

Hebrews 3:7-19 to 4:1-16

Although the book of Hebrews was written to a Christian assembly, the main thrust of this epistle was to warn Hebrew adherents not to stop short of faith in Christ.

And because this book is written to Jews, the reasoning and warnings are rooted in their national history.

First of all, the writer points out that the Messenger of the dispensation of grace, Jesus Christ, is superior to the prophets.

Also, Christ was shown to be superior to the angels, and Moses, both of whom were held in high regard by the Jews.

In Hebrews 3:6, the writer issues his first warning against a superficial belief in Christ.

"But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

He then encourages them to examine their hearts, and make their **"calling and election sure."**

He does this by going back to an incident in their history which contained a strong warning against unbelief.

V 7-11 **"Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice,**
8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:
9 When your fathers tempted me,

proved me, and saw my works forty years.

¹⁰ Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.

¹¹ So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)"

Just as many (indeed almost all) of their fathers died in the wilderness, having failed to enter the Promised Land because of unbelief, so some of the vast multitude of Jews who had become obedient to the faith might actually have failed to enter into the family of God by faith.

Not only was this warning taken from their national history, but, actually, it was quoted from their own Scriptures in

Psalm 95: 7-11: " For he is our God;
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye
will hear his voice,

⁸ Harden not your heart, as in the
provocation, and as in the day of
temptation in the wilderness:

⁹ When your fathers tempted me,
proved me, and saw my work.

¹⁰ Forty years long was I grieved
with this generation, and said, It is a
people that do err in their heart, and
they have not known my ways:

¹¹ Unto whom I sware in my wrath that
they should not enter into my rest."

Notice how this quotation from Psalms was
introduced in verse 7 of Hebrews 3.

"Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith--."

So it was not merely the words of David, but the words of the Holy Spirit Himself. And it was a warning to those who would stop short of real faith in Christ, and harden their hearts, walking in disobedience.

So to those early Hebrew adherents, the warning given in V 12-14 was clear:

"Take heed, 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 To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

¹⁴ For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."

Where there is a lack of faith, the outward life may for a time seem to be consistent with the Christian profession, but eventually the old carnal nature will assert itself, and there will be a turning back to the world, or, as in this case, to the mere carnal religion from which Christ would have delivered them---"**if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.**"

True faith is manifested by a godly walk, and steadfastness in the faith.

The principle is, "**By their fruits ye shall know them.**"

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In the remainder of this chapter, that is, V 15-19, the Holy Spirit continues to use the example of Israel in the

wilderness as a solemn warning to all who make a shallow profession of Christianity.

V 15 **"While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.**

16 **For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.**

17 **But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?**

18 **And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?**

19 **So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."**

The main warning here is to **"harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."**

1 Corinthians 10:11 tells us, concerning Israel, **"Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."**

So these Hebrews were to look seriously at the consequences of their fathers' continued provocations and lack of faith.

Their refusal to enter the Promised Land had, in the end, resulted in God's refusal to ever let them enter Canaan.

Even when they had repented of their actions, there was no change in God's sentence.

They had gone too far in their refusal to believe God, and so they were condemned to a life of wandering.

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This warning continues in chapter 4, with a further insight into David's words in Psalm 95.

V 1-10 **"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.**

² **For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.**

³ **For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said (referring to Psalm 95:11) As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.**

⁴ **For he spake in a certain place of**

the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

⁵ And in this place again (referring to Psalm 95:11) If they shall enter into my rest.

⁶ Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

⁷ Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

⁸ For if Jesus (actually Joshua) had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

⁹ There remaineth therefore a rest to

the people of God.

¹⁰ For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his."

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V 1 "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

In some parts of Scripture, the land of Canaan is a picture of the Christian's victorious life in Christ.

It is there that the mature Christian fights against principalities and powers in the strength of his Great Joshua.

However, here in V 1-2, Canaan speaks of our entrance into heaven.

Heaven is the destination of the Christian,
just as Canaan was the destination
promised to Israel.

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V 1-2 **"Let us therefore fear, lest, a
promise being left us of entering into
his rest, any of you should seem to
come short of it.**

² **For unto us was the gospel
preached, as well as unto them: but the
word preached did not profit them, not
being mixed with faith in them that
heard it."**

Yes, there was the danger that some of the
Hebrews in this Christian assembly had
stopped short of their eternal home.
What a tragedy if they, like their fathers
of old, should stop short of heaven
because of unbelief.

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But here in V 3, Canaan pictures our present life in Christ.

If we enter that Canaan, by faith in Jesus, we become the children of God, and can even go on to a victorious life in Christ while following this pilgrim pathway.

And amazingly enough, we can have victory in Canaan while resting in Christ.

V 3-5 **"For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.**

⁴ For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his

works.

⁵ **And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest."**

Here is where the writer makes a special appeal to these Jewish brethren.

He again quotes Psalm 95:11 in verses 3 and 5 of Hebrews.

However, as we look at it, we notice that there seems to be a problem in our English translation.

If you compare Psalm 95:11 to Hebrews, you will find that the words are different in Psalms than those in V 3 and 5 of Hebrews.

Psalm 95:11 reads like this: **"Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest."**

Whereas V 3 reads---"**As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest.**"

The main difference being that verses 3 and 5 put God's "**rest**" in the future---"**if they shall enter.**"

That future tense will turn out to be an important point in the argument set forth in Hebrews.

Also, the writer's reasoning in V 2-5 is hard for us to follow (perhaps again because of the translation).

However, the conclusion arrived at in V 6 is certainly clear enough---"**Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief.**"

So, the bottom line is this. The writer of Hebrews is zeroing in on the word **"rest"** found in Psalm 95:11.

First, he mentions the Sabbath rest of God after creation.

Hebrews 4:4 **"For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works."**

Although the writer mentions God's Sabbath rest here, it is clear that this is not the rest referred to in Psalm 95.

You might ask, if God's rest is not the rest referred to in Psalm 95, then why does He even mention it?

One possible answer is that this is part of the process of circular reasoning that is so prevalent in Hebrews.

We North Americans tend to think linearly,
or in a system of steps.

And linear reasoning is dominant in the book
of Romans.

However, the book of Hebrews uses a
different, but equally powerful, system
of thinking called circular reasoning.

Under this process, the subject, in this
case "**rest**," is looked at from all
angles.

So the writer first mentions the well-known
incident of God's Sabbath rest as one
possible type.

However, this could not be the rest referred
to in Psalm 95 because Hebrews 4:5 puts
the event in the future: "**If they shall
enter into my rest**," and God's Sabbath
rest was definitely very much in the
past.

Neither was it the rest that the children of Israel forfeited when they refused to enter Canaan.

Indeed, by the time Psalm 95 was written, several generations had already lived in Canaan.

Actually, over 400 years had passed by when David wrote these words.

So then, what was the "**rest**" that David referred to in Psalm 95?

Well, David, writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit, used the words "**To day if ye will hear his voice.**"

So the admonition (not to follow in the steps of their fathers) was at least brought up to the time of David's day.

However, the argument made in Hebrews brings this time of "**rest**" even beyond David's time.

I hope you're still with me.

In fact, I hope I'm still with me.

Let's go on.

If we look back at Hebrews 3:7-8, we see the verification that David's words in Psalm 95 were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

V 7-8 " **Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith,
To day if ye will hear his voice,
8 Harden not your hearts, as in the
provocation.**

So then, because the Holy Spirit, not David, said "**To day,**" it does not necessarily mean David today.

In fact, the writer of Hebrews goes on to say that this "**rest**" is actually the believer's rest in Jesus that he enjoys in this age of grace, and also it is his promised rest in heaven.

V 6-11 "Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

8 For if Jesus (the word here should be Joshua) had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter

**into that rest, lest any man fall after
the same example of unbelief."**

So, in the culmination of this very Jewish argument is an admonition to make their calling and election sure.

V 11 **"Let us labour therefore to enter into
that rest, lest any man fall after the
same example of unbelief."**

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Now that we understand the point of this argument and its consequent admonition, let's go back to these verses and have a closer look.

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Concerning the name Jesus that we find in verse 8, it should be translated Joshua, not Jesus.

It is well known that the name of our
Blessed Lord which we read as Jesus is
the Greek form of the Hebrew word
Joshua.

So, Israel's great leader and our Great
Saviour both bore the same name.

I still find it amazing that God gave His
Son the Gentile form of the name.

I suppose this was a foreshadowing of the
fact that His mission was more than the
fulfillment of Jewish promises.

Old Simeon showed this in his words spoken
to Mary and Joseph: **"For mine eyes
have seen thy salvation,**

³¹ **Which thou hast prepared before
the face of all people;**

³² **A light to lighten the Gentiles,
and the glory of thy people Israel."**--

Luke 2: 30-32.

So, Joshua led the generation who believed
God into Canaan rest.

And, Jesus leads those who believe God's
good news into their present rest in
Christ, and their final rest in heaven.

However, as V 8 points out, Joshua did not
lead that first unbelieving generation
into Canaan.

**"For if Jesus (actually Joshua) had given
them rest, then would he not afterward
have spoken of another day."**

So then, the Holy Spirit, speaking in Psalm
95, was really indicating a future
rest.

V 9-11 **"There remaineth therefore a rest to
the people of God.**

¹⁰ **For he that is entered into his
rest, he also hath ceased from his own
works, as God did from his.**

11 **Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."**

After this long and scholarly argument, the writer draws the conclusion, **"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."**

And this rest refers both to our final home in heaven and our blessings in Christ right here on this earth.

Now, it is a truth of the Gospel message that we can only enter into **"the grace of God that bringeth salvation"** if we cease from our own works and rest only in Christ's finished work on the cross.

Or to put it in the words of V 10, **"For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his."**

However, even though the work of salvation is a finished work, we must, **"labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."**

We must give due diligence in the first place to search our hearts and apply our minds to the promises in God's Word.

We must forsake our sins, and flee to the Lord for salvation.

Yes, we must **"labour therefore to enter into that rest."**

And it was imperative for those Hebrews, who only had a head knowledge of Christianity, to apply themselves to the Gospel message.

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There is still a danger today of falling short.

We can grow up in the church, and be intimately associated with the brethren, without ever having obeyed the Gospel call.

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This whole chapter has been a warning to those who would accept the good things of the Gospel intellectually, but remain uncommitted to Christ.

And, in the next two verses, there is a final warning to those who would lightly esteem the Word of God and the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

V 12-13 **"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the**

joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

¹³ Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

It is amazing how closely the Written Word and the Living Word go together here.

V 12 describes the Written Word, but immediately after, in V 13, the Lord Jesus Christ is in view.

We know this to be true by the words---"**in his sight**" and "**the eyes of him.**"

First of all, let's look at the Written Word.

V 12 "**For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing**

asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The Word of God is "**qu**ick," or *living*.

It is very living and active in seizing the conscience of the sinner, in cutting him to the heart, and in comforting him and binding up the wounds of his soul. Saints and sinners alike died and passed off this world scene, but the Word of God lives on.

1 Peter 1: 24-25 **"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:**

²⁵ **But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."**

And it is **"powerful."**

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10: 4-5, **"(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)**

⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

No doubt he was referring to the Word of God.

And it is **"sharper than any twoedged sword."**

Indeed, it is **"the sword of the Spirit."**

V 12 tells us it is **"sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a**

**discerner of the thoughts and intents
of the heart."**

It reaches down to the innermost being of
man, and makes the proud spirit humble,
and the perverse spirit meek and
obedient.

Sinful habits that have become rooted deeply
in the soul of man are separated and
cut off by this sword.

This sword divides between the "**joints and
marrow,**" and can cut off the lusts of
the flesh as well as the lusts of the
mind.

And it is "**a discerner of the thoughts and
intents of the heart."**

The Word will turn the sinner inside out,
show him his true nature, and then show
him the remedy.

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And, V 13 shows us the living Word: **"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."**

There is a striking resemblance here to the Written Word.

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight."

Our Lord Jesus Himself reinforces this message in Revelation 2:23: **"All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."**

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In the next two verses, we're going to look at Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest.

There are many comforting thoughts here, but there is a caution also.

We must remember that the high priest of old inspected the sacrifices before offering them to the Almighty.

Having received them, he cut them into pieces to be presented to God.

In doing so, he inspected the sacrifice inside and out for any blemish, for no sacrifice that was defective was to be presented to God.

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We are told in Hebrews 13: 15-16 that the believer also has sacrifices to offer to the Father by our High Priest, **"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.**

16 **But to do good and to communicate
forget not: for with such sacrifices
God is well pleased."**

Of course, we know that we can offer nothing
that is acceptable to God without the
sweet savour of Christ to sanctify it.

But, let us also remember that "**all things
are naked and opened unto the eyes of
him with whom we have to do.**"

Let our sacrifices, that is, "**the fruit of
our lips**" and our good works, be given,
in so far as we are able, with pure
motives and loving hearts.

The offerings that we present to our Great
High Priest, that He in turn offers to
God, should not be tainted with pride
or hypocrisy.

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In spite of the many solemn words of warning given in this chapter, the writer ends with words of comfort and resource for the believer.

V 14-16 " Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

¹⁵ For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Because of Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, God's throne of judgment has now become a mercy seat.

The high priest of old went once a year, on the Day of Atonement, into the holiest of all.

There he stood, in the very presence of God, with his own, and the people's, sin offering.

Our Lord Jesus executed the first part of His High Priestly ministry here on earth by the offering up of Himself on the cross . . . for us.

The other part of His High Priestly ministry He exercises in heaven today, as He pleads the cause, and presents the offerings of His people.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."