

Bible Study February 15, 2023

HEBREWS 3 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

Jesus Greater Than Moses

¹ Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

This challenge would have been especially meaningful to Jewish Christians. For Jews, the highest human authority was the high priest. For Christians, the highest human authorities were God's messengers, the apostles. Jesus, God's messenger and High Priest, is the ultimate authority in the church.

The writer says to "think carefully about this Jesus," to fix our minds, ponder intently, and focus on his true significance (see 12:1-3). How do we do that? In our age of sound bites, fast food, and quick-fix solutions, few people take time to think deeply about anything or anyone. In Jesus, we have someone who has much to say to us as a messenger (or apostle), who provides access to the Father, and who deserves our obedience and service. How does knowing the significance and superiority of Jesus affect your life? Your attitudes? Your decisions? Your actions?

² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.

To the Jewish people, Moses was a great hero; he had led their ancestors, the Israelites, from Egyptian bondage to the border of the Promised Land. He had also written the first five books of the Old Testament, and he was the prophet through whom God had given the law; therefore, Moses was the greatest prophet in the Scriptures. But Jesus has even greater honor as the central figure of faith than Moses, who was merely a human servant. Jesus is more than human; he is God himself (1:3). As Moses led the people of Israel out of Egyptian slavery, Jesus leads us out of sin's slavery. Why settle for Moses, the author of Hebrews asks, when you can have Jesus Christ, who appointed Moses? We, too, should not regard any leader, institution, or authority as higher than Jesus.

⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,

Moses was faithful to God's calling not only to deliver Israel but also to prepare the way for the Messiah ("his work was an illustration of the truths God would reveal later"). All the Old Testament writers had also served to prepare the way. Thus, knowing the Old Testament is the best foundation for understanding the New Testament. In reading the Old Testament, we see (1) how God used people to accomplish his purposes and to prepare a community of faith that would follow his way; (2) how God used events and personalities to illustrate important truths; (3) how, through prophets, God announced the Messiah; and (4) how, through the system of sacrifices,

God prepared people to understand the Messiah's work. If you include the Old Testament in your regular Bible reading, the New Testament will grow clearer and more meaningful to you.

⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Because Christ lives in believers, we can remain courageous, confident, and hopeful to the end. We are not saved by being steadfast and firm in our faith, but our courage and consistency reveal the genuineness of our faith. Without this enduring faithfulness, we could easily be blown away by the winds of temptation, false teaching, or persecution (also see 3:14).

A Rest for the People of God

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

"Today, if you hear his voice,

***⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,***

***⁹ where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.***

***¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.'***

***¹¹ As I swore in my wrath,
'They shall not enter my rest.'"***

God's rest has several meanings in Scripture: (1) the seventh day of creation and the weekly Sabbath commemorating it (Genesis 2:2; Hebrews 4:4-9); (2) the Promised Land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 12:8-12; Psalm 95); (3) the peace with God we now have because of our relationship with Christ through faith (Matthew 11:28; Hebrews 4:1, 3, 8-11); and (4) our future eternal life with Christ (4:8-11). All of these meanings were probably familiar to the Jewish Christian readers of Hebrews. We should warn each other about the danger of missing God's rest. If we let doubt about God's promises, lack of trust in his power, or rejection of his love overtake us, we could forfeit the good things he has for us.

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said,

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

Our hearts turn away from the living God when we stubbornly refuse to believe him. If we persist in our unbelief, God will eventually leave us alone in our sin and rebellion. But God can give us new hearts, new desires, and new spirits (Ezekiel 36:22-27). To prevent yourself from having an unbelieving heart, stay in fellowship with other believers, talk daily with them about your mutual faith,

be aware of the deceitfulness of sin (which attracts but also destroys), and encourage one another with love and concern.

¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

During the journey to the Promised Land, the Israelites had hardened their hearts in the wilderness. A hardened heart resembles a hardened lump of clay or a stale loaf of bread. Nothing can restore it to make it useful. Psalm 95 warns against hardening our hearts as Israel did in the wilderness by continuing to resist God's will and doubting his ability to bring deliverance (see Exodus 17:7; Numbers 13–14; 20). The people were so convinced that God couldn't deliver them from their enemies and bring them safely into the Promised Land that they simply gave up their faith in him. People with hardened hearts stay so stubbornly set in their ways that they cannot turn to God. This does not happen suddenly; it is the result of a series of choices to disregard God's will. Each day we should pray for God to soften our hearts so we can hear him speak to us.

¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

The Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land because they did not believe in God's protection and did not believe that he would help them conquer the giants in the land (see Numbers 14–15). So God sent them into the wilderness to wander for 40 years. This was an unhappy alternative to the wonderful gift he had planned for them. Lack of trust in God leaves us with the dangerous alternative that we won't enter his rest and receive his best.