

## THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

### HEBREWS 1:1-4:13, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

#### INTRODUCTION

- A. Outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
    - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
    - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
    - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
    - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
      - 1) In His work and person (3:1-6)
      - 2) In His provision of superior rest (3:7-4:13)
        - a) Second warning passage: the danger of disbelief (3:7-19)
          - 1] A warning to not harden one's heart (3:7-11)
          - 2] An appeal not to disbelieve (3:12-19)
- B. Review of Hebrews 3:7-11
1. Raymond Brown, *God was deeply grieved by his people's doubt and disloyalty and swore they would not enter into the land of rest which had been promised to them and prepared for them. This warning from the past would certainly not be lost on these Jewish Christians in danger of defection and apostasy.*
  2. R. Kent Hughes, *The point the writer of Hebrews wants his readers to see is that it is possible to have a remarkable spiritual "exodus" and yet fall by the way when trouble comes. This was the Holy Spirit's message to the beleaguered little church from Psalm 95, and it is his message to us . . . The problem today is that so many people when asked about faith point to their "exodus"—when they began with Christ. They can wax eloquent about their experience . . . Their "exodus" is a convenient memory. But to trust God now? That is a problem, for their faith is dead.*
- C. Comments on Hebrews 3:12-19
1. Thomas Constable, *Here is an exhortation to apply this lesson from the past. Note again that those to whom the writer addressed this epistle were believers. Their danger was apostasy, departure from God, not failure to come to God in saving faith.*
  2. Zane Hodges, *The widespread view that he was concerned about mere professors of the faith as over against genuine believers is not found in the text.*
  3. Douglas Mangum, *The author builds on the quotation from Ps 95. Readers are given here direct commands to watch out for evil disbelief like that of the wilderness generation, and to encourage each other daily not to have hard hearts like Israelites and so be deceived by sinful faithlessness.*

### HEBREWS 3:1-4:13, JESUS CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO MOSES AND JOSHUA

### HEBREWS 3:7-19, SECOND WARNING PASSAGE: THE DANGER OF DISBELIEF

### HEBREWS 3:12-19, AN APPEAL NOT TO DISBELIEVE

- A. The writer warns the readers of the epistle not to rebel like the Israelites (12-15)
1. To fall away from God indicates a heart of unbelief (12), *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*
    - a. *Take care, brothers*
      - 1) *Take care*
        - a) It means *to become aware of, take notice of something.*
        - b) Louw-Nida, *to be ready to learn about future dangers or needs, with the implication of preparedness to respond appropriately.*
        - c) Thomas Constable, *Here is an exhortation to apply this lesson from the past.*
        - d) Raymond Brown, *This is a picture not of casual drifters, but deliberate deserters.*

- 2) *brothers*
  - a) The writer is speaking to *brothers and sisters* in Christ.
  - b) Zane Hodges, *Neither here nor anywhere else in his letter did the writer betray the slightest suspicion that his audience might contain people who were not real Christians.*
  - c) Note Hebrews 3:1, *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,*
  
- b. *lest . . . an evil and unbelieving heart*
  - 1) *lest*
    - a) It is a conjunction after verbs *fearing, being concerned, apprehension.*
    - b) Hebrews 4:1, *Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*
  
  - 2) *an evil and unbelieving heart*
    - a) R. Kent Hughes, *The writer, having raised everyone's tension with the warning from Psalm 95, now proceeds to give personal exhortations meant to allay disbelief. The opening and closing verses of this section, verses 12 and 19, mention that subject.*
    - b) Leon Morris, *The rebellion he warns against consists of departing from a living, dynamic person, not from some dead doctrine. Jews might retort that they served the same God as the Christians so that they would not be departing from God if they went back to Judaism. But to reject God's highest revelation is to depart from God, no matter how many preliminary revelations are retained.*
    - c) Raymond Brown, *The rebellious Hebrews who failed to enter the land of promise fell in the wilderness because of unbelief. They rendered themselves morally and spiritually incapable of possessing their inheritance, and all because, in their lust for the immediate, they lost their hope in the ultimate.*
    - d) William L. Lane, *The allusions to Num 14 are significant because they indicate that unbelief is not a lack of faith or trust. It is the refusal to believe God. It leads inevitably to a turning away from God in a deliberate act of rejection.*
    - e) R. Kent Hughes, *Hardness of heart originates in unbelief, which produces contempt for God, which in turn shows itself in distinct behavioral patterns—namely, negativism, grumbling, quarreling and disobedience.*
  
- c. *leading you to fall away*
  - 1) An evil and unbelieving heart leads one to apostasy.
    - a) H. D. M. Spence, *The outcome of such "evil heart of unbelief," if allowed to become fixed and permanent, will be apostasy.*
    - b) Warren Wiersbe, *No believer today, Jew or Gentile, could go back into the Mosaic legal system since the temple is gone and there is no priesthood. But every believer is tempted to give up his confession of Christ and go back into the world system's life of compromise and bondage.*
    - c) F. F. Bruce, *a relapse from Christianity into Judaism would be comparable to the action of the Israelites when they 'turned back in their hearts unto Egypt' (Acts 7:39); it would not be a mere return to a position previously occupied, but a gesture of outright apostasy, a complete break with God.*
    - d) Charles Spurgeon, *If your God is not a living God to you, in whom you live and move and have your being, if He does not come into your daily life, but if your religion is a dead and formal thing, then you will soon depart.*
  
  - 2) *fall away*
    - a) It means *to withdraw, apostasize from God, to move away from, with emphasis upon separation and possible lack of concern for what has been left.*
    - b) Thomas Constable, *Their danger was apostasy, departure from God, not failure to come to God in saving faith.*
    - c) William L. Lane, *. . . falling away and unbelief reflect the same disposition. . . The reference to "an evil unbelieving heart" interprets the expression in v 10, "their hearts are always going astray," which in OT terms is described as "turning away from the living God."*
    - d) Warren Wiersbe, *The Greek word gives us our English word "apostasy." This is the only place this word is used in Hebrews. Does "apostasy" mean abandoning one's faith and therefore being condemned forever? That does not fit into this context. Israel departed from the living God by refusing God's will for their lives and stubbornly wanting to go their own way back to Egypt. God did not permit them to return to Egypt. Rather, He disciplined them in the wilderness. God did not allow His people to return to bondage.*

- d. *from the living God*
    - 1) Matthew 16:16, Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
    - 2) H. D. M. Spence, . . . *from him who is Eternal Life and the Source of all life and salvation.*
    - 3) Donald Hagner, *The adjective living adds to the perception of the dynamic character of God, who will in no way overlook such action on the part of his children.*
  
  - e. Comments on application of the text
    - 1) Warren Wiersbe, *The emphasis in Hebrews is that true believers have an eternal salvation because they trust a living Saviour who constantly intercedes for them. But the writer is careful to point out that this confidence is no excuse for sin. God disciplines His children. Remember that Canaan is not a picture of heaven, but of the believer’s present spiritual inheritance in Christ. Believers who doubt God’s Word and rebel against Him do not miss heaven, but they do miss out on the blessings of their inheritance today, and they must suffer the chastening of God.*
    - 2) The words of Jesus, Matthew 13:20-21, *As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.*
2. He encourages fellow believers not to submit to sin (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.***
- a. *But*
    - 1) It means *on the contrary, a contrast.*
    - 2) Verse 13 is a means of avoiding the consequences of verse 12.
  
  - b. *exhort one another*
    - 1) It means *to urge, encourage, appeal, literally, to call to one’s side.*
    - 2) 1 Thessalonians 2:12, *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*
    - 3) Thomas Constable, *The writer counseled his readers to encourage each other to continue to walk with God. He did this to help us avoid the rationalizing that we can get into when we do not confess and forsake our sins.*
    - 4) Raymond Brown, *In frightened isolation they might fall, but in supportive companionship they would stand.*
    - 5) William L. Lane, *The avoidance of apostasy demands not simply individual vigilance but the constant care of each member of the community for one another . . .*
    - 6) *Exhort one another* gives proper emphasis to the fact that we are interdependent. We need each other. One day I may be the encourager but on the next day, I am the one in need of encouragement.
      - a) W. H. Griffith Thomas, *One of the best ways of keeping ourselves true is to help other people, and the duty is here set forth of exhorting one another. There is scarcely anything more striking in Christian experience than the fact that in helping others we often help ourselves.*
      - b) Thomas Constable, *Meeting with other Christians for mutual encouragement regularly can be a great help to any Christian in remembering that failing to continue to trust God will bring bad consequences.*
  
  - c. *as long as it is called “today”*
    - 1) Exhortation needs to take place now and not be put off for the future which may not come.
    - 2) Thomas Constable, *We need to get started “today,” while there is still opportunity.*
    - 3) Raymond, Brown, . . . *every member of the body of Christ should grasp opportunities in every day to speak the uplifting word and do the supportive thing for his Christian partners in Christ.*
  
  - d. *none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*
    - 1) *hardened*
      - a) It means *to be stubborn, in the sense of refusing to believe.*
      - b) Acts 19:9, *But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.*

- 2) *deceitfulness*
  - a) It means *deceptive, misleading*.
  - b) Mark 4:19, *but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.*
  - c) H. D. M. Spence, *Those who are fallen to-day were standing yesterday, and some standing to-day will be fallen to-morrow. And if we are not among the fallen, it will be because we are giving daily practical heed to this truth concerning the deceitfulness of sin.*

3. *sin*
  - a) Submitting to sin hardens the heart that had been softened by God.
  - b) William L. Lane, *In this context "sin," has a specific connotation. It is the sin of refusing to obey God and to act upon his promise.*
  - c) Ray Stedman concerning sin, *Its terrible danger lies in the deceptive ease by which it gradually hardens the heart, as it lessens the will's power to resist evil.*
  - d) Charles Spurgeon, *Familiarity with sin makes the conscience dull, and at length deadens sensibility... We shun the evil thing when it is plainly evil. But sin puts on another dress, and comes to us speaking a language that is not its own. So even those who would avoid sin as sin may, by degrees, be tempted to evil, and deluded into wrong.*

3. He reminds the readers that they are partners with Christ (14), ***For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.***

- a. *For we have come to share in Christ*
  - 1) The writer is speaking to those who have professed faith in Christ.
  - 2) Zane Hodges, *The statement, we have come to share in Christ might be more literally rendered, "we are partners with the Christ."*
  - 3) The privilege of being *partners with Christ* is a reminder of the privilege noted in verse 6, *and we are his house*. It is the contrast to apostasy noted in verse 12.
  - 4) Donald Hagner, *Even as Christ became a sharer in our humanity, Christians have come to share in Christ and the fulfillment he brings by participating in the kingdom he has inaugurated and by becoming heirs who come "to glory" (2:10).*
  - 5) Charles Spurgeon, *To be made partakers is a work of grace, of sovereign omnipotent grace—a work that a man cannot sufficiently admire, and for which he can never be sufficiently grateful.*
- b. *if we indeed hold our original confidence firm to the end*
  - 1) *confidence*
    - a) It means *trust, assurance*.
    - b) H. D. M. Spence, *"The beginning" of this confidence refers to the earlier stage of the experiences of the Hebrew Christians, before their faith had shown any signs of wavering. . . Go on as you began.*
    - c) R. Kent Hughes, *The Israelites had no lack of confidence just after the Exodus, but it faded quickly a few days into the wilderness. . . Even a slight lessening of confidence is a warning. We must "hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first."*
    - d) Charles Spurgeon, *You are to hold fast, to hold on, and to hold out to the end; and the grace you need in order to do this is waiting for you if you will but look for it, and daily live under the power of it.*
    - e) The writer is encouraging the readers to keep on as they began, trusting God. Both privileges of verses 6 and 14 depend on faithfulness.
  - 2) Comments concerning this clause.
    - a) Ray Stedman, . . . *the if is descriptive, not conditional. If we hold firmly ... the confidence we had at first envisages deliberate efforts made to renew faith and trust on a daily basis. As we read the Scriptures thoughtfully and closely every day, or when we pray regularly with and for one another, or when we worship with other believers in a shared experience of God's wonder and glory, when we serve people's needs out of love for Christ, we are doing the things that cause us to hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.*
    - b) Note Revelation 2:26-27, *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.*
    - c) Thomas Constable, *Even though we are already partakers of a heavenly calling (v. 1), we can only partake of all that God wants us to enjoy in the future with the Messiah by persevering. . . We must continue to walk by faith just as we began the Christian life by faith.*

- d) Zane Hodges, . . . *A son who leaves home ceases to be an active partner in the home, though he does not thereby cease to be a son!*
- e) F. F. Bruce, *To begin well is good, but it is not enough, it is only those who stay the course and finish the race that have any hope of gaining the prize.*
- f) Of course, the prize for Christians is not salvation which is a gift. The prize is the reward of serving Christ as coheirs.

4. He reminds the readers of the importance of the warning (15), ***As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”***

- a. Here, he uses Psalm 95 as he did to introduce the warning passage in verses 7-8. For more details, refer to the Hebrews 3:7-11 lesson.
- b. Douglas Mangum, *The main exhortation of the psalm is the main exhortation here as well. Readers are instructed not to be like the hard-hearted rebels of the wilderness generation. This reference to the Psalms concludes the paragraph and provides a transition into the following short paragraph, which itself concludes a portion of the letter stretching back to 3:1.*
- c. William L. Lane, . . . *unbelief is not a lack of faith or trust. It is the refusal to believe God. It leads inevitably to a turning away from God in a deliberate act of rejection. . . The response of the desert generation at Kadesh can momentarily be forgotten as the community hears the Holy Spirit warning them not to respond to God’s voice with stubborn rebelliousness.*
- d. R. Kent Hughes, *Brothers and sisters, if we hear his voice, we must do something now!*

B. The writer gives the background and conclusion to the rebellion in Psalm 95 and Numbers 14 (16-19)

1. The writer asks six questions in three pairs (16-18)

a. Notes

- 1) William L. Lane, *The fact of rebellion and its catastrophic results is pressed in the formulation of a series of rhetorical questions.*
- 2) The first question of each verse asks a question from Psalm 95; the second answers it from Numbers 14.
- 3) Ray Stedman, *The rhetorical questions of verses 16–18 show how an outward facade of belief can be maintained while the heart is still unrepentant . . .*
- 4) Douglas Mangum, *Disobedience is associated with disbelief, and both are identified with the consequence of not entering into God’s rest.*
- 5) *For*
  - a) *For* begins the proof that unbelief will be judged.
  - b) H. D. M. Spence, . . . *the retention of Christian privilege is dependent on perseverance, and that the privilege may be forfeited.*

b. Questions in verse 16, ***For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?***

- 1) Those who rebelled against God were those who came out of Egypt.
- 2) Numbers 14:2, *And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!*
- 3) The exceptions of Joshua and Caleb are noted in Numbers 14:30, *not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.*
- 4) Those who rebelled is an allusion to *the rebellion* in verse 15 which looks to the events at Kadesh Barnea, Numbers 14:22, *none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice,*
- 5) Douglas Mangum, *The ones who rebelled at Kadesh Barnea were the same ones who had experienced deliverance from slavery, enjoyed God’s presence, and received his revelation and his promises to bring them safely into the land.*
- 6) Ray Stedman, *It is possible to participate in and benefit from the great miracles of God, as the Israelites did who came out of Egypt with Moses. . . Yet, despite such evidence, the heart can remain unchanged for a lifetime.*

c. Questions in verse 17, ***And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?***

- 1) God’s anger was against those who sinned against Him.
- 2) Numbers 14:29, *your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me,*

- 3) William L. Lane, *The consequence of refusing to acknowledge the presence and promise of God was the radical discipline of death in the desert.*
- 4) R. Kent Hughes, *The men who angered God for forty years were those who did not believe he could provide for them, though they had left Egypt with great hope. This is a warning that high hopes will not suffice—there must be belief.*
- 5) Ray Stedman, *God sees that inner hardness and warns continually against it until he is forced to judge it.*

d. Questions in verse 18, ***And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?***

- 1) God promised no rest for those who refused to obey Him.
- 2) Numbers 14:33, *And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness.*
- 3) William L. Lane, *The culmination of unbelief was the open defiance of God, and it was this that barred entrance into the promised rest of God.*
- 4) R. Kent Hughes, *Here unbelief leads to action, as it always does.*
- 5) Zane Hodges, *Their disobedience in refusing to enter the Promised Land caused God to swear that they would never enter His rest. This meant of course that the sinful generation in the desert was permanently excluded from taking possession of their inheritance in Canaan. Naturally it had nothing to do with the question of their going to hell, so it would be wrong to allege that the entire Exodus generation was unregenerate. But exclusion from Canaan was a consequence of their lack of faith in the power of God to bring them into it in victory over their enemies, a failure that in principle might be repeated by the readers of Hebrews if they forgot Messiah's ultimate triumph over His enemies and theirs (cf. 1:13–14).*

2. Conclusion (19), ***So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.***

- a. The people did not enter God's rest because of unbelief.
- b. *unbelief - disbelief*
  - 1) It means *lack of belief or faith toward God.*
  - 2) Hebrews 3:12, *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*
  - 3) Donald Hagner, *Unbelief here implies not intellectual doubting as much as deliberate unfaithfulness. From the author's perspective, unbelief and disobedience are inseparable.*
- c. Zane Hodges, *The writer wished his readers to take it to heart that unbelief, lack of confidence in God, was the reason God's people did not enter the land.*
- d. William L. Lane, *When the Israelites realized their folly, they sought to repent...The oath of God was final.. .The conclusion thus introduces the motif of the impossibility of a second repentance after apostasy,*
- e. R. Kent Hughes, *The three sets of questions present the descent of hardness of heart: from hope—to disbelief—to disobedience.*
- f. Charles Spurgeon, *In the wilderness, the tribes were journeying toward this country, and it was a very short distance from Egypt, so that they might almost at once have taken possession of the land, and yet it cost them forty years' traveling. . . It was not the sons of Anak that kept them out. It was not the waste howling wilderness. It was nothing but their own unbelief.*

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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- William L. Lane, *The hearers are left with the overwhelming impression that unbelief would expose them to the same precarious situation as Israel at Kadesh.*
- Douglas Mangum, *Instead of unbelief, readers are urged to continue in faith, holding fast to confidence as they consider their high priest and God's faithful Son.*
- Thomas Constable, *The apostate generation of Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land when they hardened their hearts and provoked God by their disbelief. Is the implication that Christians who do the same will not enter heaven? Many interpreters have taken this view. However, the New Testament elsewhere teaches that all who believe in Jesus Christ will go to heaven because simple faith in Christ is what saves us (e.g., Eph. 2:8–9). . . If our subsequent unbelief resulted in our loss of salvation, the condition for being saved would have to be faith plus faithfulness, which it is not. Remember, "rest" does not equal the Promised Land (or heaven) but obtaining all the inheritance that God wants to give believers in the Promised Land (or heaven).*