

Chapter 3

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.

And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, 'To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.' Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.' So I sware in my wrath, 'They shall not enter into my rest.' Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, 'To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.' For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Commentary

{1} – Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;

The "wherefore" at the top of this verse is a transition leading to a conclusion supported by everything that preceded it. To wit:

- a) God spoke through the prophets in time past, but now He speaks by His Son.
- b) The Son created all things, upholds all things and is heir of all things.
- c) The Son, by Himself, purged our sins and is seated at God's right hand.
- d) The Son is superior in all ways to all angelic beings.
- e) The Word of the Son is superior to the Old Covenant administered by angels and supported by Old Testament prophets, and should be heeded completely.
- f) The salvation which the Son wrought was prophesied in the Old Testament writings, spoken of by angels, preached by Christ, taught by the apostles who heard Him and were sent by Him, written and passed on to us by those same witnesses.
- g) God validated their witness by miraculous signs and wonders and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- h) All things are put into subjection under the headship of the Son who suffered and was glorified, defeated Satan and took possession of death and Hell.
- i) He became flesh in order to redeem fleshly men, becoming their high priest in things pertaining to God and successfully reconciled men to God by expiating their sin.
- j) He is a patient and kind priest, knowing the hardships of life in the flesh. He is a "very present help in time of trouble" (Ps.46:1).

Wherefore - having established this list of wonderful claims, the writer beckoned the "holy brethren" - the set-apart adopted sons and daughters who were effectually called by the Spirit of God - to take a good, close look at this One whom he was proclaiming. And, he points out two of the ministerial functions the Son has taken on.

Firstly, He's the Apostle. The word "the" is important. It designates "the definite article." There were men Jesus sent out who were called "apostles." But, they were not the writer's focus. He wanted his readers to see "the One" - the singular Apostle. The word "apostle" means, "sent one" - like an ambassador. Jesus sent the 12 apostles out into the world. But, Jesus is the One who was sent by God. He is Heaven's ambassador to Earth.

While the 12 had some knowledge, they learned it from the Apostle who had all knowledge. While the 12 were "endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49), the Apostle was the Almighty (Rev.1:8). The author wanted us to catch the uniqueness of "the Apostle," sent of God.

But, He is also the High Priest. Historically, Israel's high priests served in the temple, performing sacrifices and meeting with God on behalf of the chosen people. Christ's fulfillment of the High Priest type and shadow is spelled out at length in the upcoming verses, so we'll simply say at this juncture that Christ was the definitive High Priest, who performed the ultimate sacrifice and met with God on behalf of His own chosen, elect people.

Then, just to make sure we didn't miss it, the author named this "sent One," the perfect Priest, by name - Jesus. The word "Christ" was added by the KJV translators for readability. It is left out entirely in the NAS and NIV. It does not appear in the original text.

{2} - Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

By definition, an apostle - a "sent one" - must be sent by someone. God sent Jesus, and one of the defining characteristics of His apostleship was that he was faithful to the One who appointed Him.

May I take a quick left turn and wander off for a moment? It is exactly this characteristic of Christ which gives me the most hope and assurance. His faithfulness to God, and to the mission for which God sent Him, is the crux and core of our salvation. Had Jesus ever been less than completely devoted to the cause, our entrance into eternity would be fraught with uncertainty. But, we can rest assured. Our Captain is faithful. The One who determined to save us, who proclaimed "It is finished!" (John 19:30), will most certainly see us all the way to our appointed destiny - because He is Faithful to the One who appointed Him.

Can our assurance of salvation be based on anything within us of such undeniable value that it would obligate God to save us? Are we capable of such phenomenal holiness that God would be thrilled to be in our presence? Or, is there any profession or public act of contrition that certifies us as Heavenly residents?

No, no, no and no.

We are secure because Jesus is faithful not only to save us despite us, but He is faithful to save us because that is what the Father wants. And the Son is faithful to accomplish everything that the One who appointed Him and sent Him declared that He should accomplish.

Do you see that? Can you grasp that? I'll say it plainly –

Our guarantee of eternal security is based on the Apostle's faithfulness to perform His Father's decrees. It's not in us at all! And, if it's not in us, then we cannot destroy it, ruin it, wreck it, undermine it, or mess it up! Our salvation is the end product of our Elder Brother's faithfulness to our Eternal Father.

Hooray!

Okay, back to the text at hand. I just couldn't pass by there without stopping to think on it for a moment. At this point the writer introduced the person of Moses to his treatise. To a Hebrew reader there was no one who commanded more respect or was held in higher regard than Moses. While Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were highly esteemed as the forefathers of Israel, it was Moses who went up on Mt. Sinai and lived with God for 40 days. It was Moses who brought down the Law. It was Moses of whom God stated -

"... Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num.12:6-8)

That's high praise and it set Moses apart from all the children of Israel. It was a scary thing to question Moses' authority. In all things Moses had the final word. Even the Law of God given at Mt. Sinai was often called "The Law of Moses" (1 Cor.9:9). Nevertheless, the author continued his theme of Christ's superiority over everyone and everything - and the next hurdle he had to cross was Moses.

He started with a comparison. Jesus was faithful to the One who sent Him, even as God declared Moses to be faithful in the house of Israel. But, the comparison quickly changed to a contrast.

{3} - For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.

Uh-oh. Now he's done it. The author declared unabashedly that the man Jesus was accounted of higher value and deserved greater reverence than Moses! That will shake up your average Hebrew. But, he had the proof.

Remember, back at the start of the letter we read -

"And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands." (Heb.1:10)

All things were made by God through Christ. And, this same Christ chose the nation of Israel as His covenant people, through whom would come the promised deliverer. So, even though Moses was faithful in God's house, it was Christ who built the house in the first place. There is no member of the house - Moses included - who could be superior to the Master Builder.

{4} - For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.

Here's a lesson in axiomatic truth. Walk down your street. Look at the houses. Look at the buildings. The very fact that they are standing there is proof that someone drew up a plan, bought the materials, put in the labor, and saw it through to completion. No one would deny such an obvious fact. Likewise, the House of Israel stood. Likewise, the Church of Jesus stands. So, self-evident truth kicks in –

"... I will build *my* church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Mat.16:18)

And, the universe stands. "Big Bang" theories aside, the universe stands because someone had a plan and saw it through to completion. That's all the proof of God a thinking man needs. Everything stands. Everything has order and design. Everything must have had a designer and builder. Hence, "He that built all things is God."

But, this is actually just the tip of the iceberg. The author is going to not only proclaim Christ's superiority over Moses, the man, but over everything which Moses instituted. At the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus stood flanked by Moses and Elijah. To the Jewish mindset, Moses was the embodiment of the law and Elijah was the chief prophet. But, when Peter mistakenly suggested that three tabernacles be built, equating the three figures, the voice from Heaven sounded.

"While he [Peter] yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (Mat.17:5)

Peter, John and James fell down on their faces. But, they received a tender touch from Jesus who reassured them, "Arise, and be not afraid" (Mat. 17:7). When they looked around, it was just the four of them. Moses and Elijah had been replaced. The superior One had arrived.

{5} - And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after;

The next stage of contrast between Moses and Christ leads us from their relative action - that of faithful house building - to their relative authority within that house. God declared them both "faithful." But, Moses was not considered an owner or heir to the house. Rather, he was referred to as a servant. Moses served in a house that was owned by another.

Still, Moses' faith was not without its positive attributes. Even in the Old Covenant we find that righteousness was imputed to the faithful (Rom. 4:3, Hab. 2:4). Chapter 11 of Hebrews will explore this concept at length. But, in this context, Moses' faith is said to be "a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after." In other words, Moses' faithful obedience was evidence that when he spoke for God, his words were true. As well, his faithfulness before the children of Israel gave witness to the fact that God had chosen him specifically as the prophet to the nation. And, Moses prophesied of Christ -

"The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."
(Deut.18:15)

Similarly, God stated -

"I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." (Deut.18:18-19)

Viewing it from the other end of the spectrum, in Luke 24 Jesus encountered two apostles on their way to Emmaus. Hiding His true identity from them, He listened to their tale of woe and rearranged their thinking –

"Then he said unto them, 'O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself".
(Luke 24:25-27)

When Christ revealed the gospel written in Hebrew scripture, He began at Moses, showing Himself to be that very Prophet of whom Moses spoke. That's the testimony of all the prophets. They all point toward Christ. They sought no notoriety of their own, rather they faithfully testified according to the words of John the Baptist –

"He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

That is the hallmark of Godly faith. The prophets and leaders of Israel were mere servants in the household of God. But, Christ is the true heir.

{6a} - But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, ...

Now, there's a really remarkable declaration. I have no problem recognizing, believing, or accepting Christ's supremacy over Moses. Moses was a man; Christ was God in the flesh. It's obvious. It's plain and simple. God incarnate is higher, better, and more worthy than any single creature, regardless of their faithfulness or ministerial work. So, yes, right - I'm with ya'. Christ is the son and He stands to inherit all that His Father has - which is everything. He rules His Father's house. Got it.

But, I hesitate, I'm humbled by, I stand amazed at - "whose house are WE."

A Bit of Religious History:

Up on Mt. Sinai God gave Moses very specific instruction about a portable tabernacle, a place of meeting. God dwelt with, and in, that tabernacle as He led Israel through the wilderness –

"Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys." (Exod. 40:34-38)

Inside the boundaries of this tent was a small room that contained the "Ark of the Covenant." It was separated from the rest of the Holy Place by a veil. Once a year the high priest of Israel would go into that small room, the "Holy of Holies," or the "holiest place of all," and God would descend as a pillar of smoke, filling the room.

Time passed, and once the Israelites were settled in their land and united under King David, the king decided to build a house for the Lord. But that honor was passed to his son, Solomon. Solomon told Hiram, the king of Tyre,

"Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now

the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name." (1 Kings 5:3-5)

And, again:

"And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father." (1 Chron. 28:5-6)

So, God declared that He would have a physical dwelling place in Jerusalem. And, He honored that word:

"And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD. Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever." (1 Kings 8:10-13)

But, in the providence of God, this would not be His settled dwelling. He had yet another house in mind. After years of being plundered by marauding armies, the Babylonian militia of Nebuchadnezzar finally destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 BC –

"And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire." (2 Kings 25:8-9)

There was another temple, Herod's temple, constructed from 20 B.C. to 64 A.D. Despite its grandeur and structural magnificence, and despite having an area designated, "the holy of holies," complete with a heavy veil, the ark was noticeably absent from this "holiest place." The glory of God never occupied that building.

The historic picture is consistent - God was ever external to men. Men knew where God abode - in the tabernacle, or the temple. The high priest knew where to meet God - in the "holy of holies." But, God dwelt in a place that common men could not approach under fear of death.

Then things took a startling turn - one day God walked into Herod's temple occupying a new tabernacle of human flesh. He did not take up residence in Herod's structure; He was residing in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. As the temple merchants were selling - and the priests were continually slaughtering - sacrificial lambs, the very Lamb of God walked into the temple building, He being the tabernacle of the Most High. Jesus drew that direct correlation -

"Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body." (John 2:18-21)

The body of Jesus was the dwelling, the temple, the house of God –

"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col. 2:9)

Jesus remained "the most holy place," the central locale of God on Earth, right up through the resurrection (John 7:39). But, before He departed the earthly plane, Christ made a revelatory announcement -

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and SHALL BE IN YOU. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." (John 14:16-18)

The promise of Christ was that the Spirit of God would, for the first time, indwell individual believers. He would take up residence in mortal men, and "abide with you for ever." It would not just be His next stopover. It would be a permanent home. So, we become the "house of God" –

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor.6:19)

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22)

That was all just a lengthy way of saying that we who live under the New Covenant are the first people ever spoken of as being God's house, God's dwelling. And, His Son rules over His household.

Moses may have served, and we may today serve, but there is one ruler in this house. He is the "blessed and only Potentate" (1Tim 6:15). It is His house. He makes the rules.

{6b} - ... if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Now, our Arminian friends love to get a hold of this phrase and try to prove that there is a contingency present here. I guess they assume that God can take up residence in a person, the purpose of which Christ described as "that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:16), and then later decide that we are not living up to our end of the bargain and move out. Any real permanence in the deal rests with us and our ability to stir up our faith and whip up our emotional response to the degree that the Spirit would be obligated to hang out with us.

But, let's start by defining some terms. The Old English phrase "hold fast" means to cling tightly to something, never loosening our grip. What we cling to is "confidence." Knowing that Christ has died to purchase our redemption, we have a firm conviction that we are safe and eternally secure.

The word translated "hope" is the Greek word, "*elpis*." It has a similar root to "pistis," or "faith." Unfortunately, our modern use of the word "hope" connotes a longing for something that may or may not happen. But, "*elpis*" is a word of great confidence and expectation. "*Elpis*" looks forward to the future with anticipation and a favorable faithfulness.

So, the author's intention in this verse is to assure believers that the proof that God resides within us is that we have a firm grip on our confidence in Christ's work and we rejoice as we look forward with confident expectation right up until His return. The "if" in this verse does not pose a hypothetical situation. It establishes the "proof positive." How will we know if the Holy Spirit indwells us? We will cling confidently to our faith and rejoice in our future expectation.

To look at it another way, no man is able to demonstrate any confidence in God, nor will he rejoice or have any eternal hope, unless the Spirit of God has already changed his stony heart and begun the process of conforming him into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). And, if we understand that –

"...by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9),

As well as -

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil.1:6) -

We are forced to conclude that every person who God thus indwells will most certainly retain both their confidence and their rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. I'm not just playing word games here, nor am I doing an "end run" around a piece of Scripture that may appear to contradict my personal belief. No, what I'm attempting to do is place the glory firmly where it belongs - at the feet of our Lord. To whatever degree we can take responsibility for our salvation, to that degree we make the cross of Christ of no effect. But, He saved us completely. He is the "author and finisher of (our) faith" (Heb.12:2). But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Suffice it to say that I'm not particularly worried about that *if*, because –

- 1) *If* Jesus is everything He said He is (which He is);
- 2) And, *if* He went to prepare a place for His elect sheep (which He did);
- 3) And, *if* He promised to come back and get us so we could be where He is (which He did);
- 4) And, *if* He did all that to fulfill the promise to His father that He would bring all His brethren home and wouldn't lose a single one (which He did);

Then, I'm quite certain that when the writer of Hebrews said *if* we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end - - -

We will.

The author was cornering his readers. Piece by piece he built a platform from which everyone could see the supremacy of Jesus over all forms of religious thought, practice or philosophy. Moses, as great as he was in the Hebrew frame of reference, was still only a servant. He ruled over the house of Israel, which house Christ built.

We, on the other hand, are the New Testament house of God. But, just as with Moses, despite our best efforts, good works, and faithful practice, we are still mere servants.

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke17:10)

He is all and in all. He is the Son and the Ruler over the household. Still, through faith in Him, and by the faith that He authored and sustains in us, we can look forward to hearing –

"... Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Mat. 25:21)

A Little Exodus Background

For any Hebrew man, woman or child, the story of the Exodus was ingrained into their education, conscience and religious history. The delivery of the children of Israel out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery was one of Moses' chief accomplishments. So, next the author took on this revered event and revealed it to be an incomplete delivery when contrasted with the superior salvation accomplished in Christ.

The deliverance out of Egypt is one of the best-known Old Testament "types" or "shadows." While it is an accurate account of historic events, the truth of Christian salvation is woven into the "warp and woof" of the 40-plus year journey through the wilderness. There is neither ample space, nor is it the intent of this particular commentary, to demonstrate the abundance of "foreshadows" embedded in the Biblical account. But, a few basics will help -

1) Egypt is a type of sin. Sin has us all in "bondage." And, we are slaves to that sin.

"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34)

2) Israel is the "chosen" and "elect" nation of God.

"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth." (Deut.14:2)

"For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me." (Is.45:4)

That's a type of the Church, the elect and chosen who are in bondage to sin and in need of a deliverer. However, take a moment to notice what I did not say. I did not say that the Church has replaced Israel in God's economy or plan of salvation. God used the history of His dealings with Israel to teach the New Covenant church about salvation. In Galatians 4:24, the Apostle Paul calls such specific teaching events "an allegory" - but, not a replacement.

3) Moses is the God-sent deliverer of Israel.

"Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt." (Ex. 3:10)

He is the type of Christ, who is the God-sent deliverer bringing the redeemed believers out of the bondage of sin.

4) Moses was to lead Israel from Egypt to "the Promised Land."

"And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land; unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey;" (Ex.3:8a)

That land of promise is a type of Heaven, the eternal home, overflowing with blessings, to which the Church's Deliverer is leading them. However, I will say again that recognizing the substance or parallel of such typology does not in any way negate or eliminate the real promises God made to the nation of Israel.

Now, with those simple types in mind, let's look at one other comparison between these two deliverers and their end result - albeit a negative one:

{7-11} – Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, 'To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.' Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.' So I sware in my wrath, 'They shall not enter into my rest.'

The author lifted a direct quote from Psalm 95:7-11. It is the basis of the writer's further discourse. This is a reminder of an important event and vital bit of historic Hebrew theology. We have to go back into Genesis to understand the depth of this passage.

Abram was called by God to leave Ur of the Chaldees, his country, his kindred and his father's house, and head toward a land that God would show him. Abraham obeyed God and started traveling, though he didn't know the final destination. He arrived in a land known as Canaan.

"And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land." (Gen.12:7a)

That promise was renewed in Gen.13:14-15. Read how definite it is –

"And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever."

That's a firm promise.

But, there was one seemingly insurmountable problem - Abram was childless. So, how in the world were his descendants going to take possession of this land when he lacked even the first offspring? Well, God took care of that and promised him not only a single heir, but also seed as the sand of the sea and stars of the heavens.

"And, he [Abram] believed in the LORD: and he [God] counted it to him for righteousness." (Gen.15:6)

Then, in verse 7 God repeated the promise that Abram's seed would inherit this land of Canaan. But, Abram asked a question that inspired God to reveal the next several hundred years of human history as a guarantee that His word was good.

"And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (Gen. 15:8)

Immediately, God instructed him to prepare sacrifices fit for a covenant. As evening fell, God put Abram into a deep sleep and He answered Abram's question.

"And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." (Gen.15:13-17)

God's answer was, "Well, you're going to die. But, your offspring are going to end up in a strange land." That happened, by the way. Through Joseph, they ended up in Egypt.

God also stated, "They will become slaves in that land." That happened. The book of Exodus begins by telling us that a pharaoh came to power that had no memory of Joseph. He feared that the Israelites might side with an enemy of Egypt, so he put them into bondage.

God continued, "They will be under this affliction for 400 years." That happened. According to Exodus 12:40 it was 430 years, to be exact.

God accurately added, "And, I will judge that nation which afflicts them." That happened. Egypt was smitten with the infamous plagues that culminated in the

death of their firstborn. Later, Pharaoh and his army were drowned in the Red Sea.

God also promised, "Your offspring will leave there richer than when they went in." That happened. The Egyptians were so anxious to be rid of the Israelites that they gave them gold, silver, clothes - whatever it took to get them to leave.

And, God's concluding statement was, "They will come back to this very land."

That's vital! If you miss that you miss the whole point! Everything else God had promised to Abram had come to pass with pinpoint accuracy. Generation after generation, the Israelites passed down this prophetic "land promise." As they departed Egypt they were eyewitnesses to the severity of God's punishment and their own miraculous deliverance. They heard the wailing of Egypt over their dead. They walked through the walls of water dry-shod as God led them across the Red Sea.

And, just to seal the imagery and shake their memory, God appeared as a pillar of smoke, clouding the way of the Egyptians who pursued them. But, He appeared as a burning light to guide His chosen through the sea. The same two elements that sealed the covenant to Abram appeared to seal the deliverance of his seed! (Ex.14:19-20)

Now, my point in all this is that these people should surely have been overwhelmed with confidence and faith toward God. He had controlled the events of time and human circumstance to keep His promise to Abram. These Israelites should have been convicted with unwavering, unswerving dedication and faith to the God who had moved so mightily on their behalf!

But amazingly, they weren't. After God drowned their enemies, they sang a joyful song of deliverance and began their journey. But, after only three days they started murmuring. Three days!!! And, right away God started threatening them –

"And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee." (Ex.15:26)

God gave them bread from Heaven to eat. They grew tired of it and learned to "loathe" it. The journey became a constant series of complaints and chiding against Moses. Three months into the trip, they arrived at Mt. Sinai. While Moses was on the mountaintop receiving the terms of their relationship, the Israelites were in the valley making an idolatrous cow to worship.

At every turn the children of Israel proved themselves to be a "stiff-necked" and stubborn people. But, their undoing came only two years and a few months after their departure as they approached the very land they were to inhabit. The Lord instructed Moses to send spies into the land. Their report began –

"... We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it." (Num 13:27)

Hey, that's the place! Word for word, it's the land Abraham was promised! Go get it! But they continued -

"Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan." (Num.13:28-29)

Hey, wait! That's not a bad thing! That proves it's the place! Remember God's promise to Abram –

"In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." (Gen. 15:18-21)

That's them! It's all yours! Go get it! But, no...

"And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." (Num 14:1-4)

And, what was God's reaction, considering all He'd done for these people and their faithless, spineless, stiff-necked reply?

"Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to

make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun." (Num 14:28-30)

God revoked their inheritance and scattered their dead bodies through the wilderness for the next 40 years. Their children, the second (or new) generation, finally entered into the Promised Land.

Now, that rather extended exercise was an attempt to bring us into the mindset of the Hebrew reader of this letter. When they read the reminder –

Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.' So I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter into my rest.'

It was a bitter memory of Israel's worst days. They had the long-standing promise given to their father, Abram. They had the history of their nation played out in perfect accord with God's prophetic word. They had the miraculous deliverance. They ate the manna. They drank from the rock. They saw the land of milk and honey. Yet, they were rebellious and hard-hearted. And, they paid the supreme price for their foolishness. God swore against them that they would never "enter into my rest."

So, how did that apply to a New Testament Hebrew?

{12} - Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

Given their common heritage and history, knowing how their ancestors had lost the Promised Land by refusing to follow God faithfully, the author exhorted them to check their hearts and make sure that they understood that rejecting Christ was tantamount to rejecting God's leadership. And, the judgment "They shall not enter into my rest" was looming over them.

But, that's also a warning to Christians of all ages. Take heed. Take account. Check yourself. In this day of relativistic thinking, when we're supposed to give credence to every man's "belief," regardless of how bizarre, this warning should slice through us like a razor. Any system of belief that departs from the clear revelation of God found in Scripture - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God revealed by Messiah Jesus - is considered an evil lack of belief.

Get that. It is not counted as simply misinformed thinking backed by good intentions. It is evil. It is not belief. It is dis-faith. It is a departure from the only God in the universe that can save your ever-living, never-dying soul.

Pay attention: check your heart.

{13} - But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

I'm thankful that God has not left me here, alone. He has surrounded me with faithful Christian brethren who push me on and remind me constantly of the value of this journey. That's one function of the body. We are to be a daily reminder, a constant correction and edification to each other.

- Do you love your brother or sister in Christ? Tell them. Tell them now. Today.
- Are you thankful for someone's gift or help? Tell them. Now. Today.
- Does someone need to hear a good word, or an uplifting message? Do it. Do it now. Today.
- Do you know a lost person whose soul hangs in the balance? Do they need to hear about the only Deliverer and Captain of their soul? Tell them. Exhort them. Today.

Why? What's the rush? Isn't tomorrow soon enough? Well, no - now is the time, because sin is working overtime. Sin never sleeps. Sin takes no vacations. And, sin is tricky. Sin will confound and confuse us. It's deceitful. Satan is a deceiver. Sin will lie to you and tell you everything is okay.

Sin is alot like smoking. When a kid takes his first drag off a cigarette, his body instantly goes into convulsive coughing spasms. That's the body's way of saying, "This may not be real good for us." But, rather than heed the obvious hints, the kid will give in to pressure from the commercials that make smoking look cool, and he'll force himself to smoke more cigarettes until his body adapts and even becomes addicted. That's the "deceitfulness" of it. What he thinks is "cool" and good for him socially is actually eating away at him from the inside.

Our natural fleshly selves love sin. And, there's pleasure in it - for a season (Heb.11:25). Sin often feels good. Sin is fun. Sin can usually be hid from other folk. But, that's the deceitfulness of it. It cannot be hidden from the One who searches the secret places of the heart.

"Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD." (Jer. 23:23-24)

So, exhort, lift-up, support one another every day. We can all use the help.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." (1 Pet 5:8-9)

{14} - For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

This verse echoes the sentiment of verse 6. Again we are exhorted to hold tightly to our confidence. Think about it. Christ is heir to everything, and the ones who complete this journey will be "joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). We will partake of His heavenly, eternal nature if we end this race the same way we started - driven by faith and clinging to Him.

Do you remember the joy and excitement that flooded your soul the day you first realized the truth of the Gospel? Remember how wonderful it was to drop the burden of your endless attempts to please God through your own effort? Remember the emotion that stirred your heart as you realized the horrible and wonderful price Christ paid to guarantee your place in eternity? Well, hold on to that! Just as we began by resting in Christ's finished work, we must end knowing that He is truly our every hope and stay. Be steadfast, unmovable, convinced. Never let go of Him that promised to never let go of you.

Okay, let's turn our attention back to the New Testament application of the Exodus saga:

{15} - While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

This thought is connected to the previous verse. Hold your confidence steadfast to the end because Scripture admonishes us, "To day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

There are only two reactions to truth - acceptance or rejection. There's no middle ground. Some people would like you to think that there is a "middle path" of picking and choosing those aspects of Christianity that fit well with your personal lifestyle or religious line of reasoning. But, that's part of that "evil unbelief" stuff. It's an all or nothing-at-all proposition. Some get it and some don't. Who are the ones who get it? Who hears the heavenly voice?

"But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his

voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." (John 10:2-5)

Interestingly, the very Psalm that contains this warning not to harden our hearts to His voice includes this thought -

"For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice." (Ps. 95:7)

The sheep, and only the sheep, will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow as He leads. But, let's continue the warning.

{ 16 } - For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

That's right. Joshua and Caleb encouraged Moses to go in and take the land.

"... Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." (Num.13:30)

So, those two faithful old men and every child under 20 years of age made it all the way to the land of promise. Interestingly, the name Joshua is a contraction of the Hebrew designation "*Jehovah-Oshua*," which means "Yahweh is Deliverance." The Greek cognate of that name is *Jesus*. Moses was forbidden to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land after their 40-year judgment. Instead, it was this Joshua – the foreshadow of Jesus - who led them across the Jordan River and into their inheritance.

Meanwhile, Caleb - whose name means, "raging with canine madness" - just happened to be a ruler in the house of Judah, the very tribe from which the Messiah would come. No accidents, just providence. It's good to know that God can produce faith and reward even those of us who started out raving like a mad dog.

{ 17-18 } - But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

The answer is, "Yes, that's exactly who and that's exactly why."

{ 19 } - So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

That's the crux of this whole discussion. In one sentence the author has defined the very core of the Exodus story. Some did not enter into the land that God promised to the seed of Abraham. They did not get in because they refused to believe the promise of God that had been passed down for hundreds of years and which had played out on the stage of human history with such accuracy that only the omnipotent hand of God could have caused it. There was no good reason for any of them to react in any other way than absolute confidence and faith in God's ability to see the entire venture through to the end.

But, they didn't believe. Their hearts were hard. And, they were refused entrance.

So, what does that mean to us all these years later?

Well, that's in Chapter 4.