

Virtual Bread

Week 40 (Trinity 19): Day 1 (Monday)

Strive to enter God's rest!

Hebrews 3:1–19

1. Opening prayer

God of love and strength, your Son forgave his enemies even while he was suffering shame and death. Strengthen those who suffer for the sake of conscience. When they are accused, save them from speaking in hate; when they are rejected, save them from bitterness; when they are imprisoned, save them from despair. Save us all from taking the easy road when opposition comes. We ask this for the sake of our merciful and righteous judge, Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Modified from a prayer found in the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church USA)

2. Concerning Hebrews

This week we turn our attention to the NT writing known as the Letter to the Hebrews. It is not really a letter at all as it does not begin in the usual style of a letter. It is perhaps better described as an 'exhortation', an appeal to a company of Christians not to fall away from the confidence of their faith in Christ in the face of persecution and widespread opposition to the Christian faith.

To whom was it written?

Most of the background to this writing is unknown, but it would appear to have been written to Christians that had come from a Jewish background – hence the title 'to the Hebrews'. The letter appeals often to the OT in showing the fulfilment of the OT scriptures in Christ, an appeal that would have fallen on deaf ears if those tempted away from Christ had come from a pagan background.

The destination of this letter is unknown but possibly it was sent to a church in Rome where there was a sizeable Jewish population from whom the early church will have gained believers. The persecutions of the church under Claudius (AD 49) and Emperor Nero in the 60s AD account for the temptation to return to their ancestral faith. The letter is of an unknown date but was quoted by Clement of Rome in AD 96. So, it may have been written sometime between 49AD and 64AD.

Who wrote it?

This too is unknown but the style of the writing confirms that this 'letter' was not written by the apostle Paul. The quality of the Greek is among the best in the NT and the writer quotes the OT almost exclusively from the Greek translation of the Bible known as the Septuagint (often written as LXX). We may sensibly assume the writer was a well-educated non-Jew, or Hellenist (that is,

someone who was born into the Greek world and not into the faith of Israel) who knew intimately the OT in its Greek version and who was passionately concerned for his fellow Christians who were in danger of falling away from Christ.

The method of writing used.

As we shall see, our writer saw the OT as containing ‘pictures in shadow’ of truths that were to be fully revealed in Christ. His method is known as a form of ‘messianic typology’, that is, he sees in the OT ways in which the Messiah is portrayed through people and events in the OT all of which point forward to Christ Jesus. He takes the history and the lessons of the past and explains how their true significance was revealed with the coming of Christ (as Jesus did on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24). By so underlining the supremacy of Christ as the fulfilment of all that God had revealed to his people in the times past, he urges his Jewish-Christian brothers and sisters not to linger in the shadows of the past, but to hold fast to the present reality of Christ.

As we see these constant connections between events and prophecies in the OT and their fulfilment in Christ, we too should be encouraged to see God’s faithfulness carefully and consistently revealing his plan of salvation to people down the ages and right through to the present day and be encouraged to hold fast to him.

3. Read Hebrews 3:1–19

Today we read [Hebrews 3:1-19](#) (*click on the link, see below or turn to p.1003 of the Church Bible*).

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹ where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.
¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.’
¹¹ As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 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. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

¹⁶For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

4. Commentary

We begin with this chapter to set the background for our readings in Chapter 4 which will occupy the rest of the week. Notice how the words of Psalm 95 are being used. The history of the Israelites in the wilderness is recalled in the Psalm and its truths applied to the day when the psalmist was writing. The writer to the Hebrews now does the same for his day. He recalls the message of the sin and disbelief by those in the wilderness, the result being the refusal by God to enter God's 'rest'. In their case God's rest being found in the Promised land. His purpose is to help present believers to learn from that historic record and hold fast to their trust in God and so enter into God's rest.

The chapter may be split into three:

Verses 1 – 6. Moses is held in very high regard within Judaism, it was through Moses that Israel came closest to God. These verses echo Moses' high place in Jewish faith but makes the distinction between Moses as a servant of God 'in God's house' and Jesus who is the Son 'over God's house'. The difference is emphasized as between the one who serves in a house and one who builds it. Verse 6 '**we are** (emphatic) his house, or household designed and built by Christ, if we hold fast to our confidence and hope in Christ.'

Verses 7 – 15 quotes Psalm 95 verses 7 – 11. Here the history of the Exodus is recalled with reference to the way in which the Israelites were unprepared to trust God to lead them into the promised land because they feared God might not be able to overcome the peoples already in the land (See Numbers 13 and 14). Their disbelief closes the door on God's good future and the wilderness generation never see the promised land. Only Caleb and Joshua, who remained confident that what God promised he would fulfil, reached the promised land. The disbelief of the people means their exclusion by God from His rest.

But, the promise of God's rest remains open for all believers 'today'. So, says our writer, be sure not to let an 'evil and unbelieving heart' lead you astray and exclude you from that rest. Rather, exhort one another to remain confident in Christ 'firm to the end' and not to be deceived by the siren voice of sin.

Verses 16 – 19. Hebrews ends this chapter with three questions by which the writer shows how the unbelief of the wilderness people led to their rejection

5. Reflection

We all face times when we are tempted to give up our faith. Maybe because of some painful tragedy when our prayers seemed ineffective; or when the call to be holy becomes a burden and the sneers of the world encourage us to take our faith less seriously. These temptations all seed in us an unbelief that challenges God's love, power and authority. But we would do well not to heed these

shallow voices, for we have the sure promise that we are God's children, part of 'his house', if we remain faithful and obedient children.

Maybe we are in this state of holding back on God and his will for us; or maybe we have friends who confide in us that since the pandemic they have taken up new interests and have decided worship and the fellowship of other believers is no longer for them. Pray for them and encourage them to return to Christ who holds the key to entering the glory of the Father and his eternal rest.

6. Prayer

Dear Lord, you know the times when we have grown weary and been tempted to ease off serving and worshipping you; help us to rekindle our love and devotion to you as we discover again the wonder of the Lord Jesus Christ promised in the Jewish Scriptures and realized in Christ. In His name and for his glory we pray. **Amen**

7. Pray the Collect for this week:

O God, forasmuch as without you we are not able to please you; mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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