

EXPLANATION OF 58TH BIBLEBOOK HEBREWS 3 (A.D. 64)

OUTLINE

Section 2. Hebrews 3:1 - 4:13. Christ is God's Son over God's house, which is the true home (Rest) of the people of God.	1
Introduction. Who are 'the people of God'? What is meant by 'Israel'?	1
A comparison between the expressions (names) for the people of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.	
3:1-6. The superiority of Christ the High Priest to Moses the servant	3
a. In God's household, Christ is greater than Moses.	
b. The one household of God.	
c. The perseverance of the saints.	
3:7-19. Second practical warning. Do not harden your hearts against this revelation!	5
The rejection of Christ is more serious than the rejection of Moses.	
a. Old Testament typology.	
b. The historical record of Israel's rebellion.	
c. The quotation from Psalm 95:7-11 (3:7-10).	
d. The warning not to fail to enter God's 'Rest' is for every generation (3:11)	
e. Exhortation not to fall away from the living God and not to be hardened by sin (3:12-13)	
f. The Hebrews have become believers in Christ (3:14).	
g. Only disobedience and unbelief can prevent them from entering God's Rest (3:15-19)	

Hebrews 3 teaches that Jesus is greater than Moses. The Jews regard Moses as *the greatest prophet* of Judaism, but Jesus Christ is greater than Moses (3:1-6)! The second exhortation is: If you hear his voice today, do not harden your heart as the Israelites did at Meribah and Massah during the 40 year journey through the desert. That made God angry so that he swore that that generation of Israelites would not enter his Rest (the Promised Land)(3:7-11).

Believers should rather encourage brothers daily not to be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (3:12-15). The second exhortation is backed-up by a warning: the Israelites that were led out of Egypt never entered God's rest, because of their sinful unbelief and disobedience (3:16-19).

Section 2. Hebrews 3:1 - 4:13 **Christ is God's Son over God's house,** **which is the true home (Rest) of the people of God.**

Introduction. Who are 'the people of God'? What is meant by 'Israel'?

During the Old Testament period the (mainly Israelite) believers in the God who revealed himself in the Bible and in the Coming Messiah were 'the people of God'. *Since the first coming of Jesus Christ* the believers in Jesus Christ from all nations, including those in Israel, are 'the people of God'.

The chosen believers during the Old Testament period are the beginning of God's people, but not the end of God's people. *They are the type for the chosen believers from among all the nations during the New Testament period.*

A comparison between the expressions (names) for the people of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

a. Israel continued and extended.

Gods people, Israel, the chosen believers during the Old Testament period

- are not terminated (at the first coming of Christ) or substituted (by the Church of the New Testament),
- but are continued during the New Testament period on a higher plane of realities (instead of the shadows)¹
- and extended (enlarged) to include the believers in Jesus Christ in every nation on earth.

b. Therefore God's Old Testament people, Israel, and God's New Testament people, the Church, are called by exactly the same names!

Names for people in Israel and the Church:

- God's *firstborn son* (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; NT Hebrews 12:23)
- God's *sons and daughters* (Isaiah 43:6-7; NT 2 Corinthians 6:18)
- The city of Jerusalem (another symbol of God's people) are called: *a woman, or the bride, or the wife* (Isaiah 54:1,5-6,11-12; Ezekiel 16:32; Hosea 2:2; NT Revelation 12:1; Revelation 21:9-10)
- The *first fruits* of God's harvest (Jeremiah 2:3); the first fruits of all he created (NT James 1:18)

Names for a group in Israel and the Church:

- The *twelve tribes* (Genesis 49:28; NT James 1:1; Revelation 7:4; Revelation 21:12)
- A *kingdom of priests* (Exodus 19:6; NT 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6)
- A *holy people* (Exodus 19:6; NT 1 Peter 2:9; Titus 2:14)
- God's *chosen people* (Deuteronomy 7:6; NT 1 Peter 2:9)

¹ Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 9:7-10

- God’s treasured possession out of all nations (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6), “a people that are his very own (of our great God and Saviour)”, “a people belonging to God” (NT Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9)
- God’s *covenant people* (Leviticus 26:12; NT Corinthians 6:16)
- A dispersed people, a wandering nation, scattered through the nations, *strangers in the world* (Deuteronomy 30:1; Psalm 105:10-13; Ezekiel 12:15; Esther 3:8; 1 Peter 1:1)
- *Israel* (2 Samuel 7:23; NT Galatians 6:14-16)
- *Jews* (Zechariah 8:22-23; NT Romans 2:28-29)

Both Israel and the Church are called by the name of the same city:

- *Zion* (also a symbol of God’s people)(Isaiah 51:16; Isaiah 52:7; NT Hebrews 12:22-24)
- The present Jerusalem (that is beneath) and the *Jerusalem* that is above (Isaiah 51:17; Isaiah 52:1; NT Galatians 4:25-26), the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22), the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2), the Holy Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10)

Both Israel and the Church are depicted by the same images:

- *The vineyard of God* (Isaiah 5:7; NT Matthew 21:41-43)
- *The flock of God* (sheep) from the sheep pen of Israel and from the sheep pens of the other nations (Ezekiel 34; NT John 10:16)
- *The temple as building*² (also a symbol of God’s people) (1 Chronicles 17:12,14; NT 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16)
- *The house of God*³ called a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7) and in which Moses (Deuteronomy 23:18) is a servant and Christ is the Son (NT Hebrews 3:5-6).

Israel is called Church and the Church is called Israel:

- Both are called *Israel* (2 Samuel 7:23; NT Galatians 6:14-16)
- Both are called *Church* (Hebrew: qahal; Greek: ekklésia) (Psalm 107:32; NT Matthew 16:18) *with a council of elders* (Hebrew: moshab zekenim; Greek: presbuterion) as leadership (Psalm 107:32; NT 1 Timothy 4:14).
- Both are called *Christians* (anointed): (Hebrew: meshichi; Greek: christoi) (Psalm 105:15) (christianous) who lived among the non-Christians in the world (NT Acts 11:26)
- Both are *members of the same Body* (Ephesians 3:6)
- Both are *heirs* (of God’s promise) (Ephesians 3:6; Galatians 3:29)
- Both are *sharers* together of God’s promises in Christ on complete equal footing (Ephesians 3:6; 2 Corinthians 1:20)

c. Israel (Old Testament believers) and Church (New Testament believers) together form one organism.

They are symbolised as follows:

- *one flock* (John 10:16)
- *one Body* (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 3:6)
- *one family* with children of God (Galatians 3:26-29)
- *one new man* (Ephesians 2:15)
- *one house of prayer for all nations* (Isaiah 56:7)
- *one household*⁴ of God (Ephesians 2:19)
- *one dwelling of God in the Spirit* (Ephesians 2:22)
- *one olive tree* (Jeremiah 11:16-17; NT Romans 11:17-24)
- *one chosen and holy people* of God (1 Peter 2:9-10).
- *One New Jerusalem* (Revelation 21:9-14, see Hebrews 12:22-24 for Jews and Galatians 4:21-31 for non-Jews).

d. Israel and Church come into existence through ‘the gospel’ and ‘the Spirit of God’.

God called his people, Israel, and called his Church to himself through the preaching of ‘the gospel’ during the Old Testament period (Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:18-21; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 4:1-3) and during the New Testament period (NT Acts 20:24; see Acts 13:44-49).

Believers from among the Jews and from among the non-Jews (heathen nations, Greeks) are *baptised with the Spirit into one Body*⁵ (also a symbol of God’s people). They are “all given the one Spirit to drink” (see Ezekiel 36:25-27; NT 1 Corinthians 12:13)

The believers *gather together in a Church (community, gathering)*⁶ (Hebrew: qahal)(Psalm 107:32; Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:28); Greek translation of the Old Testament: ekklésia) (NT Matthew 16:18; Matthew 18:17; Acts 8:2; Acts 9:1) and are *led by a council of elders*⁶ (Hebrew: moshab zekenim)(Psalm 107:32); (Greek: presbuterion)(NT 1 Timothy 4:14).

In the Greek New Testament natural Israel (the unbelievers in Israel) is called “*Israel according to the flesh*” (carnal Israel)⁵ (Romans 9:6a; 1 Corinthians 10:18 Greek text). She “bears children who are to be slaves” (Galatians 4:24). In contrast the Church (the believers in Jesus Christ) is called “*the Israel of God*” (spiritual Israel)⁶ (Galatians 6:14-16; see Romans 9:6b and

² η οικοδομη

³ ο οικος

⁴ οικειος-α-ον members of the same household

⁵ τον Ισραηλ κατα σαρκα

⁶ τον Ισραηλ του θεου

Galatians 4:26).

The Israel of God consists of believers who boast in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to them and they to the world” (Galatians 6:14; see Romans 2:28-29 and 1 Corinthians 1:22-26)! *‘Israel’ in this spiritual sense is definitely limited to believers in Christ from among the Jews and from among the non-Jews in both the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.*

While *natural Israel* became disloyal to God and his Messiah (Isaiah 1:2-10; John 1:11), *spiritual Israel* never rejected God and his Messiah (Romans 9:6b)! Spiritual Israel remains God’s covenant people forever. God has never rejected spiritual Israel that is: the believing Jews, ‘the proselytes’ (the Gentiles who converted completely to God and to the Old Testament Law), and ‘the God-fearing people’ (the Gentiles who converted to God and partially to the Old Testament Law) (Acts 2:5,10; Romans 11:1-6). Spiritual Israel or the Church remains God’s chosen people forever (*read* Romans 8:29-30,33; Romans 9:6-18; Romans 11:1-5,28-29; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; see John 6:44,37; John 17:3,12).

After the first coming of Jesus “*there is no difference between Jew and Gentile (Greek).* The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him” (Romans 10:12-13; 1 Corinthians 1:24; Galatians 3:28-29; Colossians 3:11; Revelation 21:9-14). “He (God) made no distinction between us (Jews who believed) and them (Gentiles who believed) for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9).

e. The ‘brothers’ of Jesus are only those who believe in him.

‘*The brothers of Jesus*’ (Matthew 25:40) are NOT the natural Jews (the nationals of flesh and blood in Israel).

The ‘brothers of Jesus’ are ‘whoever do God’s will’⁷. They believe in the One (Jesus Christ) whom God of the Bible had sent⁸. They are ‘sanctified in Christ (separated from the sinful world to be dedicated to Christ alone)’⁹, “holy brothers that share in the heavenly calling”¹⁰. Matthew 25:40 does not speak of natural Jews, but of believers in Christ who are welcoming other believers in Christ (the disciples) and showing mercy to them¹¹!

In the Old Testament unbelievers in Israel are called people of “Sodom, Gomorrah and Egypt”¹² or “No longer pitied” and “*Not my people*”.¹³ In the New Testament unbelievers in Israel are called “stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears” who have “resisted the Holy Spirit, killed the prophets and murdered the Messiah”¹⁴.

3:1-6. The superiority of Christ as Apostle and High Priest to Moses the servant.

a. In God’s household, Christ is greater than Moses.

3:1. Therefore, holy brothers, sharers in the heavenly calling, you *must* fix your thoughts on Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.¹⁵

Christians are ‘holy brothers’ (and ‘faithful brothers’)¹⁶. ‘Brothers’ within the family of God all share a heavenly calling. ‘Holy’ means ‘set apart by God himself for God himself’, made members of God’s family, called to share in God’s eternal rest.

‘Fix your thoughts on Jesus’ is a command and marks a definite change with the Old Testament (namely, from Moses to Jesus)! Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest of (whom) our confession (speaks). The combination of prophet (envoy) and priest is not common in Old Testament. Moses is the best example: as ‘a prophet’ he mediates God’s Law to people and as ‘a priest’ he is their most effective intercessor with God¹⁷.

In both these aspects, the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ in the New Testament: Jesus Christ is:

- ‘Apostle’ of God = sent out by God to be the authoritative representative (envoy, prophet) of God among people. Jesus Christ reveals God completely

⁷ Mark 3:35

⁸ John 6:29

⁹ Hebrews 2:11

¹⁰ Hebrews 3:1

¹¹ Matthew 10:40-42; cf. Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11; Revelation 21:9-14

¹² Isaiah 1:10; Revelation 11:8

¹³ Lo-Ruhama and Lo-Ammi (Hosea 1:6-9)

¹⁴ Acts 7:51-52

¹⁵ **3:1.** Therefore (οθεν)(ch=conjunction hyper/supercoordinating), holy (αγιος-α-ον)(a--vm-p *vocative*) brothers (ο αδελφος)(n-vm-p), sharers in (ο μετοχος)(ap-vm-p) the heavenly (επουρανιος-ον)(a--gf-s) calling (η κλησις)(n-gf-s), you *must* fix your thoughts on (κατανοησατε<κατανοεω) (vmaa--yp) Jesus, the Apostle (ο αποστολος)(n-am-s) and High Priest (ο αρχιερευς)(n-am-s) of our (ημων)(npg-xp) confession (η ομολογια)(n-gf-s)

¹⁶ Colossians 1:2

¹⁷ Exodus 32:31-32

- ‘High Priest’ of Christians = the authoritative representative of Christians in God’s presence. Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of man’s obedient response to God.

3:2. He was faithful to the One who appointed (*made*) him, just as Moses (*was faithful*) in all his (*God’s*) house.¹⁸

As faithful Apostle he discharged his commission completely by finishing it¹⁹. As faithful High Priest (2:17) he never stops to represent us before God (9:24).

3:3. He (*Jesus*) has been considered worthy of greater honour than Moses, as much more honour the Person building (*the house*) has than the house itself.²⁰

3:4. For every house is built by someone, but he who is the Builder of everything (*is*) God.²¹

3:5. And Moses (*was*) faithful in all his (*God’s*) house as a servant with a view to testimony of (*testifying to*) the things that would be said (*in the future*).²²

Moses was *the servant* in God’s house, a dignified office rendering service freely and willingly and relating personally to the One served. The servant Moses became the chief administrative executive of God’s house. But Christ is *the Builder* of God’s house. He is the ‘Constructor’ and ‘Supplier of all necessary furniture and equipment’. Christ is the Founder and the Inheritor of God’s house, because “through him and to him all things were made”²³. As Builder there is no distinction between the Father and the Son²⁴.

The ministry of Moses was designed as “a testimony of those things which would be said (in the future)(in the New Testament period)” The word (testimony) indicates that *the task of Moses was one which pointed beyond itself to a higher future revelation. Moses foreshadows the ministry and claims of Jesus Christ.* The ministry of Moses was prophetic and anticipatory, a shadow, but the ministry of Jesus Christ was the fulfilment, the real thing!

3:6. But Christ (*is faithful*) as a Son over his (*God’s*) house, which house are we if we hold fast to boldness and boasting about the hope.²⁵

Moses was the servant in God’s house, but Christ is the Son and Heir of God’s house. While Moses served in the past in relationship to what would be said in the future. Moses as God’s servant in God’s house has not been serving since he died in 1407 B.C.! But Christ as God’s Son in God’s house is ruling over God’s house in all eternity. Just as 2 Samuel 7:11-14 is applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:5b (the King will be my Son), so it is applied to Hebrews 3:4 (God will establish the King’s house and the King will build a house for God). The authority of the Son is much greater than the authority of the servant!

b. The one household of God.

We, Jewish and non-Jewish believers, are God’s house. The Bible does not speak of ‘two peoples of God’ or ‘two households of God’ as if Israel and the Church are two distinct peoples of God!

¹⁸ **3:2.** He was (οντα>ειμι)(vppaam-s) faithful (πιστος-η-ον)(a--am-s) to the One (τω)(ddms=definite article dative masculine singular / aprnm-s= Adjective pronominal *relative* nominative masculine singular) who appointed (made) (ποιησαντι>ποιεω)(vpaadm-s) him (αυτος-η-ον)(npamzs), just as (ως)(cs) Moses (was faithful) in (εν)(pd) all (whole) (ολος-η-ον)(a--dm-s) his (αυτος-η-ον)(npgmzs)(God’s) house (ο οικος)(n-dm-s)

¹⁹ John 17:4

²⁰ **3:3.** He (ουτος-η-ον)(apdnm-s *demonstrative*) (Jesus) has been considered worthy (ηξιωται>οξιοω)(virp--zs)(the perfect tense expresses the state of condition) of greater (πλειονος>πλειων)(a-mgf-s *coMparative*)(followed by genitive of comparison) honour (η δοξη)(n-gf-s) than (παρα)(pa) Moses, as (κατα)(pa) much (οσος-η-ον)(apran-s *relative/* apdan-s *demonstrative*) more (πλειονα>πλειων)(a-amf-s *coMparative*) honour (η τιμη)(n-af-s) the Person building (κατασκευασας>κατασκευαζω)(vpaanm-s) (the house) has (εχει>εχω)(vipa--zs) than the house (η οικος)(n-gm-s genitive of comparison) itself (αυτος-η-ον)(npamzs).

²¹ **3:4.** For (γαρ)(cs) every (πας)(a--nm-s) house (ο οικος)(n-nm-s) is built (κατασκευαζεται>κατασκευαζω)(virp--zs) by (υπο)(pg) someone (τις, τυνος)(apigm-s *indefinite*), but (δε)(cc) he who is (ο)(dnms/aprnm-s *relative*) the Builder (κατασκευασας>κατασκευαζω)(vpaanm-s) of everything (πας, παντα)(ap-an-p) (is) God (θεος)(n-nm-s)

²² **3.5.** And (και)(cc) Moses (was) faithful (πιστος-η-ον)(a--nm-s) in (εν)(pd) all (whole) (ολος-η-ον)(a--dm-s) his (God’s) (αυτος-η-ον) (npgmzs) house (ο οικος)(n-dm-s) as (ως)(cs) a servant (ο θεραπων)(n-nm-s) with a view to (εις)(pa) testimony (testifying to) (το μαρτυριον)(n-an-s) of the things that (των)(dgnp /npgnzp) would be said (in the future)(λαληθησομενων>λαλεω) (vrfpgn-p).

²³ Colossians 1:16

²⁴ John 1:3

²⁵ **3:6.** But (δε)(ch) Christ (*is faithful*) as (ως)(cs) a Son (ο υιος)(n-nm-s) over (επι)(pa) his (αυτος-η-ον)(npgmzs)(God’s) house (ο οικος) (n-am-s), which (ου)(aprgm-s *relative*) house (ο οικος)(n-nm-s) are (εσμεν>ειμι)(vipa--xp indicative) we (ημεεις)(nprn-xp)(the believers) if (εανπερ)(cs) we hold fast to (κατασχωμεν>κατεχω)(vsaa--xp) boldness (confidence, courage) (η παρρησια)(n-af-s) and (και)(cc) boasting (το κανχημα)(n-an-s) about the hope (η ελπις, ελπιδος)(n-gf-s)(genitive of content or definition: NIV: “and to the hope of which we boast. The Christian hope is the theme of our boasting and glorying)

God has only one continuous house or household (one people of God) from the beginning (the past) unto the present!²⁶

It includes all the genuine born-again believers:

- Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham *before the time of Jacob/Israel!*
- Jacob and Joseph *before the time of Moses*
- Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, Samuel from among the judges *before the time of the kings*
- David and the other believing kings *before the time of the exile*
- Daniel and his three friends *during the exile to Babylon*²⁷
- ‘The remnant’ of Israel that returned to God *after the exile*²⁸!
- the twelve disciples of Jesus *at the beginning of the New Testament period*²⁹
- the 120 believers *before the Day of Pentecost*³⁰
- the 3000 converts *on whom the Holy Spirit was poured out*³¹
- the 5000 who heard the gospel message and believed *in Jerusalem*³²
- the “more and more men and women who believed in the Lord (Jesus Christ) and were added to their number”³³
- and *since then until today* all the chosen believers “purchased from every tribe and language and people and nation on earth”³⁴! “

New Testament Christians are “fellow-citizens of the Old Testament household”³⁵. Moses served only temporarily in an early period of the household of God, but Jesus Christ is the Builder (3:3-4)³⁶, the Ruler (3:6a)³⁷ and the Heir (the Son) of this one household of God and serves forever!

c. The perseverance of the saints.

The condition is that we hold fast to our boldness (confidence, courage) and our boasting/glorying in the hope in what is still coming! *Note the conditional sentences in the letter to the Hebrews*. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find such insistence on the fact that persevering continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality. *God’s election of believers includes the responsibility of believers to persevere, that is, to continue to believe and to obey. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints has as its corollary the teaching that the saints are the people who will persevere and actually persevere to the end.*

True Christians live by faith and not by sight. But while their hope is in things that are unseen, it is something to exult in, not to be ashamed of. Their ‘confidence’ or ‘courageous boldness’ is ‘the fearless confession’ (4:16; 10:19,35) of their faith and their hope³⁸.

There is a relationship between maintaining the Christian hope and the attainment of the final salvation³⁹. The waning of the first enthusiasm (cf. 6:4-8; 10:23-31), the apparent postponement of their hope, and the various pressures on the Hebrews combined to threaten the steadfastness of their faith. The danger of the Hebrews was that the good seed (the Gospel) fell into rocky soil (the shallow ground of the heart) and was scorched to death⁴⁰. The danger for Christians everywhere and at all times is to believe for only a while!

3:7-19. Second practical warning.

Do not harden your hearts against this revelation!

The rejection of Christ is more serious than the rejection of Moses.

a. Old Testament typology.

The Old Testament ‘salvation’ or return from exile in Babylonia had been portrayed in terms of a new Exodus⁴¹.

The New Testament salvation of Christ is interpreted as a new Exodus.

- The death of Christ is called an ‘exodus’, his departure⁴².

²⁶ 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:5-6 (Old Testament and New Testament believers); 1 Peter 2:5; 4:17

²⁷ Hebrews chapter 11

²⁸ Isaiah 1:8-9 and Isaiah 10:21-23

²⁹ Matthew 10:1-7

³⁰ Acts 1:15

³¹ Acts 2:41

³² Acts 4:4

³³ Acts 5:14

³⁴ Revelation 5:9-10

³⁵ John 10:16; Ephesians 2:19; Ephesians 3:2-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10

³⁶ cf. Matthew 16:18-19

³⁷ King, Revelation 19:16

³⁸ cf. 1 Corinthians 13:13

³⁹ Romans 5:2-4; 8:24-25; Ephesians 1:18; Colossians 1:23; 1 Peter 1:13

⁴⁰ Mark 4:5-6,16-17

⁴¹ Isaiah 41:17f; Isaiah 42:9; Isaiah 43:16-21; Isaiah 52:12

⁴² Luke 9:31

- Christ is ‘the true Passover’, sacrificed for his people⁴³.
- Christ is ‘the Lamb without blemish and without spot’⁴⁴.
- Like Israel in the Old Testament, Christians are ‘the Church in the wilderness’⁴⁵.
- The baptism of Christians into Christ is the antitype of ‘Israel’s passage through the Red Sea’⁴⁶.
- The sacramental feeding of Christians on Christ by faith is the antitype type of ‘Israel’s nourishment with manna and the water from the rock’⁴⁷.
- Christ, the spiritual Rock of Christians is the antitype of ‘the rock that accompanied the Israelites’⁴⁸.
- ‘The heavenly Rest which lies in front of Christians’ is the counterpart to ‘the earthly Canaan’ which was the goal of the Israelites⁴⁹.

The moral implication of this typology in the Old Testament is pressed upon the readers of the New Testament: *The historical record of Israel’s rebellion and punishment in the wilderness has been preserved as a warning to Christians*. “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.” “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come”⁵⁰. “Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that *the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt but later destroyed those who did not believe*”⁵¹. This is a warning to Christians against giving up their faith and hope.

b. The historical record of Israel’s rebellion.

When the Israelites during their exodus reached the hill country of the Amorites (the southern border of the Promised Land, Canaan), Moses said, “The LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it ... Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”⁵². The LORD promised, “Do not be terrified ... The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you ... There (in Egypt) you saw how the LORD your God carried you as a father carries his son, all the way you went ...”⁵³.

But the Israelites did not trust in the LORD who went ahead of them on their journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day...⁵⁴! They sent a team of 12 spies from Kadesh Barnea to explore the Promised Land. Ten spies brought a bad report: “The land we explored devours those living in it. ... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them”⁵⁵. But Joshua and Caleb brought a good report: “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it”⁵⁶.

When the LORD heard what the Israelites said, he was angry and solemnly swore: “*Not a man of this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give your forefathers*” accept Caleb and Joshua⁵⁷.

c. The quotation from Psalm 95:7-11 (3:7-10).

*Psalm 95 has two parts: ‘a call to worship’*⁵⁸ and ‘a warning against disobeying him’⁵⁹. The two parts should not be separated from one another. It is a good thing to worship God, but acts and words of worship are acceptable only if they proceed from sincere and obedient hearts. Throughout the 40 years of wandering, the Israelites ‘tested’ the LORD. ‘Tested’ means ‘tempted’ in the sense of trying to see how long his patience would hold out in the face of their stubbornness of heart⁶⁰.

3:7. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice,⁶¹

3:8. You *must* not harden your hearts as (*you did*) in the rebellion during the day of testing in the desert,⁶²

⁴³1 Corinthians 5:7

⁴⁴1 Peter 1:19

⁴⁵ἐκκλησία ἐν τῇ ἐρημῷ. Acts 7:38

⁴⁶1 Corinthians 10:1-2

⁴⁷1 Corinthians 10:3-4

⁴⁸1 Corinthians 10:4

⁴⁹Hebrews 3:7 - 4:11

⁵⁰1 Corinthians 10:6,11

⁵¹Jude 5

⁵²Deuteronomy 1:19-21

⁵³Deuteronomy 1:29-31

⁵⁴Deuteronomy 1:32-33

⁵⁵Numbers 13:31-33

⁵⁶Numbers 13:26

⁵⁷Deuteronomy 1:34-40

⁵⁸Psalm 95:1-7a

⁵⁹Psalm 95:7b-11

⁶⁰Exodus 17:7

⁶¹**3:7.** Therefore (διο)(ch), as (καθως)(cs) the Holy (αγιος-α-ον)(a--nn-s) Spirit (το πνευμα)(n-nn-s) says (λεγει>λεγω)(vipa--zs), “Today (σημερον)(ab), if (εαν)(cs) you hear (ακουσητε>ακουω)(vsaa--yp) his (αυτος-η-ον)(nprgmzs) voice (η φωνη)(n-gf-s)

⁶²**3:8.** You *must* not harden (σκληρυνητε>σκληρυνω)(vsaa--yp / vmaa—yp *imperative*) your (υμων)(npg-yp) hearts (η καρδια)(n-af-p) as (ως)(cs) (you did) in (εν)(pd) the rebellion (ο παραπικρασμος)(n-dm-s) during (κατα)(pa) the day (η ημερα) (n-af-s) of testing (οπειρασμος)(n-gm-s) in (εν)(pd) the desert (η ερημος)(ap-df-s),

3:9. Where your fathers tried by testing (*me*) and saw my works for forty years.⁶³

⁶³ **3:9.** Where (ου)(abr *relative*) your (υμων)(npg-yp) fathers (ο πατηρ)(n-nm-p) tried (επειρασαν>πειραζω)(viaa--zp) by testing (η δοκιμασια) (n-df-s) (*me*) and (και)(cc) saw (ειδον>οραω)(viaa--zp) my (μου)(npg-xs) works (τα εργα)(n-an-p) for forty (τεσσερακοντα)(a-can-p *cardinal*) years (το ετος)(n-an-p) (testing God for 40 years or seeing God's works for 40 years).

3:10. That is why I was angry with that generation and I said, “Always they are *continually* going astray with the hearts. And they have not known my ways.⁶⁴

The Holy Spirit is viewed as the Author of the Old Testament revelation: its words (3:7) and its contents (the plan of construction of tabernacle) (9:8). The author is especially thinking of Numbers 14 or Deuteronomy 1 as ‘the testing in the desert’. ‘Knowing God’s ways’ relates not so much to ‘knowledge/understanding’, but more to ‘obedience/commitment’ to God’s ways. Note the repeated references of Jesus Christ to ‘this generation’⁶⁵ of Jews in the New Testament.

d. The warning not to fail to enter God’s ‘Rest’ is for every generation (3:11).

In Numbers 12:8 God gives a solemn warning to any who might venture “to speak against my servant, against Moses”. *But God’s warning to deny or ignore the claims of Jesus Christ and the Gospel is far more serious! Therefore, rejecting Christ in the New Testament revelation is far more serious than rejecting Moses in the Old Testament revelation!*

3:11. So I swore in my anger: Never shall they enter my Rest⁶⁶.

The author of Numbers 14 and Deuteronomy 1 (Moses) had the generation of Israelites during the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, Canaan, in mind. The Rest here was entering the Promised Land, Canaan. _

The author of Psalm 95 (David) had a much later generation - at least 4 centuries later - in mind. He warns them not to follow the bad example of the preceding generation of Israelites, lest disaster should also overtake them. “They shall never enter my Rest⁶⁷.” The Rest here is associated with salvation brought about by ‘the Rock of salvation’ (the promised Messiah)⁶⁸. They are warned not to harden their hearts when they hear the LORD’s voice⁶⁹.

The author of Hebrews 3 (inspired by the Holy Spirit) impressed the same warning on an even later generation of Israelites – about 1000 years later. Through them he warns us today - 2000 years later! *The ‘Rest’ here is associated with something after the completion of the creation of the whole universe on the 7th creation day⁷⁰. Since then that Rest has never ended! The Rest is a reference to the blessings of the new age, heaven and the new earth.*

The loss incurred when people reject Jesus Christ is so much greater than the loss incurred by the Israelites when they rejected Moses (as leader and wanted to return to Egypt)! The rebels in the time of Moses missed the promised blessing of entering the Promised Land, consisting of the earthly Canaan. But the latter-day rebellion by Jews (and non-Jews) after the first coming of Christ will forfeit the much greater blessings of the new age: heaven and the new earth!

e. Exhortation not to fall away from the living God and not to be hardened by sin (3:12-13).

3:12. You *must constantly* see to it, brothers, lest (*in order that not*) there will be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief that consists in the falling away from the living God.⁷¹

Falling away from God during the Old Testament period. The generation of Moses rebelled against God when they rejected Moses as God’s appointed leader. Their rebellion originated in “a heart depraved (corrupted) by unbelief” ‘Unbelief’ is a failure to believe as well as disloyalty/unfaithfulness.

Falling away from God during the New Testament period is not simply a passive backsliding into a former position, but rather an active rebellion against God by making a choice against God who has revealed himself in Christ. For Christians to repudiate the Apostle and High Priest of their confession would be a more outrageous revolt against the Living God. A *relapse from Christianity into Judaism* would be comparable to the action of the Israelites when “they in their hearts turned back to Egypt”⁷². It is not merely a return to their previous position of being slaves, but rather a gesture of outright apostasy, a complete break with the God of the Bible!

For people who had never been illuminated by God’s final revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, the Old Testament revelation provided a means of temporary access to God - even if it was a shadowy imperfect revelation.

⁶⁴ **3:10.** That is why (διο)(ch) I was angry (indignant, burdened with grief, exhausted) (προσωχθισα>προσωχθιζω)(viaa-xs) with that (ουτος-αυτη-τουτο)(a-ddf-s=adjective demonstrative dative feminine singular) generation (η γενεα)(n-df-s) and (και)(cc) I said (ειπον>λεγω)(viaa-xs), “Always (continually, from the beginning)(αει)(ab=adverb) they are *continually* going astray (πλανωνται>πλανωω) (vipp- -zp) with the hearts (η καρδια)(n-df-s). And (δε)(cc) they (αυτους-η-ον)(nprnmzp=noun pronoun nominative masculine 3rd person plural) have not known (εγνωσαν>γνωσκω)(viaa--zp) my (μου)(npg-xs) ways (η οδος)(n-af-p)

⁶⁵ Matthew 11:16; Matthew 12:4f,45; Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:34; Acts 2:40

⁶⁶ **3:11.** So (the reason)(ως)(cs) I swore (declared an oath) (ωμοσα>ομνυμι)(viaa--xs) in (εν)(pd) my (μου)(npg-xs) anger (η οργη)(n-df-s): Never (if ever)(strong negative)(ει) shall they enter (εισελευσονται>εισερχομαι)(vifd--zp) my (μου)(npg-xs) Rest (η καταπαυσις)(n-af-s)”.

⁶⁷ Psalm 95:11

⁶⁸ Psalm 95:1

⁶⁹ Psalm 95:7-8

⁷⁰ Genesis 2:1-4

⁷¹ **3:12.** You *must constantly* see to it (βλεπετε>βλεπω)(vmpa—yp imperative), brothers (ο αδελφος)(n-nm-p vocative), lest (in order that not) (μηποτε)(cs) there will be (εσται>ειμι)(vifd--zs) in (εν)(pd) any (τις, τι)(apdm-s=adjective pronominal interrogative dative masculine singular) of you (υμων)(npg-yp=noun pronoun genitive 2nd person plural) an evil (πονηρος-α-ον)(a-nf-s) heart (η καρδια)(n-nf-s) of unbelief (η απιστια)(n-gf-s) that consists in (εν)(pd) the falling away (αποστηναι>αφισταμι)(vnaad) from (απο)(pg) the living (ζωντος>ζωω) (vppagm-s) (infinitive + preposition = explanation of the content of the evil heart) God (ο θεος)(n-gm-s)

⁷² Acts 7:39

But for those who had received the illumination of the gospel to renounce it in favour of the old order which the gospel had superseded, was the irretrievable sin - the sin against light (6:4-8).

3:13. But you *must keep on* encouraging one another for each succeeding day (*daily*), until it (*the day*) is called 'Today', so that not any of you may (*allow yourself to*) be hardened by deceitfulness of sin.⁷³

To encourage is a command, not an option! 'Encourage' means 'to stand at someone's side and call him to do something', 'to urge someone to do something', 'to fire him on'. Encourage one another to love in relationships and to be occupied with what are 'good works' in the Bible.

Encourage one another in the weekly meetings (small group or congregation) (10:24-25)! Together Christians can support one another. But in isolation a Christian may more easily succumb to the temptations and pressures of sin.

Each succeeding day is a fresh 'Today'!

The deceitfulness of sin. Many people in especially 'a shame culture' think that as long as they are not caught out in wrongdoing, they do not 'sin'. To get caught means that they 'lose face' and are 'shamed' in front of other people. For them 'sin' is purely an outward visible performance in which they are caught out/found out in the act by others.

But with God 'sin' is first of all invisible and deep in the heart and is defined in terms of 'a wrong relationship with God' (i. to miss God's goal, to fail God's perfect standard, ii. to openly transgress God's commands and teachings in the Bible, to rebel in your heart against God and his will, iii. to more subtly change God's reality, to distort God's truth). The root of 'sin' means failing God's purpose in your life. In short, it means to remain independent from God.

The fruit of 'sin' are expressed in i. 'thinking, speaking and doing things which God forbids' and ii. in 'not thinking, not speaking or not doing the things which God commands'. God always sees everything and always catches you out when you sin!

The hardening of the heart means 'a reduced sensitivity of the conscience', 'an increased lack of insight and wisdom' and 'a growth in rebellion against God and what he regards as 'right', so that it becomes more difficult to recognise the right path next time. "Do not allow or permit yourself to be hardened" is the Greek passive of permission.

f. The Hebrews have become believers in Christ (3:14).

3:14. We have become sharers of Christ (*e.g. his Kingdom*) if at least we hold firmly to the beginning of the conviction until the end.⁷⁴

We (believers in Jesus Christ) come to be partakers of Christ. The meaning of this phrase is probably not 'participating in Christ's death and resurrection' (as Paul uses the phrase: 'in Christ'⁷⁵), but rather 'participating with Christ'⁷⁶ in his heavenly Kingdom (cf. 12:28). The parallel is Paul's encouragement or warning about inheriting the Kingdom⁷⁷.

If we hold firmly to our conviction till the end. The root meaning of 'conviction' (Greek: *hupostasis*) is 'that which underlies', 'the ground', 'the basis'. 'Hupostasis' refers to the reality, the ground or basis of faith. It is Christian assurance, conviction, confidence (3:14) about the reality of things Christians hope for (11:1). The Christian confidence rests on a very stable foundation! The hope (expectation) of Christians is a reality, not a mere wish! 'The conviction, assurance, confidence we had at first'⁷⁸ is the dedication to the Christian truths and beliefs, which cause us 'to be a finisher', to be a Christian who stays on course and finishes the race (cf. 12:1). Alas, the good beginning of the Israelites was not matched by their later behaviour.

g. Only disobedience and unbelief can prevent them from entering God's Rest (3:15-19).

3:15. In this (*word Psalm 95:7-8*) it has been said: Today if you hear his voice", you *must* not harden your hearts as (*you did*) in the rebellion."⁷⁹

⁷³ **3:13.** But (ἀλλά)(ch) you *must keep on* encouraging (παρακαλεῖτε<παρακαλέω)(vmpa--yp) one another (εαυτος-η-ον)(npramyp=noun pronoun accusative masculine 2nd person plural) for (κατα)(pa) each succeeding (*distributive*)(εκαστος-η-ον)(a--af-s =adjective accusative feminine singular) day (η ημερα)(n-af-s) (daily), until (αχρις)(pg) it (the day)(ου)(aprgm-s / apdgm-s=adjective pronominal *relative/demonstrative* genitive masculine singular) is called (καλεῖται>καλέω)(vipp--zs) 'Today' (σημερον)(ab), so that (ινα)(cs) not (μη)(ab) any (τις)(apinm-s *indefinite*) of (εξ)(pg) you (υμων)(npg-yp) may (allow yourself to) be hardened (σκληρυνθη>σκληρυνω)(vsap--zs) by deceitfulness (η απατη)(n-df-s) of sin (η αμαρτια)(n-gf-s)

⁷⁴ **3:14.** We have become (γεγοναμεν>γινομαι)(vira--xp *perfect tense*) sharers (ο μετοχος)(ap-nm-p) of Christ if at least (εαντερ)(cs) we hold (κατασχωμεν>κατεχω)(vsaa--xp) firmly (βεβαιος-α-ον)(a--af-s) to the beginning (η αρχη)(n-af-s) of the confidence (conviction) (η υποστασις)(n-gf-s) (the confidence we had at first) until (μεχρι)(pg) the end (το τελος)(n-gn-s).

⁷⁵ εν χριστω f.e. in Ephesians 1:3

⁷⁶ μετοχος του χριστου (12:28)

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5; Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:12

⁷⁸ cf. Revelation 2:4, 'first love'

⁷⁹ **3:15.** In (εν)(pd) this (τω)(ddns) (word) it has been said (λεγεσθα>λεγω)(vnpf *infinitive*): Today (σημερον)(ab) if (εαν)(cs) you hear (ακουσητε>ακουω)(vsaa--yp) his (αυτος -η-ον)(nprgmzs) voice (η φωνη)(n-gf-s)", you *must* not harden (σκληρυνητε>σκληρυνω) (vsaa--yp / vmaa--yp *iMperative*) your (υμων)(npg-yp) hearts (η καρδια)(n-af-p) as (ως)(cs) (you did) in (εν)(pd) the rebellion (ο παραπικρασιμος) (n-dm-s)

The generation of Israelites in the desert failed to enter into ‘the Rest’ (the Promised Land, Canaan’), because of their unbelief in God, in his promises and in his ability to do what he promised, and because of their disobedience to Gods commands and teachings (4:2,6).

3:16. For who were they who heard and rebelled (*provoked God*)? Were they not rather all those Moses led out of Egypt?⁸⁰

Those Moses led out. Paul says that God was not pleased with ‘most of these Israelites’⁸¹. That generation of *Israelites had experienced the exodus*, how God had led them out of slavery in Egypt. *Yet they failed to experience the entrance* into Canaan (the Promised Land) because of their unbelief and disobedience! It was the generation of Israelites who had seen God’s mighty acts and had heard God’s wonderful words and yet rebelled!

3:17. And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?⁸²

3:18. And to whom did he (*God*) swear that they would *certainly* not enter into his Rest if not to those who disobeyed?⁸³

3:19. And we see that they were not able to enter, through unbelief.⁸⁴

Disobedience and unbelief. The message was clear to the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews. The present Hebrews like the former Israelites had also heard the gospel, had experienced the redeeming power of God, and had received the promise of entering ‘God’s Rest’ - a homeland of the faithful. Only unbelief and disobedience could prevent the Hebrews (and others) from realising God’s promise!

⁸⁰ **3:16.** For (γαρ)(cs) who (τις, τινες)(apnm-p=adjective pronominal *interrogative* nominative masculine plural) were they who heard (ακουσαντες>ακουω)(vraanm-p) and rebelled (provoked God) (παρεπικραναν>παραπικρανω)(viaa--zp)? Were they not (ου)(qt=particle *inTerrogative*) rather (αλλα)(cc) all (πας)(ap-nm-p) those led out (εξεληθοντες>εξερχομαι) (vraanm-p) out (εξ)(pg) of Egypt by (δια)(pg) Moses?

⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 10:5

⁸² **3:17.** And (δε)(cc) with whom (τις, τισιν)(aptdm-p *inTerrogative*) was he angry (προσωχθισεν<προσωχθιζα)(viaa--zs) for forty (τεσσαρακοντα)(a-can-p=adjective *cardinal* accusative neuter plural) years (το ετος)(n-an-p)? Was it not (ουχι)(qt *inTerrogative* particle) with those who sinned (αμαρτησασιν>αμαρτανω)(vraadm-p), whose (ων)(aprgm-p *relative*) bodies (το κωλον)(n-nn-p) fell (επεσεν>πιπτω) (via--zp) in (εν)(pd) the desert (η ερημος)(ap-df-s)?

⁸³ **3:18.** And (δε)(cc) to whom (τις, τισιν)(aptdm-p *inTerrogative*) did he (God) swear (ωμοσεν>ομνυμι)(viaa--zs) that they would *certainly* not (μη)(ab) enter (εισελευσεσθαι>εισερχομαι)(vnfd) into (εις)(pa) his (αυτος-η-ον)(npgmzs) Rest (η καταπαυσις)(n-af-s) if (ει)(cs) not (μη)(ab)(otherwise) to those who disobeyed (απειθησασιν>απειθεω)(vraadm-p).

⁸⁴ **3:19.** And (και)(cc) we see (βλεπομεν>βλεπω)(vipa--xp) that (οτι)(cc) they were not able (ηδυνηθησαν>δυναμαι)(viao--zp *passive deponent*) to enter (εισελθειν>εισερχομαι)(vnaa), through (because of) (δια)(pa) unbelief (η απιστια)(n-af-s).