

Candlelight Christian Fellowship

Hebrews (Chapter 3)

Hebrews 3 (NKJV)

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, 2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. 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. 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.

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.”’

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. 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.’

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.”

The Holy People

The Children of Israel are those the author has referred to as the “*holy brethren*.” They have been given Divine promises and a “*heavenly calling*.” The fact that they are holy is a reference to the fact that God has specifically “set apart” Israel as His own special people. Moses wrote, “*For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them*” (Deuteronomy 7:6–11 NKJV).

To be considered holy and special is not always as we might think. The word “*holy*” simply means “consecrated” and “set apart.” Israel is “sanctified” by way of use to the exclusivity of the

Lord. We may tend to think of something mystical, spiritual, or supernatural; and inasmuch as this may be referred to in certain contexts, this case refers to the earlier rather than the latter: "set apart."

Earlier in our study we learned that God chose Israel to make Himself known to them, and through them, for His own purposes and plans.

The Heavenly Calling

The heavenly calling relates directly to the sovereign choice God made when He set Israel apart. His purposes and plans are directly linked to the revelation of Himself to them and through them, so that all of Israel may be saved. Therefore, the author puts special emphasis on the unique calling of Israel and the special privileges they enjoy. (Please note that God's special purpose with Israel does not exclude the Gentiles in the purposes and plans of God. Likewise, it does not exclude the Gentiles from the salvation He offers all men in Jesus Christ.)

Apostle and High Priest

We have seen that Jesus is the Champion, Forerunner, Hero, and Captain of Salvation. Now we see Him referred to as the Apostle (Sent One) and as High Priest (Mediatorial Intercessor).

We are all aware that Jesus was sent into the world as Savior. Jesus declared this Himself when He said, *"all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him"* (John 5:23). The Hebrews like all others must recognize that *"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also"* (1 John 2:23). The Apostle of our faith is to be trusted as the mediatorial intercessor who has been sent into the world in order to save all who trust Him for salvation from the wrath to come.

As High Priest (which we will address more fully later in the study), Jesus stands before God on behalf of man. The High Priest (as pictured in the Old Covenant) represented God to man and represented man before God. Jesus as our Great High Priest does the same in fulfillment of the typology and practice found in the Old Covenant. In this way, the author continues his documentation that the Old Covenant has given way to the New and that the Father is to be approached only in Jesus. The Old Covenant is obsolete! Therefore, the Hebrews must move forward in faith and trust Jesus for the fullness of all promised them.

Faithful in the House

Jesus was appointed by the Father to His mediatorial work. In that work He was and is faithful. The author draws from the faithfulness of Moses to show the greater and better faithfulness of Jesus. *"For this One [Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house"* (vs. 3).

As Author and Creator, Jesus is worthy of all glory and all honor. He not only *"built"* the *"house"* but is the One and Only who saves it.

Much can be said of the *"house."* Some will contend that the house is a picture of Israel; others see the house as the world. Some see the house Moses built as the Tabernacle, and others see the house Jesus is building as the Church. May I suggest that all can be true? Jesus is the Creator of the world and is the world's Savior. He is Messiah to Israel and the Church. He is the Builder and Redeemer. For, *"He who built all things is God"* (vs. 4). *"Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 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” (vss. 5–6). Jesus built the house, intercedes for the house, and is Redeemer of the house. The world is the house, Israel is the house, and those who are of Israel and trust in Jesus are the house redeemed. (Gentiles who believe are the house too—the house Jesus is building. [See Matthew 6:18])

Hold Fast...To The End

“Hold[ing] fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (vs. 6b) requires recognition of the starting place. Gentiles in particular often get this wrong and, therefore, end up with a false understanding of their security (or lack thereof) in Jesus. A Hebrew perspective on this clears up the whole matter.

We should be reminded that the starting place for all mankind could be said to be found in Genesis 3 when God made the first promise of the Messiah (see Genesis 3:15). For the Hebrews, this *“hope”* and *“rejoicing”* could more specifically be said to have begun at the call and promise God made to Abraham (see Genesis 12:1–3, 15; Galatians 3:16). Therefore, we must recognize that the author when writing to the Hebrews is exhorting them to *“hold fast”* the *“hope”* they had been given from the beginning of their calling and election—from the beginning when the promises were made to them. This was what they had hoped for since the call of Abraham and the revelation of the promises made to him. For Gentile believers, the beginning is identified as the place or time we first believed and trusted Jesus for salvation. However, and to the contrary, the Hebrews being addressed by the author were individuals who had believed the promises made to their forefather Abraham, to his descendants after him, to the prophets, et al. Therefore, holding fast and maintaining hope was an injunction to cross over the dispensational timeline and move from the Old Covenant to the New by trusting in Jesus. It was a recognition that their earlier hope in the coming Messiah was now realized in Him—the object of that hope. The fruition of the New Covenant promise is Jesus! Therefore, the Hebrews were to *“continue in the faith”* they had embraced from the beginning—and follow through in the knowledge they then had come to know about Him. There was no option of turning back to the Old Covenant. It had been (has been) annulled and made obsolete (see Hebrews 7:18–19 and 8:13). This faith is the substance of what the Hebrews had hoped for, the evidence of the thing they had previously waited to see (see Hebrews 11:1).

Today is the Day of Salvation

The author again drew from history and quoted from Psalm 95 when he wrote, *“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years’* (vss. 7–9). He rehearses the words of the Psalm in the form of prophecy when he said, *“as the Holy Spirit says.”* He was utilizing a historical setting and the Psalmist’s review of the incident by making it applicable to the first-century Hebrews. He insists that the Hebrews maintain a tender heart and resist the temptation to harden their hearts in a similar pattern to that of their forefathers.

The incident in view was the rebellion and unbelief manifested at Kadesh Barnea (see Numbers 13–14).

In review of the incident, the author quotes the Lord when He said, *“Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”* (vss. 10–11), therefore warning the Hebrews by saying, *“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God”* (vs. 12). The Hebrews were not to depart from the Lord and His promise of deliverance through Jesus their Messiah. There is deliverance in no other. Furthermore, he says that they should *“exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be*

hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (vs. 13). "Today" for those in history was the day they heard this word. "Today" for the first-century Hebrews was then, there—in that moment. "Today" for you and me is the moment we heard or hear—and understand the Gospel. Today is the day of Salvation.

The Deceitfulness of Sin

Sin is deceitful! The sin herein warned against is the sin of rejecting Jesus and trusting in that which cannot save. The Lord was and is calling His people to Himself that they might enjoy the rest only He can provide. The fact that He said, "*they have not known My ways,*" indicates that they did not know the righteousness, justice, mercy, grace, and purpose of God. Had they known the ways of the Lord they would have known that His plan was to bless and prosper them (as highlighted in Jeremiah 29:11–13). They would also have known that curses follow disobedience and rebellion.

Blessings and cursing had been pronounced upon Israel during the Old Covenant dispensation (see Deuteronomy 28). Therefore, they should have been hungry and thirsty for the changes and deliverance found in the Gospel of the New Covenant. Thus, the author adds, "*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion'*" (vss. 14–15). The "confidence" is the promises earlier given to their forefathers. The "hold[ing] fast" is seeing through to fruition what they had believed and hoped for—that has now come—in the finished work of Jesus the Messiah. The deceitfulness of sin was the lie that tempted the Hebrews to look back to the "Old" rather than forward to the "New." The sin of rejecting Jesus and trusting in that which cannot save would cause the Jews to miss out on the blessings found only in Jesus as expressed in the New Covenant relationship He intended (and still intends) for them. The Hebrews began "*partak[ing] of Christ,*" by faith, from the beginning. It was and is essential that all the Jews hold fast to the promises made and move forward in saving faith by trusting Jesus as Messiah.

Lessons from the Past

The important illustrative questions, and their answers, are given in the text. "*For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?*" (vss. 16–18). Therefore, the lessons from the past proved valuable in the present. At Kadesh Barnea God provided the deliverer and the deliverance—but the Children of Israel rejected their deliverer and therefore forfeited the blessings of that deliverance. God's righteous anger led Him to cause all those in rebellion to wander about the wilderness rather than enter the Promised Land. They died out in the desert! Only Caleb, Joshua, and the young were exempted (see Numbers 32:11–13). The Children of Israel were given opportunity to "*enter His rest,*" but they did not obey and thus forfeited the blessing. Failure to trust the Lord always has consequences. It did for those led out of Egypt for "*they could not enter in because of unbelief*" (vs. 19). It did for all who rejected Jesus in the first century, and it does today! Therefore, "*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.*"

In chapter 4 we will look more fully at "*the rest*" unbelieving Israel forfeited and how it applies today.

Additional Reading: Psalm 95

Questions:

- 1) **True or False:** To be considered holy and special is not always as we might think. The word “*holy*” simply means “consecrated” and “set apart.” Therefore, “holy people” can at times act unholy but nonetheless be “positionally holy” to the Lord.
- 2) **True or False:** Jesus stands before God on behalf of man, but we still need priests to confess our sins to.
- 3) **True or False:** To properly understand the command “continue in the Lord” may require an understanding of context, to whom the injunction is given, and a recognition of the starting place.
- 4) **True or False:** We should exhort one another daily, while it is called today.
- 5) **True or False:** The Children of Israel were given opportunity to “*enter God’s rest,*” but they did not obey and thus forfeited the blessing.

Notes