

The Letter to the Hebrews

Lesson 2

The first two chapters deal with the principle that Jesus is God. Chapter 3 continues to establish His position as God while addressing the second principle that the Holy Spirit is God.

3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. **2**He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.

Numbers 12:7 "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household;

When the author addresses the "holy brethren", he is not speaking to those Jews who are still ingrained in the old Judaic way of life. He is speaking to those Jews who have heard the heavenly calling concerning Jesus and accepted it in their hearts. They are holy because they belong to the Lord. Throughout the New Testament the Greek word "holy" is also translated as "saints". Today, many use different definitions for the words "holy" and "saints", but in the Scripture, they are the same. They both mean sacred, physically pure, morally blameless, or ceremonially consecrated. When the New Testament speaks to the "brethren," it is always referring to people of Jewish descent, who, by nature of their birth heritage belong to God's chosen people. The Jews have nothing to do with this position; it is all God's doing. In this passage, the author is writing to the "holy brethren" who are the partakers of a "heavenly calling". These brethren are not only chosen; they have accepted the calling to give their hearts to the Lord. In the New Testament, all Christians must accept the calling of God which is facilitated by the Holy Spirit. Since creation, it has been the Holy Spirit who calls people to put their trust in the Son of God. These brethren have accepted the call and are now considered saints, holy because of their relationship with the Lord. Therefore, the author is addressing Jews who know Jesus as their Savior.

In Hebrews 3:1 the author asks these Jewish saints to remember Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of their confession. Hebrews 3:1 is the only passage in the Scripture that refers to Jesus as an Apostle. These Jewish saints have confessed Jesus as their Lord and the author wants them to remember who He is and what He has done for them. Jesus is faithful to God the Father in caring for those under His watch just as Moses was faithful to God the Father in caring for those under his watch. Jesus' faithfulness and care are perfect whereas Moses' faithfulness and care were fallible. The old Mosaic-Judaic system of faith is the house about which the author is speaking. The new Christian house built by Jesus is far superior to the old system built by Moses, yet the new house is not greater than the Son of God because He is the creator of everything. The desire of the author is to make sure that neither the old nor the new systems of faith become more important than the Savior.

3For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. **4**For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. **5**Now Moses

was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; ⁶but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Numbers 12:7 "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household"

The purpose of everything that Moses did with the old system was to guide the people of God to a point in the future when Christ would be revealed. The house of Moses, known as the Judaic faith, was superseded by Christ. In this passage, the author wanted all the holy brethren to leave the Mosaic house behind and fully embrace the household of Jesus. Paul addresses this same problem in Romans and Galatians. Jewish Christians found it difficult to leave the old rituals and put all their trust in the new belief system of Christians.

7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, ⁸DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, ⁹WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me, AND SAW My WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. ¹⁰"THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART; AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; ¹¹AS I SWEORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.' "

Psalm 95:7-8 For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice, ⁸Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness;

Beginning with verse 7, the author introduces the work of the Holy Spirit in the entire plan of God for the Jews by using language from Psalms 95:7-11.

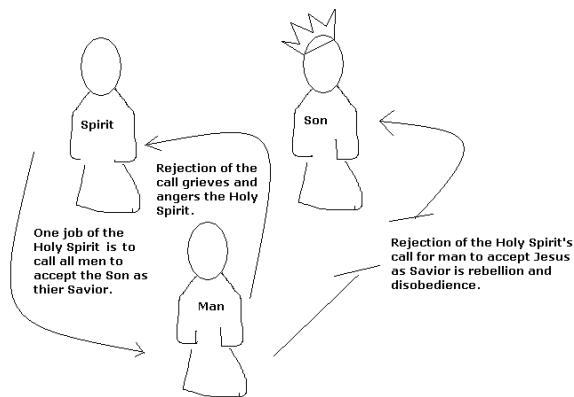
Psalm 95:7-11 For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice. ⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness: ⁹ "When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. ¹⁰ "For forty years I loathed that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. ¹¹ "Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest."

The Holy Spirit is speaking in Psalm 95 and the setting of the psalm is found in the following passage.

Exodus 17:1-7 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. ²Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But

the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." ⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷And he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

Here, the Holy Spirit warns the wilderness congregation to hear the voice of the Lord. The writer of Hebrews issues the same warning to the Jews of the Church. By not hearing the voice of the Lord, the people of God grieve the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit did not allow those who grieved and angered Him in the wilderness of Massah and Meribah to enter the rest of the Lord. In this passage, the "rest" of the Lord begins with their entrance into the Promised Land in Canaan. Moses had been a faithful servant of the Lord over the house of Israel in the wilderness, but not all the house had followed His faithful lead. Many became apostate in their faith and did not hear His voice. The Holy Spirit knew their hearts and condemned them for their rebellion and disbelief. Likewise, not all Jews in the church believed in the Lord Jesus as their Savior and this rebellion is the same as the rebellion in the wilderness.



12Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. **13**But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. **14**For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; **15**while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."

This letter applies the same standard to the Jews in the church, warning them not to grieve the Holy Spirit by not hearing the voice of the Lord. It is also a warning to Jewish Christians not to be influenced by Christ-rejecting Jews in their midst. A Jew who did not believe in the Lord was evil, marked by his disbelief, in rebellion to God. Just as there were Jews in the wilderness with

Moses who never placed their full belief and trust in God, so too, there were Jews in the church who had not put their faith and trust in the living God. Everyday Jewish Christians were to encourage one another in their faith. It was difficult for them to lay aside their former system of faith. Old habits are hard to break; old traditions are difficult to set aside. The Jewish Christians in the church had entered into the saving grace of Christ, and this letter warns against grieving the Holy Spirit by returning to the old ways and hardening their hearts against the new ways of Christ. This warning does not jeopardize a Jewish believer's salvation as it did the salvation of those in the wilderness; it is just a warning against being led astray in the old system of beliefs by non-believers. If they are led astray by the old system, they will provoke the anger of the Holy Spirit as they did in the wilderness.

16For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses? **17**And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? **18**And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? **19**And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Was the Holy Spirit angry with all the people in the wilderness? He was angry only with those who did not believe in the God of Moses. Only the disobedient were punished and not allowed to enter the Promised Land. This disobedience was a by-product of the people's unbelief. Had they believed, they would not have been disobedient, and they would have not perished in their sins.

4:1Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. **2**For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. **3**For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Speaking to the Jews attending the Christian churches, the writer wants to make sure that none of them has fallen short of putting his faith and trust in Jesus as his Savior. We always think about the life of Jesus as being the good news, but we seldom think about the message delivered to the people through Moses in the same way. The message delivered by Moses formed the establishment of God's chosen people, the people from whom the Messiah would one day come. Not everyone in the wilderness accepted the good news in their hearts; therefore, the land of rest would not be theirs. Only those who truly believed in the message were allowed to enter that land of rest. In the same way, the author is concerned that there were Jews in the church who had not accepted the good news of Jesus in their hearts. Jesus had completed His work on earth. In reality, His work was completed before the world was even created; nevertheless, Jesus had died on the cross, had risen from the grave, and had returned to take His proper place on the throne of God. Anyone whose heart was united with His story would one day enter into

that heavenly rest; however, as evidenced in Psalm 95:11, the Holy Spirit would not let those who rejected Christ into this heavenly rest.

Psalm 95:11 "Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest."

4For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; **5**and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." **6**Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, **7**He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."

When the author says "somewhere concerning the seventh day," he is not stating that he does not know the source of this quotation; it is a literary mannerism used in the Hebrew way of thinking to indicate that the statement has been made many times.

Genesis 2:2 And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Exodus 20:11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

Exodus 31:17 "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed."

Not concerned with where the statement is made in the Old Testament, he is concerned with the salvation of those who have heard the good news of the Savior and rejected it. Rejection of the good news is disobedience, an act not rewarded with salvation.

In referring to the 95th Psalm of David, the author draws out the importance of the word "today." "Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts." It is the call of the Holy Spirit to everyone who hears the gospel message. We might add another Scripture that fits in this context, saying, "Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today," Exodus 14:13. Tomorrow is not the day of salvation for anyone who hears the word of the Lord; today is that day. Yesterday is gone and cannot be retrieved. Tomorrow is not promised to anyone and it may therefore, be too late to accept the salvation of the Lord. Today is the day, the appointed day for salvation. The first day to hear the gospel message is the best day to unite the heart with the message and obtain the promise of the heavenly rest that comes only through the Lord.

8For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. **9**There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of

God. **10**For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. **11**Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through *following* the same example of disobedience.

12For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

13And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

It is redundant to say "Sabbath rest" because Sabbath means "to rest from labor." In Genesis 2:2 we see that the Sabbath was made for man for rest and refreshment of the body and the blessing of the soul. The only way to enter into this rest is to die on earth and enter into the glorious presence of the Lord, the place of peace and rest. Accepting the living word of God concerning Jesus Christ is the only way to obtain this rest. Nothing on earth can ignore the power of the living word of God.

14Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15**For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. **16**Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

We must never forget that we have a Savior who has been where we have been, seen what we have seen, suffered what we have suffered, hurt where we have hurt and been tempted where we are tempted. He sits on the throne of grace, waiting to meet our needs.