

A Study of Hebrews

Lesson 4

Hebrews 3:1-4:10

Jesus is Better Than Moses

(Hebrews 3:1-6)

We have already studied in past lessons the ways in which Jesus is superior to the angels. Now we see Jesus as being superior or greater than Moses. We recall that this book was likely first read by Jewish Christians. Jews considered Moses to be truly great as the one through whom God delivered them from Egyptian bondage and the one through whom God gave the Law. To say that Jesus is superior to Moses was a monumental statement to the Jews.

The designation of the Christians in Hebrews 3:1 is significant. They are *holy* because they have been set apart for Christ and he has made propitiation for them (2:17) and they are *brothers* because they share along with the author of Hebrews that heavenly calling.

The Hebrew writer turns his readers to Jesus and says to “consider Jesus” ... “who was faithful.”

1. What is the meaning of the word “*consider*?”
2. How is Jesus described in Hebrews 3:1-2?
3. Describe the difference between the role Jesus fulfills as apostle with his role as high priest.

The house of God in verse 2 refers to God’s people; in the Old Testament this was Israel, but in the New Testament it is Christians (the church).

4. What two contrasts are made between Moses and Jesus regarding “God’s house?”

That Little Word “If”

The word “if” indicates a condition. In Hebrews 3:6, we are a part of God’s house “if” we hold fast our confidence and hope. Hebrews 3:14 again we share in Christ “if” we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

A Warning

(Hebrews 3:7-19)

In Hebrews 2:1-4 the Hebrew writer warns his readers not to drift away. Now in 3:7-19 he provides a warning from the history of the Jews as they wandered in the desert refusing to listen to God. They did not enter the land of rest because of their unfaithfulness and lack of belief.

The Hebrew writer quotes from Psalm 95:7-11 in Hebrews 3:7-11. We see immediately that Scripture is from the Holy Spirit (Heb 3:7; 2 Peter 1:21). This passage was especially meaningful to the Hebrew writer because he quotes, *"Today, if you do hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion"* three times (Heb 3:7,8; 3:15; and 4:7. Psalm 95 was divided into two parts with the first being used as a call to worship while the second is a warning against disobedience.

A Couple of Important Greek Words

The word translated in our English bibles in Hebrews 3:12 as "beware" or "take care" is the Greek word "blepete" which has a very strong meaning -- BEWARE! Be careful. Be on guard. This can happen to you too just as it did to the Israelites.

The second Greek word is "apostenai" from which we get the English word apostasy. This word is translated in many English translations as "fall away."

The warning is clear: Listen to the Lord and obey Him. The Israelites in the desert were filled with hard hearts. The episodes that record the failure of the wandering Israelites can be found in Exodus 17; Numbers 13-14; and Deuteronomy 9:10. The warning is also that the warning is to be obeyed **TODAY**.

5. What do the words "provoked," "swore," and "wrath" tell us about God's reaction to the unfaithful Jews in the desert?

6. What is meant by the term "fall away" in Hebrews 3:12?

Neil R. Lightfoot in our textbook comments on the word unbelieving in Hebrews 3:12 and says, "'Unbelief' here is not so much 'lack of believing' but 'refusal of believing.'"¹ Because of the danger of apostasy, it is important that we encourage one another (Heb 3:13; 10:24-24).

¹ Lightfoot, Neil R. *Everyone's Guide to Hebrews*. p. 53.

7. What if anything is significant about the phrase “every day” in Hebrews 3:13?

There are five rhetorical questions found in Hebrews 3:16-19. A) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? B) Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? C) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? D) Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? E) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

8. Please describe why Israel failed to enter the Promised Land. What danger does this highlight for us?

Rest for the People of God

(Hebrews 4:1-10)

There is no break in thought from the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4. The words “enter” and “rest” are the key words tying these verses together. The word “enter” is used nine times in chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews indicating that this is an important thought. The Jews were not able to enter into the Promised Land because of their disobedience and unbelief. Now comes the warning to Christians: we too can miss the promised rest if we are disobedient and unbelieving.

To miss the promised rest is a fearful thing (4:1). We have heard the Good News, just as the Jews heard good news. Yet the good news did not benefit them. The question is: “Will the Good News benefit us?”

9. In what sense did God “rest from his works?” When if ever did God cease from this rest? (Heb. 4:4 which is a quotation from Genesis 2:2).

In verses 4-7 there are two more quotations (both from Psalm 95). The rest was available to the Jews in the day of Moses, was still available in the days of David as quoted in Psalm 95, and it is still available today. What is offered is a share of the rest that God enjoys.

Just as Jesus is greater than Moses, he is also greater than Joshua. The rest that Joshua led them in was temporary and earthly. The Promised Land was a great land, but it was only a physical land and the Jews did not keep it perpetually. There is a much greater rest available to God’s people. Jesus leads us to everlasting rest.

Hebrews 4:9 calls the rest available a Sabbath rest. This comes from the Greek word *sabbatismos*. This is because it is a participation in God’s own rest.² A rest awaits those who

² Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*.

serve God faithfully, where they will share the rest that God enjoys. We call this place of Sabbath rest *heaven*.

Therefore we must strive to enter the rest that is offered to us.

10. What is meant by the word “strive?”

11. Describe the Word of God from Hebrews 4:12.

12. What do we learn about God in Hebrews 4:13?