Eph 3:14), 'the 12 tribes scattered among the nations' (Js 1:1), 'God's elect', 'strangers or temporary residents in the world' 'scattered' throughout the world (1 Pet 1:1), 'a spiritual house', 'a holy priesthood' (1 Pet 2:5), 'a chosen people', 'a royal priesthood', 'a holy nation', 'a people belonging to God' (1 Pet 2:10), 'the chosen lady' (2 Jn 1; cf. Rev 12:6), 'a kingdom and priests' (Rev 1:6), 'the 144000' (Rev 14:1), 'the bride of the Lamb' (Rev 19:6), 'the wife of the Lamb' (Rev 21:9), 'the new Jerusalem' (Rev 21:1-2,9-10).

Christians are "holy brothers". "Holy and faithful brothers" (Col 1:2). 'Brothers' in the family of God, all sharing a heavenly calling. 'Holy' means 'set apart by God himself', made members of God's family, called to share in God's eternal rest.

Fix your thoughts (Greek: κατανοησατε<κατανοεω)(imperative aorist active) on Jesus; continuous observation and attention.

Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest of (whom) our confession (speaks).

The Old Testament revelation consists of

- i) God revealing himself to people
- ii) and people responding to God.

The combination of prophet (envoy) and priest is not common in Old Testament. Moses is the best example; he mediates God's Law to people (prophet) and he is their most effective intercessor with God (priest)(Ex 32:31-32).

In both these aspects, the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ:

- i) Jesus Christ is God's 'apostle' = 'sent out by God to be God's authoritative representative (envoy, prophet) among people'. Jesus Christ reveals God completely
- ii) and our 'high Priest' = 'our authoritative representative in God's presence'. Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of man's obedient response to God.

Confession (Greek: ομολογια). 'That which is confessed (noun: confession)' or 'the act of us confessing (verb: confessing)'. NEB "The Apostle and High Priest of the religion we profess". The noun is the best.

3:2. Jesus Christ is faithful (2:17). As faithful apostle he discharged his commission completely by finishing it (Jn 17:4). As faithful high priest he never stops to represent us before God (9:24).

3:3-4. Moses was the faithful servant in God's household, but Christ is the Builder of God's household.

i) The builder (Greek: ο κατασκευασας) means 'constructing' and 'supplying all necessary furniture and equipment'. Christ is the Founder and Inheritor of God's household, because through him and to him all things were made (Col 1:16). The God who is the builder of everything, does so in and through Christ (Mt 16:18-19). In this regard no distinction can be made between the Father and the Son.

ii) Servant (Greek: θεραπων) means a dignified office rendering service freely and willingly and relating personally to the One served. Moses became the chief administrative executive, because of his faithfulness.

3:5-6a. Moses was the servant of God's household and Christ is the Son and Heir of God's household.

- i) Moses served in God's household as a part of that household.

ii) Christ *rules over* God's household. Just as 2 Samuel 7:11-14 is applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:5b (The King will be my Son), so it is applied to Hebrews 3:4 (God will establish the King's house and the King will build a house for God). The authority of the Son is much greater than the authority of the servant.

Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses. 'Has been found worthy' (Greek: ηξιωται, αξιω)(indicative perfect passive). The perfect tense expresses the state of condition.

The ministry of Moses was designed as "a testimony of those things which were afterwards to be spoken" (Greek: μαρτυριον των λαληθησομενων)(participle future passive). The word indicates that the position of Moses was one which pointed beyond itself to a future and higher revelation. *Moses foreshadows the ministry and claims of Jesus Christ.* The ministry of Moses was prophetic and anticipatory, but the ministry of Jesus Christ was the fulfilment, the real thing!

In Numbers 12:8 God gives a solemn warning to any who might venture "to speak against my servant, against Moses". God's warning to deny or ignore the claims of Jesus Christ and the Gospel is far more serious!

3:6b. Christians are God's house. The Bible does not speak of 'two peoples of God' as the dispensational theory teaches! *God has only one continuous house or household (one people of God) from the beginning unto the present!* It includes all the believers: Abel, Enoch Noah and Abraham before the time of Israel (Hebrews chapter 11) and it includes Jacob and Joseph before the time of Moses! *In the New Testament 'Israel' (the believers in Israel, the true, spiritual Israel) is continued, extended and completed in the Church consisting of believers from every nation!* New Testament Christians are "fellow-citizens with the saints, God's Old Testament people/household" (Jn 10:16; Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 2:9-10).

Moses served in the one household of God, but Jesus Christ is the Builder (3:3-4), the Ruler (3:6a) and the Heir (the Son) of this one household of God!

If we hold on, to hold fast to (Greek: κατασχομεν,κατεχω)(subjunctive aorist active). Notice the conditional sentences in the letter to the Hebrews. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find such insistence on the fact that *continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints has as its corollary the teaching that the saints are the people who persevere to the end. God's election of believers includes the responsibility of believers to continue to believe and obey.*

Our courage (Greek: παρρησια) and the hope of which we boast (Greek: το καυχημα της ελπιδος). True Christians live by faith and not by sight. But while their hope is in things that are unseen, it is something to exult in, not to be ashamed of. Their 'confidence' or 'boldness' (Greek: παρρησια) is 'their fearless confession' (4:16; 10:19,35). The Christian faith and hope is something to share courageously with all people.

There is a relationship between maintaining the Christian hope and the attainment of the final salvation (Rom 5:2-4; 8:24-25; Eph 1:18; Col 1:23; 1 Pet 1:13). The waning of the first enthusiasm (cf. 6:4-8; 10:23-31), the apparent postponement of their hope, and the various pressures on the Hebrews combined to threaten the steadfastness of their faith. The danger of the Hebrews was that the good seed fell into rocky soil and was scorched to death (Mark 4:5-6,16-17).

2. Warning (2nd) against rejecting Christ (3:7-19).

Rejecting Christ is far more serious than rejecting Moses!

a. Old Testament typology.

i) The Old Testament 'salvation' or return from exile in Babylonia had been portrayed in terms of a new Exodus (Isa 41:17f; 42:9; 43:16-21; 52:12).

ii) The New Testament salvation of Christ is interpreted as a new Exodus.

- The death of Christ is called an 'exodus' (Luke 9:31)
- Christ is the true passover, sacrificed for his people (1 Cor 5:7)
- Christ is the lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet 1:19)
- Christians are the Church in the wilderness, like Israel in the Old Testament (Acts 7:38)
- The baptism of Christians into Christ is the antitype of Israel's passage through the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:1-2)
- The sacramental feeding of Christians on Christ by faith is the antitype of Israel's nourishment with manna and the water from the rock (1 Cor 10:3-4)
- The spiritual Rock of Christians, Christ, is the antitype of the rock that accompanied the Israelites (1 Cor 10:4)
- The heavenly rest which lies in front of Christians is the counterpart to the earthly Canaan which was the goal of the Israelites (Hebrews 3:7 - 4:11)

The moral implication of this typology is pressed upon the readers of the New Testament: The historical record of Israel's rebellion and punishment in the wilderness has been preserved for our warning, lest we Christians should

imitate their disobedience and be overtaken by comparable judgement (1 Cor 10:6-11). “The Lord (some early mss: “Jesus” = Saviour) delivered a people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe” (Jude 5). This is a warning to Christians against giving up their faith and hope.

b. The quotation from Psalm 95:7-11 (3:7-11).

The two parts of Psalm 95: worship and obedience.

A call to worship (vs 1-7a) and a warning against disobeying him (vs 7b-11). The two parts should not be separated from one another. It is a good thing to worship God, but acts and words of worship are acceptable only if they proceed from sincere and obedient hearts. Throughout the 40 years of wandering, the Israelites ‘tempted’ God, in the sense of trying to see how long his patience would hold out in the face of their stubbornness of heart (Ex 17:7).

The Holy Spirit says (3:7). The Holy Spirit is viewed as the Author of the Old Testament revelation: its words (3:7) and contents (plan of construction of tabernacle, 9:8).

Do not harden your hearts (3:8). Harden (Greek: σκληρυνητε<σκληρυνω)(subjunctive, present active).

Tested and tried (3:9). The author is especially thinking of Numbers 14:20-22.

Angry (3:10). Better is the word ‘loath’, ‘be burdened down’, ‘be laden with grief’, ‘be exhausted’, ‘be indignant’ (Greek: προσωχθισα<προσοχθισω)(indicative aorist active).

Not known my ways (3:10). ‘Known’ (Greek: εγνωσαν)(indicative aorist active). Not so much ‘understanding’, but more ‘obedience’.

This generation (3:10). Note the repeated references of Jesus Christ to “this generation” (Mt 11:16; 12:4f,45; 23:36; 24:34; Acts 2:40).

They shall never enter my rest (Greek: καταπαυσις)(3:11).

c. The warning not to fail to enter God’s ‘rest’ is for every generation.

The author of Psalm 95 has especially Numbers 14:20-33 (the exploration of the land Canaan) in mind. The ‘rest’ is the land Canaan, the home which God had prepared for the Israelites. A later generation of Israelites was warned by the author of Psalm 95 not to follow the bad example of the preceding generation of Israelites, lest disaster should also overtake them.

The author of Hebrews 3 impresses the same warning on an even later generation of Israelites - and through them to us today. The ‘rest’ is here ‘the rest which God *began* after completing the creation (Gen 2:1-4), and which has *never ended!*

The loss incurred when people reject Jesus Christ is so much greater than the loss incurred by the Israelites when they rejected Moses (as leader and wanted to return to Egypt)! The rebels in the time of Moses missed the promised blessing of entering the Promised Land consisting of *the earthly Canaan*. But the latter-day rebellion after the first coming of Christ will forfeit the much greater blessings of *the new age (the New Jerusalem)!*

3:12. See to it that none of you relapse into the condition of a former generation of Israelites.

The generation of Moses rebelled against God when they rejected Moses as God’s appointed leader. Their rebellion originated in “an evil, unbelieving heart” (Greek: απιστια)(3:12).

Unbelief is disloyalty/unfaithfulness as well as a failure to believe. The infinitive + preposition = explanation of the content of the evil heart.

Falling away. Their rebellion turned into a “turning away or falling away from the Living God”; to depart, to leave, to step aside (Greek: εν τω αποστηναι<αφιστημι)(infinitive aorist active)(3:12). ‘Falling away’ is not simply a passive backsliding into a former position, but an active rebellion against God by making a choice against God.

For Christians to repudiate the apostle and high priest of their confession, like Moses appointed to leadership by God, would be a more outrageous revolt against the Living God.

A relapse from Christianity into Judaism would be comparable to the action of the Israelites when they “they in their hearts turned back to Egypt” (Acts 7:39). *It is not merely a return to a position previously occupied, but a gesture of outright apostasy, a complete break with the God of the Bible.*

For people who had never been illuminated by God’s final revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, the Old Testament revelation provided a means of access to God - even if it was a shadowy imperfect revelation.

But for those who had received the illumination of the gospel to renounce it in favour of the old order which the gospel had superseded was the irretrievable sin - the sin against light (6:4-8).

3:13. Encourage one another daily as long as it is called 'Today'. This is a command, not an option!

Encourage (Greek: παρακαλεῖτε)(imperative present active) means 'to stand at someone's side and call him to do something', 'to urge someone to do something', 'to fire him on'. Encourage one another to love in relationships and to be occupied with what are 'good works' in the Bible. Encourage one another in the weekly meetings (small group or congregation) (Hebrews 10:24-25)! Together Christians can support one another. But in isolation a Christian may more easily succumb to the temptations and pressures of sin.

Today. While time lasts, each succeeding day is a fresh 'Today' (Greek: καθ' ἑκάστην ἡμέραν), distributive.

The deceitfulness of sin. Many people in especially 'a shame culture' think that as long as you do not get caught, you do not 'sin'. To get caught means that you 'lose face' and are 'shamed' in front of people. For them 'sin' is purely an outward visible performance in which you are found out, got caught by others. But with God 'sin' is first of all invisible and deep in the heart and is defined in terms of 'a wrong relationship with God' (to miss God's goal, to fail God's perfect standard, to transgress God's commands and teachings in the Bible, to rebel in your heart against God and his will, to change God's reality and to distort God's truth). The root of 'sin' means failing God's purpose in your life. The fruit of 'sin' are expressed in 'thinking, speaking and doing things which God forbids' and in 'not thinking, speaking or doing the things which God commands'. God always sees everything and always catches you out when you sin!

The hardening of the heart (Greek: σκληρυνθη)(subjunctive aorist passive) means 'a reduced sensitivity of the conscience', 'an increased lack of insight and wisdom' and 'a growth in rebellion against God and what he regards as 'right', so that it becomes more difficult to recognise the right path next time. The passive of permission: "Do not allow or permit your self to be hardened".

3:14. We come to be partakers of Christ. 'Partaker' (Greek: μετοχοι του Χριστου γενομεν)(indicative perfect active). The meaning of this phrase is probably not 'participating in Christ' (as Paul uses 'in Christ'), but rather 'participating with Christ in his heavenly kingdom' (cf. 12:28). The parallel is Paul's encouragement or warning about inheriting the kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12).

If we hold firmly till the end. 'Hold firmly' (Greek: κατασχωμεν,κατεχω)(subjunctive aorist active)(cf. 3:6).

The confidence we had at first (Greek: εανπερ την αρχην της υποστασεως μεχρι τελους βεβαιαν κατασχωμεν). The root meaning of 'υποστασις' is 'that which underlies', 'the ground', 'the basis'.

i) It refers to the reality, essence, or nature of something: Jesus Christ is the essence of the divine nature (1:3).

ii) It refers to the reality, ground or basis of faith: Christian confidence, assurance, conviction (3:14); the reality and assurance of things Christians hope for (11:1). The Christian confidence rests on a very stable foundation! Their hope (expectation) is a reality, not a wish!

'The confidence we had at first' (cf. Rev 2:4, 'first love') is the dedication to the Christian beliefs or convictions, which causes us 'to be a finisher', a Christian who stays on course and finishes the race (cf. 12:1). The good beginning of the Israelites was not matched by their later behaviour.

d. The warning against unbelief and disobedience.

3:15-19.

The generation of Israelites in the desert failed to enter into 'the rest' (Canaan), because of their unbelief in God, his promises and his ability to do what he promises, and because of their disobedience to God's commands and teachings.

Those Moses led out (3:16). Paul says that God was not pleased with 'most of these Israelites' (1 Cor 10:5). That generation of Israelites had experienced the exodus, how God led them out of slavery in Egypt. Yet they failed to experience the entrance into Canaan, how God led them into the Promised Land, because of unbelief and disobedience. It was the generation who had witnessed God's mighty acts and yet rebelled!

Rebelled (3:16); 'to provoke', 'to exasperate' (Greek: παρεπικραναν,παρπικρανω)(indicative aorist active)(3:16). Translation: "For who, when they heard, provoked (God)?"

Angry (Greek: προσωχθισεν<προσωχθιζα)(participle aorist active)(3:17)

Those who sinned (Greek: αμαρτησασιν)(participle aorist active)(3:17)

Those who disobeyed (Greek: απειθησασιν,απειθεω)(participle aorist active)(3:18).

Disobedience and unbelief. The message was clear to the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews. They too had heard the gospel; they had experienced the redeeming power of God; and they had received the promise of entering 'God's rest' - a homeland of the faithful. Only disobedience or unbelief can prevent them from realising God's promise!