

3. Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest (Hebrews 3)

The introduction of Hebrews 3 relates directly to chapter 2, where the writer has concluded in Heb 2:17 that we are brothers in every way. He also concludes that the benefit of atonement was to Abraham's true descendants. He begins chapter three focusing on this relationship of brothers and draws the conclusions stemming from the relationship in the text that follows.

Holy Brothers who Share in the Heavenly Calling

3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.

By saying, "holy brothers," the author gives a sacred designation to the family relationship between Christians, Christ, and God. The idea that Christians are children of God and brothers to one another is an idea that runs throughout the New Testament. Abraham's descendants, of the preceding chapter, are the true children of God. Paul taught that the natural children of Abraham are not the children of God, but the children of promise are the children of God. In Rom 9:8, Paul wrote, "8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." These children of Abraham are those who believe according to Paul in Gal 3:7-9,:

7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

That the believing children are the true children of God becomes evident. John wrote in 1 John 3:1-3:

3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

In Rom 8:16-17, our relationship to God, as His children, secures our inheritance: "16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Our share in the heavenly calling in Heb 3:1, cited above, is this very same inheritance.

We are to fix our thoughts on Jesus who is the apostle (one sent) and high priest whom we confess. Heb 2:17 designated Jesus "a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God." This Jesus was faithful and loyal in all God's house. The relationship thus extends from Christ the son, to Christians as brothers, to God as the Father, all of which comprise the house of God. Moses was a faithful member of this house of God; however, but he was just a member of the house, along with all of us. Jesus is different as apostle and high priest, and in the following verse, he is different as the very builder of the house.

Jesus, Greater than Moses

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. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5 Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. 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.

For the reasons given in the preceding verses, Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses, for the builder of the house has greater honor than the house itself. The comparison puts Moses, and by extension, the Law of Moses, in the proper perspective about Jesus. Christ is both the builder of God's house and a faithful son over God's house. The house of God that Jesus built is the church of the living God. Paul wrote in 1 Tim 3:14-15, "I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." Paul was also specific about the spiritual nature of the house of God in Eph 2:19-22:

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him **you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives** by his Spirit. (Emphasis added.)

"We are his house," in Heb 3:6 shows that the spiritual house of God is made of people—people qualified by their courage and hope.

Warning against Unbelief

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice,

8 do not harden your hearts

as you did in the rebellion,

during the time of testing in the desert,

9 where your fathers tested and tried me

and for forty years saw what I did.

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.'

11 So I declared on oath in my anger,

'They shall never enter my rest.'"

The preceding verses ended with the statement, "And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast." The Christians' membership in the house of God depends on holding to courage and hope and not faltering in unbelief. The warning looks to Psalms 95:7-11 for reinforcement, echoing the warning already stated in Heb 2:1, "Do not drift away." This present passage is one of those examples from the Old Testament referred to in Heb 2:2 where "every violation and disobedience received its just punishment."

We know that the author of the Psalm was David; yet the Hebrew writer begins, "So, as the Holy Spirit says." The Holy Spirit speaks through the word of David and the other inspired

writers. Rom 8:16-17, quoted above, reads, "16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit." Clearly, the spirit speaks to us through the word of God.

God responded to the unbelief of that day, "They shall never see my rest." In the next verse, the writer applies this lesson from the Psalms to these last days.

12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 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. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

The falling away follows the reverse order of that order by which God saved us: faith, repentance, and obedience. The one who falls away has a heart that is sinful, unbelieving, and turns away. Unbelief and the sins that go with it harden the heart with deceitfulness. As promised, in such a state, we shall never enter God's rest. Verse 14 gives the antidote to this state of sin: "14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first."

15 As has just been said:

*"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion."*

In verse 15, the writer repeats the admonition, showing its importance: Do not harden your heart!

Not Able to Enter God's Rest Because of Unbelief

16 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

The chapter ends with this set of rhetorical questions. A rhetorical question is a question to which the answer is self-evident. The questions bring the reader logically to the main point of this discourse:

- 16 Who were they who heard and rebelled?
- Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?
- 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years?
- Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?
- 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?

The conclusion to this passage summarizes the preceding verses as a conclusion to the rhetorical questions: "19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." The stage is also set for the discussion of the next chapter about God's true rest for the people of His spiritual house.

Hebrews 3 has taught that Jesus has secured our rest as the apostle and high priest of all that we believe and follow. We are holy brothers in this heavenly calling that makes us family members in the house of God. However, we, just as Israel after the flesh, may fall away because of unbelief. If we fall away, we, just as they, will not be able to enter God's rest.

Hebrews 4 will reveal that the true rest of God for His people still stands.