

SESSION ELEVEN

THE CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

Heb 3:1-6

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Ch 3:1 brings us to a new section of the book:
- 1:5–2:18 - The Son is superior to the angels who mediated the Old Covenant revelation.
 - 3:1–5:10 - The Son is superior to Moses through whom the Old Covenant came, and has a superior task to Joshua as the leader to God's greater "rest."
- B. Comparison and contrast of these major sections:
1. Comparison:
Both argue for the superiority of the person of Christ in contrast to "key players" of the Old Covenant (in order to show the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant).
 2. Contrast:
 - a. The author will now shift his focus from angels to human leaders of the Old Covenant (Moses and Joshua).
 - b. Although the previous section touched upon the consequences of New Covenant failure (2:1-4), the new section will *strongly emphasize* the possibility and consequences of New Covenant failure.
- C. Literary Technique
1. The final two verses of the previous section (i.e., 2:17-18) concluded by suggesting that the audience could be described as "those who are tempted." In light of the general context of the book, this is predominantly the temptation to abandon their confession of Jesus and fail to endure.
 2. In contrast, Jesus is described as a "merciful and faithful high priest" who is able to come to their aid.
 3. Literary Connection:
 - a. 3:1–4:13 - Jesus is depicted as the High Priest who is *faithful* (though we can share in "God's rest" if we are not disobedient like those in Moses' generation)

- b. 4:14–5:10 - Jesus is a High Priest (of a different priesthood than the order of Aaron) who is *merciful*, and the source of eternal salvation to those who obey Him.

D. The Significance of The OT Comparisons

1. With Moses

a. Importance in the OT

- (1) The Old Covenant Law was revealed to Moses who transmitted it to the Hebrew people (Ex 20–24)
- (2) Yet, he is also associated with *priestly functions*
 - (a) Levitical family background (Ex 2:1-10)
 - (b) The plans for the Tabernacle were revealed to Him (Ex 25 ff).
 - (c) His intercessory ministry on behalf of the nation
 - (d) Privileged vision of God (Ex 33:12–34:35)
 - (e) His service at the altar (Ex 24:4-8)
 - (f) Ps 99:6 - "Moses and Aaron were among His priests"

b. Veneration of Moses

Scott notes, ". . . the name of Moses appears more times in the Old Testament and in fact all of the Bible (847 total times: 762 in the Old Testament and 85 in the New Testament) than any other proper name except for Jesus and David."¹

Particularly in the eyes of Jews he was regarded as the greatest person who ever lived, for he (1) led Israel out of bondage in Egypt; (2) constituted Israel as a nation at Sinai; and (3) brought Israel the Law of God.

"It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of Moses in hellenistic Judaism and the veneration with which he was regarded. If reference is restricted to Jewish-hellenistic texts, it is necessary only to recall a passage from *The Exodus* by Ezekiel the Tragedian (preserved in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.29). Moses is shown in a dream that God will install him on a heavenly throne and invest him with a crown and a scepter as the symbols of his unique authority."²

"Moses holds a particularly high place in the thought of Philo, who repeatedly calls him 'high priest' (*Rer. Div. Her.* 182; *Sacr.* 130; *Vit. Mos.* 1.334, 2.2-7, 66ff., 153-158, 187, 275) . . ." (Ellingworth, 194)

¹Brett R. Scott, "Jesus' Superiority Over Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (Apr-Jun 1998), 203.

²Lane, 1:liv. Cf. Sir. 45:1-6; Wis. of Sol. 10:16 and 11:1; and 4 Macc. 9:2.

2. With Joshua

Joshua (LXX = Ἰησοῦς) stands as the great OT leader who brought the people into the promised land where they received their "inheritance" and their "rest."

II. THE CALL FOR THE "BRETHREN" TO BE FAITHFUL (3:1-2)

A. The Audience Addressed

1. ὅθεν - consequential conjunction = "Consequently"

Shows the connection to all that the author has been saying about Jesus in the preceding material.

2. "holy brethren" (ἀδελφοὶ ἅγιοι) - calls our attention back to Heb 2:11

a. In 2:11ff., the author had argued persuasively that we are Jesus' "brethren" (despite the fact that He holds the exalted title of "Son").

b. The audience is also described as "sanctified" (vb ἁγιαζω) in 2:11, probably used here in the sense of *justification* (cf. 1 Cor 1:2)

3. "partakers of a heavenly calling" (κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι)

a. μέτοχοι recalls those who were mentioned in Heb 1:9—"partners" with the Son in his kingly reign.³ Balz & Schneider (2:420) suggest the translation "*participants* in a heavenly calling."

b. "heavenly calling"

Nothing in the context suggests that this has "salvation from sin" in view (i.e., the gospel), although "calling" can be used that way in the NT (e.g., Eph 4:1; 2 Tim 1:9). The word "heavenly" is used six times in Hebrews (3:1; 6:4; 8:5; 9:23; 11:16; and 12:22). In light of this usage, "heavenly calling" seems to be a calling unto the greater heavenly realities associated with the New Covenant, culminating with participation in the New Jerusalem of the Messianic kingdom. Note particularly 11:16, "But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God . . . has prepared a city for them."

c. Conclusion

In Heb 2:10, the author had pointed out that God was involved in "bringing many sons to glory" (which, as we saw earlier, looks at the work of the Son to bring believers into the glory of the resurrection and a sharing in His glorious reign and dominion). Hodges writes, "The author was thinking especially of their high privilege of being invited to participate in the future dominion and joy

³Of the six occurrences of μέτοχος in the NT, five are in Hebrews (1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; and 12:8).

of God's king-Son" (785). The author certainly has "true believers" in view, an observation that ought to influence our interpretation of Heb 3:6!

B. The Admonition:

"Consider Jesus (the Apostle and High Priest of our confession) . . . He was **faithful!**"

1. "Consider" = κατανοήσατε (Aorist Impv)
 - a. This word could also be translated "contemplate" - i.e., we are to *focus* on Christ as our model.
 - b. In particular, we are to contemplate and focus on His faithfulness. This is the key: our eyes need to be on Him (the *Aorist Impv* may suggest that some of them had not been doing this).⁴ We are to focus on Jesus' faithfulness, because we also need to be faithful (the author will return to this matter in 12:2).
2. As *the Apostle*, He was "sent from God" and was faithful to accomplish His mission (to "taste death for every one" and to be "perfected" through sufferings). As High Priest, He continues to be faithful to represent us before the Father.
3. "our confession" (ὁμολογία) - used 3x in Hebrews (cf. 4:14 and 10:23)

This is our confession of belief in Jesus as God's Son and Messiah (cf. Jn 9:22; 12:42; 2 Cor 9:13). We must not retract from this "confession." Since He was (and "is") faithful, we must be faithful to our confession of Him.

4:14 - "let us hold fast our confession"

10:23 - "let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering"
4. But the author wants to compare the faithfulness of Christ to that of Moses, the dominant leader figure of the Old Covenant

III. FAITHFULNESS IN RESPECT TO "GOD'S HOUSE" (3:3-6)

A. What does the author have in mind by "house"?

Moses was "faithful in all His house" (πιστὸς ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ)

1. The author is clearly drawing on Num 12:6-8 in the LXX

Context:

Moses' leadership was being questioned by Aaron and Miriam over the issue of his Cushite wife. In defense of Moses, the LORD rebuked Aaron and Miriam.

⁴ According to Wallace (485), "With the *aorist*, the force generally is to *command the action as a whole*, without focusing on duration, repetition, etc. In keeping with its aspectual force, the aorist puts forth a *summary command*." This is in contrast to the present imperative which commands the action as an ongoing process.

Num 12:6-8:

"Hear now my words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision.

I shall speak with him in a dream.

Not so with my servant Moses, οὐχ οὕτως ὁ θεράπων μου Μωυσῆς

He is faithful in all my household; ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ μου πιστός ἐστίν

With him I speak mouth to mouth, . . .

Why then were you not afraid

To speak against My servant, against Moses?"

2. The primary image in view is the tabernacle and the faithfulness that Moses exhibited in regard to it.

- a. Reasons:

- (1) In Heb 3:3, the emphasis is upon the building of the house.

- (2) In Heb 3:5, after saying that Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, the author adds εἰς μαρτύριον τῶν λαληθησομένων ("for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later"). This is referring to the fact that the earthly tabernacle served as a "shadow" of the heavenly tabernacle (compare Heb 8:5 and 9:9).

3. If the tabernacle is in view, then Moses' role is reflected in Ex 25:9:

"According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, **just so you shall construct it.**"

Moses was faithful in his commission to construct the tabernacle precisely according to the divine specification. In doing so, he protected the intended analogy to the reality of the heavenly tabernacle. Notice that when God defends Moses against Miriam and Aaron, He makes a point to do so at the tabernacle.

Num 12:4 - "And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, 'You three come out to the tent of meeting.'" And vs 5 - "Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent."

- B. Why is Moses' faithfulness to the OT "house" (i.e., tabernacle) being highlighted?

Answer: The author of Hebrews wants to show that both Moses and Jesus were involved in building a "house" for God, but that which Jesus builds is greater than what Moses once built.

Point: Moses built an earthly tabernacle-house that was intended to depict a greater reality, i.e., a spiritual tabernacle-house. Jesus is building that greater reality of the spiritual tabernacle-house.

C. The author makes a case that both Moses and Jesus were faithful to their commission, but the work of Jesus is more significant (He has been counted worthy of more glory, vs 3).⁵

1. Moses was faithful in his role as a servant (θεράπων, vs 5), but Jesus was faithful in His role as a "Son" (υἱός, vs 6).
2. Moses was faithful in his house (ἐν, vs 5), but Jesus was/is faithful over his house (ἐπί, vs 6).
3. Moses' tabernacle-house served as a testimony to what was to be spoken later (vs 5), but Jesus' house is the fulfillment of that earthly symbol.
4. Conclusion: Jesus is superior to Moses (the giver of the Old Covenant Law), and therefore the ministry of Jesus through the New Covenant is superior to the ministry ordained by the Old Covenant.
5. Implication: The audience must not turn back to the more rudimentary Old Covenant, but must move ahead to the *more superior* New Covenant under the revelation and leadership of Jesus Christ.

D. The Extension of the Argument to Awaken the Audience (3:6b)

1. Introduction: By the middle of vs 6a, the author could have stopped with the words "But Christ *is faithful* as a Son over His house." At that point, the author would have substantiated his argument for the superiority of Christ. However, he adds another line in order to awaken his audience to the fact that they must respond to this truth appropriately or risk losing something:

"whose house we are, if we hold fast *our* confidence and the boast of *our* hope firm until the end."

Note: The words "firm until the end" (Gk = μέχρι τέλοθς βεβαίαν) are not included in the UBS⁴ or reflected in the *NIV*, but are included in the *NASB*. However, the manuscript evidence favors the inclusion of these words:

Omit: B, \mathfrak{P}^{46} , and \mathfrak{P}^{13}

Include: \aleph , A, C, D, Y, Byz [K, L, P], vg, syr and others

2. How is this conditional statement to be understood?
 - a. Armenian Theology: one can lose their salvation!

⁵Scott points out, ". . . the contrast is not between the faithfulness of Jesus and Moses, but between the *position* in which each was faithful. If the contrast had been the superior faithfulness of Jesus over Moses, Moses' unfaithfulness in Egypt (Exod. 2:11-12) and at the rock of Meribah (Num. 20:10-12) would surely have been presented as evidence" ("Jesus' Superiority Over Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6," 209).

- b. Reformed Theology: evidence that one truly is (or is not) a Christian

Toussaint: "Endurance is the mark of election!"

I would like to suggest that neither one of these extremes is correct! Notice, by the way, that these two systems (as diverse as they are) have something in common and lead to the same end: one can never be sure that he/she is truly saved. One could go completely through life and never have the assurance that he/she would die a child of God. How sad!

3. Crucial Observations:

- a. The author has Christians in view throughout 3:1-19.

Note that the author begins in 3:1 by addressing them as "holy brethren" and "participants (μέτοχοι) in a heavenly calling." The conditional statement in 3:6 is obviously related to the author's purposes in quoting Ps 95 and the warnings he draws from that. As we shall see in our study of Ps 95, however, that audience is certainly composed of "children of God." The issue for them was not their eternal destiny, but temporal punishment (death in the wilderness) and forfeiture of blessing and reward in the land. Furthermore, the "unbelief" that the author is concerned about (e.g., 3:19) was not unbelief in relation to personal salvation in God, but unbelief in regard to God's will for the Hebrews to go up into the promised land.

- b. There is a great deal of similarity between Heb 3:1-6 and Heb 10:19-25

- (1) The use of the word "confidence," παρρησία (3:6b; 10:19)
- (2) Both passages are addressed to "brethren" (3:1; 10:19)
- (3) Christ is emphasized as a high priest (3:1; 10:21)
- (4) The house (οἶκος) is emphasized (3:6; 10:21)
- (5) Christ is over (ἐπί) the house (3:6a; 10:21)
- (6) Mention of our "confession," ὁμολογία (3:1; 10:23)
- (7) Mention of our "hope," ἐλπίς (3:6b; 10:23; cf. 4:14)
- (8) Concern that the audience "hold fast," κατέχω (3:6b; 10:23)

Implications:

The similarities are too striking to miss the point that the message is one and the same concerning 3:6 and 10:19-25. So, notice carefully the author's concerns in 10:19-25:

- (1) The author assures his audience in 10:19 that they have confidence to enter the holy place and (in 10:21) that they have a great high priest (i.e., Jesus).

- (2) His desire for his audience is not that they get "saved" but that they draw near, hold fast, stimulate one another to love and good works and not forsake their assembling together.
- (3) Although the concern to "hold fast" (κατέχω) is a conditional matter in 3:6, it is an exhortation in 10:23: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (compare the cognate προσέχω in 2:1). As far as our author is concerned, this is just as much a duty for his audience as it is a condition.
- (4) Heb 10:21 clarifies the understanding about God's "house":

"since *we have* a great priest over the house of God."

The point of using the metaphor of the house in 3:6 is not simply to say that the "house" is a metaphor for the "elect of God." The point of the metaphor is to draw comparison to the functioning of the tabernacle and those who participate in its activities.⁶ Moses was involved in building a literal earthly tabernacle-house, but we are involved in a more significant tabernacle-house, namely, a tabernacle composed of believers who draw near to God through The Great High Priest (Jesus). This is beautifully depicted in 1 Pet 2:5:

"you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Notice that the verse is not just saying that we are a spiritual house. It also speaks about our priestly activities and offering up of spiritual sacrifices (cf. Rev 1:6). We are not really functioning as the house if we are not fulfilling the priestly duties. Perhaps we could say it this way: we are not really *being the "house"* if we are not serving as believer-priests. And we cannot function as priests if we are not submissive to the High Priest of the "house." If we "harden our hearts" against God and fail to "hold fast our confession" of the High Priest Himself, we are not "being the house."

4. Conclusion

The "house" must not be taken as an equivalent of the "elect," as though the author were saying "we are the *elect* if we hold fast." Rather, he is thinking about the reality that the earthly tabernacle built by Moses was meant to depict, i.e., a spiritual tabernacle composed of believer-priests who were actively engaged in spiritual

⁶Hodges writes, "By a natural semantic shift to which the Greek word for *house* naturally lends itself, the writer moved from the thought of the house as a sphere where priestly activities transpired to the thought of the 'house' as consisting of the people who engaged in these activities" (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, OT, 786).

sacrifices under the authority and direction of Jesus the High Priest. Oberholtzer is correct when he writes,

"When the writer used the conditional clause, 'if we hold fast our confidence' (Heb. 3:6b), he was referring to the reader's function of priestly worship. That is, if they failed to hold fast, they would no longer be able to participate in their priestly worship role (10:19-25)."⁷

We are this "house" when we avail ourselves of Jesus the High Priest and His priestly ministry, in order to "draw near" to God. Hence, the author can conclude "Since then **we have** a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (4:14). Do you get the point? We already have this High Priest; we don't need to get Him (i.e., receive Him as Savior). Rather, we need to hold fast our confession about Him, and draw near through Him to receive God's mercy and grace in our times of need (cf. 7:25; 10:22; 11:6). We do this by exercising faith, taking care not to harden our hearts against God. Nevertheless, although we have believed in Him as Savior, it is possible that we can turn away from Him in unbelief and even abandon our confession. But if we do this, we are no longer being faithful as believer-priests, and hence we are not "His house" (i.e., an active participant in God's spiritual priesthood). In such cases, we do not lose our salvation, but we may be in danger of something else—jeopardizing our place in God's "rest." In the remainder of chapters three and four, the author will argue vehemently that we must not do this. There is too much that we have at stake in regard to God's "rest."

⁷T. K. Oberholtzer, "The Kingdom Rest in Hebrews 3:1--4:13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (Apr-Jun 1988), 186-87.