

Consider Christ

There is probably no other man, other than Jesus Himself, that God has honored more than Moses. His name appears more times than any other name in the Bible except for Jesus and David. Would you believe Moses' name is mentioned 847 times? 762 in the Old Testament and 85 in the New Testament. God's hand was on him from the time he was a baby placed in a basket and hidden on the Nile to the end of his life where God personally buried him.

Next to Abraham, Moses was certainly the man most greatly revered by the Jewish people. For the Hebrews to go back to the law it meant to go back to Moses and they were sorely tempted to do just that. It was important that the writer convince his readers that Jesus was greater than Moses, for the entire Jewish religion came through Moses. So in this chapter the writer shows how Jesus Christ is superior to Moses in three areas..

1. Christ Is Greater in His Person Hebrews 3:1-2

“Holy brethren” tells us that the readers of this letter were saved by the grace of God. He was referring to the people in the church, the body of Christ, “partakers of a heavenly calling.” (partners) True believers shared more than a heavenly calling:

- they shared in Jesus Christ - *“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”* Hebrews 3:14
- through the Holy Spirit *“we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.”* Eph 5:30
- we become *“partakers of the Holy Spirit”* Hebrews 6:4
- as His children, we also *“partake in His chastening”* Hebrews 12:8

Chastening may not seem to be a benefit but it is: God chastens us because we are His children and He loves us. It is painful as a parent to discipline our children but we must do it to develop the right kind of character. It is the same for us. God has to chasten us to develop our Christian character and teach us right from wrong. If you are never chastised you may need to take a close look at your relationship with God.

“Our confession” - confession means “to say the same thing.” All true Christians “say the same thing” when it comes to their salvation - it came by faith in Jesus Christ. It was not Moses who did any of this, it was Jesus. That is why the author exhorts them to *“consider Jesus Christ,”*: “to study carefully, to understand fully”; “not a passing glance, but to closely think about” who Jesus is and what He has done. Obviously, Christ as a person was superior to Moses. Moses was a man, called to be a prophet and a leader while Jesus is the Son of God, sent from heaven by the Father into the world.

The writer calls Jesus “The Apostle.” We don’t usually think of Jesus as an apostle but the word simply means “a sent one.” Moses was called and commissioned (sent out) by God but Christ was sent down from heaven as God’s final word to us - giving Him the preeminence.

Moses was a prophet who was occasionally served as a priest but he was never a high priest. Aaron served in that capacity. Jesus alone has the title of Great High Priest. The difference between a prophet and a priest is the direction of communication.

- A prophet is God’s representative to the people. He proclaims, foretells, exhorts and presents God to the people.
- A priest presents the people to God. He is the people’s representative before God. Today, Jesus is our high priest who intercedes on our behalf before the Father.

Moses was primarily the prophet of the law while Jesus is the messenger of God’s grace. Moses helped prepare the way for the coming of the Savior to earth. The writer acknowledges that Moses and Jesus were both faithful in the work God gave them to do. Moses was not sinless like Jesus but he obeyed God’s will. This would have been an encouragement to the readers to remain faithful to Christ even in the midst of their trials and tribulations. Instead of going back to Moses and the law, they should imitate Moses by being faithful to their calling just like Moses was.

2. Christ Is Greater In His Ministry Hebrews 3:3-6

The ancient rabbis considered Moses to be the greatest man ever, even more important than the angels. So the writer does nothing to criticize Moses but looks at Moses in his proper relation to Jesus. Moses was a faithful servant in the house of God but Jesus was the faithful Son who built the house, the Creator, who is worthy of more glory. Though a house is built by a man, God is still the builder of all things. Moses was called a faithful servant but never called a Son like Jesus was, showing Jesus is the greater of the two. The house of God in the days of Moses was the nation of Israel. When we speak of “*Christ as a Son over His own house,*” we are speaking of much more than just Israel; it is the whole Church, which includes us. We are a part of Jesus’ household “*if we hold fast the confidence.*”

The word “confidence” literally means “freedom of speech, openness.” Because Jesus shed His blood for us, a believer can come boldly to the throne of grace with openness and freedom and not be afraid. No matter what the circumstances, we should not cast away our confidence. We should not have confidence in ourselves because we are prone to fail; our confidence must be in Jesus who never fails. True commitment to Jesus is not an instant thing, it is a process. Philippians 1:6 tells us “*being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” Our confidence lies in knowing that God is faithful to keep His word. Because of this confidence, we can experience joy and hope in this life as we await the Lord’s return. It is this “heavenly calling” that motivates believers to stick with Jesus even when the going gets tough.

We will be looking at the wandering of Israel in the next verses. Two men - Joshua and Caleb - illustrate the attitude discussed here in verse 6: “*if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.*” Everyone else over the age of 20 was to die in the wilderness and never enter the promised land. But Joshua and Caleb believed God and He honored their faith. For 40 years these two watched their friends and relatives die all around them, but they were confident in God’s word that one day they would enter Canaan. While others were experiencing sorrow and death, Joshua and Caleb rejoiced in confident hope. As believers, we should exhibit that same kind of joyful confidence and hope knowing that God will continue to work in us and one day take us to heaven to be with Him.

3. Christ Is Greater In The Rest That He Gives Hebrews 3:7- 19

These verses begin the second warning to the Hebrews. The first was about the danger of drifting away from the Word because of neglect. Now the author explains the danger of doubting and disbelieving the Word because of a hard heart.

The writer takes us back to the Old Testament - to the exodus of Israel from Egypt and their unbelief in the wilderness. Why would he want us to go back there? Because of the lesson it teaches. He uses Israel's bondage in Egypt as an illustration of a sinner's bondage to the world. The writer quotes from Psalm 95:7-11. God had delivered His people from Egypt, showing signs and wonders: they saw the Red Sea part so they could walk across and watched as Pharaoh's army drowned. In the middle of nowhere, God fed them daily with quail and manna from heaven and provided water from a rock. Israel experienced all of this but they did not grow closer to God or trust him any more. In fact, just the opposite took place. They hardened their hearts against God. They were totally insensitive to what God said and did, focusing only on themselves. Their hearts were so hard they even wanted to return to Egypt. Imagine wanting to exchange their freedom in God for slavery back in Egypt! This should have resonated with the Hebrews who wanted to "go back" themselves.

It was not God's will for Israel to remain in Egypt or the wilderness. His desire was for them to enter their glorious inheritance in Canaan. But when Israel got right to the border of their inheritance, they delayed because they doubted the promise of God. They looked to themselves instead of God and decided they could not do it. Only two men out of over a million, Joshua and Caleb, were ready to enter. So God's judgement fell on Israel there in the wilderness and a whole generation was condemned to die without their inheritance. Their unbelief kept them from entering into the rest God had prepared for them. God also gives us a rest when we trust God, believe His promises, and submit our will to Him.

The message is clear: "Don't be like the generation who perished in the wilderness." For the Hebrews, this was an encouragement to stay with Jesus and not go back to the Mosaic law. For us, this is an exhortation to not go back into the world and its bondage. Unbelief is serious. Refusing to believe God shows "*an evil heart and a departing from the living God.*"

"Unbelief is not inability to understand, but *unwillingness to trust*... it is the will, not the intelligence, that is involved." (Newell)

We must also be vigilant against hardening our heart. It can start with something as simple as a little hidden sin you indulge in; no one suspects it because you hide it well. You deceive yourself into thinking that it really isn't doing any harm - you can always ask for forgiveness. Maybe you'll finally surrender it to Jesus one of these days. After all, we all sin. What you can't see is that little hidden sin starts to harden your heart. You become less and less sensitive to your sin and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, even to the point of rationalizing it or ignoring it all together. Slowly this sin causes you to become more and more distant from Jesus and you are in spiritual danger without even realizing it. It is important we take heed and recognize the spiritual dangers that exist.

God also reminds us of the importance of fellowship with other believers. We need each other. Being accountable to a brother or sister helps us to stay on track. We are to encourage each other to be faithful to the Lord. We need to be around other Christians who will exhort us - "seriously encourage" us daily in the things of God. And it's a two-way street: we should receive exhortation as much as we give it. Exhortation is for the purpose of "urging change" or "giving encouragement" - not to judge or criticize. In Hebrews 10, we will see that some of the believers were already forsaking meeting together which made their situation worse.

The story of the children of Israel is retold here to show us that unbelief can rob us of all the rich blessings God wants to bestow on us. The Israelites took their eyes off of God and saw only the obstacles

before them, refusing to believe God would keep His promise. They failed to persevere in faith. After crossing much of the wilderness trusting God and personally experiencing all of His faithfulness, they ended up falling short. Their unbelief kept them from entering into the rest God had prepared for them. It's wonderful to make a good start but how we finish is more important.

In closing this part, one important thing to note is that even though Israel lost their inheritance in Canaan because of unbelief, they did not lose their status as a redeemed people. They did not go back to become slaves of Egypt again; they remained God's chosen people. Unbelief, or lack of faith, for the Hebrews, and us as well, does not mean we lose our salvation. What we sacrifice is the peace God gives us in this life and the rewards God has waiting for us in the next.

