

HEBREWS

CHAPTER THREE

Think about the greatest person you've ever known. What made them great? Perhaps it was their character, accomplishments, or service to others. History tells countless stories of amazing men and women who have fought for the freedom of others, sacrificed to meet the needs of the weak, provided brave leadership in dark times, or offered love to the unlovely. These heroes deserve our admiration and respect.

Israel held Moses in the highest esteem. He was God's prophet, the man God used to lead them out of slavery in Egypt, and the one through whom God gave the Law. Moses was a great man. A man who was "faithful in all God's house" (3:2). However Moses was still a man. He needed a Savior just like the rest of us. But – praise God - there is One greater than Moses!

In chapters one and two, the author established the superiority of Jesus over the angels. Now, as we move into chapter three, the author continues to build on the superiority of Christ by showing these Jewish Christians that Jesus deserves even more honor than the prophet Moses. "You thought Moses was great?! Just wait 'til you get a glimpse of Jesus!"

Focus on the Faithful One

Read 3:1-6

Based on information established in the first two chapters, explain why the author can call his audience "holy brothers who share in the heavenly calling." See 1:3b, 2:10-11, and 2:14 to help with your answer.

If you know Jesus as your Savior, then you, too, are a "holy brother (or sister) who shares in the heavenly calling." How could reflecting on this truth change the way you live your daily life?

Hebrews 3:1 is the only place in the NT where Jesus is called an "apostle." "Apostle," which means "one that is sent," is an appropriate term for Jesus since He was sent to declare God's name to His brothers (see 2:12). As an apostle Jesus reveals and represents God to us. As our high priest, Jesus goes to the Father on our behalf. He is our "go-between," the perfect and only mediator.

Now, having demonstrated the superiority of Christ over the angels and the result of His completed mission among humanity, the author strongly urges his audience to apply it to their lives. He commands them – and us – to “fix your thoughts on Jesus.” His command is based on a “therefore.” We are to focus on Jesus because of the things the author has already established. Because Jesus...

- Is superior to the angels
- Shared in and understands our humanity
- Has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty in heaven
- Has authority over all things

The Greek verb *katanoeo*, which is translated as “fix your thoughts” (NIV), means to “consider, think about, notice, observe.” The *Amplified Bible* reads: “thoughtfully and attentively consider Jesus.” Jesus deserves more than casual thoughts or our limited attention during the day.

What does it look like to “fix your thoughts on Jesus?” In your daily life, what are some practical ways we can obey this command?

Starting in verse 2, the author begins the comparison between Jesus and Moses. His argument continues to build on Jesus’ superiority and gives the readers more reason to focus their thoughts on Christ. The original audience had a higher respect for Moses than they did the angels. After all, through Moses God established the nation of Israel and the Old Covenant.

What primary characteristic of Moses’ life does the author highlight? (Check all that apply)

His gift for gab

His faithfulness to God

His people skills

What important difference in position between Moses and Jesus does the author point out? What illustration does he use to make his point?

God’s “house” is a word picture for the family of God – God’s children, the brothers and sisters of Jesus. We are God’s children, we “share in the heavenly calling” (3:1), if our sins have been purified by the blood of Jesus (1:3). Are you part of God’s house? Can Jesus call you “sister?”

Rebels and Hard Hearts

Read 3:7-19

In verse 1-6 the author presents Moses and Jesus as positive examples for God's children. The author now gives a negative example for comparison. He quotes from Psalm 95 to show the hard hearts of the children of Israel during the desert wanderings. Although God had miraculously rescued them, guided them with His presence, and provided for their daily needs they still rebelled.

Read Psalm 95:1-11

The author of Hebrews only quotes verses 7b-11 in Hebrews chapter 3. However, his audience would have known this entire Psalm quite well. The first half of the Psalm – the half that illustrates a correct response to God – would have stood in stark contrast in their minds to the sinful response of their ancestors.

Use Psalm 95:1-7 to fill out the table below. On the left side, list the ways that God's people should respond to Him. On the right side, list the reasons why God deserves this response.

Proper responses to God	Reasons God is deserving

God overwhelming deserved their gratitude, worship, and praise, but the children of Israel refused to give it. The disastrous results impacted an entire generation. The author of Hebrews used this poignant example from his readers' history as a dramatic warning.

List the phrases in verses 8-11 and 16-18 used to describe the sin of the Israelites in the desert.

How did God respond?

Although neither the original audience of the book of Hebrews nor Christians today are facing a literal desert wandering, we are at risk for falling into the same sin. How can we help each other stand firm? (See 3:12-13 and 3:1.)

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-12

Paul also used the Israelites in the desert as a negative example for Christians in Corinth. This warning extends to us today. In fact, Paul said these things happened to serve as examples to God's people, to "keep us from setting our hearts on evil things" like the Israelites did in the desert. Their sin was recorded to remind us to carefully guard our hearts and minds to keep from falling.

Although the Israelites were in a physical desert, they were not experiencing spiritual dryness. What provisions of God and manifestations of His presence does Paul mention in verses 1-5?

Make a list of God's provision and presence that you experience in your own life. How can reflecting on these things protect you from a sinful, unbelieving heart?

The third chapter of Hebrews touches on a sticky issue. Although we will look at it again when we get to chapter 6, we need to briefly consider it here. Compare Hebrews 3:14 with 3:6b. Some Biblical scholars believe these verses imply it is possible to lose our salvation. This topic is hotly debated among scholars and Christian laymen alike. The author of Hebrews is not the only NT writer to make these kinds of conditional statements. Paul's letters contain many similar ones. (See Romans 11:22 and Colossians 1:22-23 for examples.) How then are we to understand these difficult passages?

Even though the NT authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit as they wrote they were not omniscient. Although they wrote to a collective group of "Christian brothers," they could not possibly know the true spiritual condition of another person. They - just as we must - depended on the outward manifestation in an individual's life as evidence of the reality of the inner spiritual condition. "Perseverance does not gain salvation but demonstrates the reality that true salvation has taken place." (NIV Commentary, pg. 136.)

Read James 2:14-26, 1 John 2:3-6, and 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Based on Hebrews 3, James 2 and 1 John 2, what would need to be present in an individual's life in order to "pass the test" Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 13:5?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. Describe this perspective on God's grace verses human works.

Application

Chapter three illustrates both positive and negative examples of faithfulness to God. Jesus is the positive example that should encourage one to remain faithful. We must follow His example by "fixing our thoughts on Him" and encouraging each other. This should result in acts of faith that are evidence of a saving relationship with Jesus.

What are some ways we can develop a true, clear picture of Jesus, whose example we are to follow?

What are some ways that you personally can cultivate a more intimate relationship with Jesus?

The author of Hebrews holds up Jesus as our example for "faithfulness" to God. What does "faithfulness" look like in a believer's life? Have you been faithful?

God continually pours grace into the lives of His children. His grace gives us the blessed gift of faith to believe in Jesus and enter into a saving relationship with Him. His grace also guides, provides, presides, and abides in us daily. How do we respond to His grace? Is it with obedience and good works? Or is it with hard hearts and rebellion? *Prayerfully ask God to search your heart today and reveal the nature of your responses to Him.*