

• *Five contrasts between Moses and Jesus*

• *Israel's disobedience under Moses – a warning to the followers of Jesus not to repeat history*

The Warning – lessons from Scripture

'We ourselves are his house if...' – a condition introduced

• *To function means to continue in faith*

• *Unbelief forfeits usefulness*

Three possible interpretations

• *Loss of salvation*

• *Was faith genuine?*

There are at least five contrasts in Hebrews 3:1–6: (i) Moses builds a material house; Jesus builds a spiritual house, (ii) Moses' house was a testimony pointing forward; Jesus' house is the final reality, (iii) Moses is a servant; Jesus is a Son, (iv) Moses is a participant in Jesus' house; Jesus is the Son and heir, exercising lordship over the house, (v) Moses' work is completed and only 'testimony' remains; Jesus' work continues. He 'ever lives' to reign over his house, and minister to his people. He does that work with perfect faithfulness.

At Hebrews 3:6b the author of the letter to the Hebrews is led by God to give his second warning. Hebrews 3:7–4:13 is his development of the warning in 2:1–4. If there was punishment for not responding to God's will via Moses [☐]¹, there is greater loss for not responding to the grace of God in Jesus. If Israel disobeyed God when being led by Moses [☐]², then there is a danger that the writer's own generation of Jewish Christians might disobey God when being led by Jesus. The section unfolds as follows.

Hebrews 3:1–6. Two captains of salvation: Moses and Christ

Hebrews 3:7–11. Citation of the Scripture

Hebrews 3:12–4:11. Exposition of the Scripture

The failure of the wilderness generation [☐]¹

The nature of the 'rest' [☐]²

Hebrews 4:6-11. Appeal: enter rest today

Hebrews 4:12-13. Final warning: God's penetrating word

Hebrews 3:6b adds a word of explanation: *We ourselves are his house if we hold on to our boldness and our joyful delight in our hope*. It leads into the warning passage of Hebrews 3:7–4:13. The words 'firm to the end', found in some translations represent Greek words found in later manuscripts but not in the earlier ones. The house is the people who are being used as God's living temple. A condition is introduced: 'We ourselves are his house if...'.

These Hebrew Christians will function as God's living house only if they continue in faith. This is one of many appeals in this letter to the Hebrews for persistent and diligent faith. We shall find the same theme again in 3:12, 14 (which is very similar to this verse). The writer wants us to draw near to God with boldness and confidence [☐]¹ and not throw away our confidence [☐]². Unbelief forfeits usefulness. Persistent faith is needed. 'House' does not mean the elect or the regenerate or God's true church. It means God's **functioning** house. He is thinking experientially. The **experience and the function** of being used by God will cease if we draw back in unbelief. The point is being made throughout Hebrews that persistent faith results in achievement of God's purpose. Unbelief results in serious loss, not loss of 'eternal redemption' (which if lost would not be eternal redemption!) but loss of usefulness, joy, sensitivity to God, rest, 'crowning' with glory. Bible-believing commentators divide into three at this point, as they often do when passages of warning are found in the Scriptures. (i) Some will want to take this to be a warning about loss of salvation. 'We shall be God's house on condition we do not let go of the Christian faith', says one writer. (It is interesting that he changes the writer's tense. Hebrews said, 'We **are**...' and did not refer to what we **shall** be.) (ii) Another group of commentators think the question is not, 'Will your faith continue?' but (as one puts it) 'Was your faith genuine?' If your faith was indeed genuine you **will** keep going in faith. The mark of true faith is that it **does** endure to the end. So the writer's warning is not a warning against loss of faith (says this approach) but

[☐]¹ said Hebrew 2:1–4
[☐]² says Hebrews 3:7–4:13

[☐]¹ 3:12–19
[☐]² 4:1–5

• *Experience and function in God's household*

against a faith that is not real faith at all. This interpretation reads the verse as if it said: 'We ourselves are (now!) his house if we **shall** hold on...'. The future proves the genuineness of the present. But actually the writer did not use a present and then a future tense. (iii) Actually the writer twice uses the present tense. '**We ourselves are (now!) his house if we are (now!) holding on to our boldness and our joyful delight in our hope.**' He is not referring to final salvation or lost salvation. He is not referring to true or false salvation. He is referring to the **experience and function** of being a household of people who testify to the purpose of God in this world. The writer's thought is about function not about status in salvation. The 'house' that Moses built – the tabernacle – gave forth testimony to Jesus. The house that Jesus builds has the same function. It also 'testifies'.

☞¹ 4:16; 10:19, 23–25
☞² 10:35–36

Entering into rest – we need to

• *Hear God's voice*

Next he says: ⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts, as in the provocation, as in the day of the testing in the wilderness, ⁹where your fathers tested me by testing and saw my works for forty years. ¹⁰Therefore I was angry with that generation and said, They are always going astray in their heart, and they do not know my ways. ¹¹Therefore I swore in my wrath, they shall certainly never enter my rest.'

• *Keep our heart soft and tender*

In order to 'enter into rest' (that is, to enter into the **sworn** blessing of God after a time of conflict we have to persist in faith) we have to (i) hear God's voice. Some Christians do not hear God's voice. That is why our writer says, 'If...'. (ii) We have to keep our heart soft and tender. (iii) We reject any tendency to rebelliousness. (iv) We do not 'test' God – finding out whether he will act when we take the risk of sinning. (v) We get to know the 'ways' of God – his habits of testing our faith.

• *Reject any tendency to rebelliousness*

• *Not 'test' God*

What is it to 'enter into rest'? It is the reward we get after persistent faith. The first generation of Israelites were **at first** heroes of faith (see 11:29) but then became famous for not persisting in faith. So they never got to 'rest' in Canaan. They never received what God wanted to give them. They were redeemed by the blood of the lamb – and they stayed redeemed. But they never inherited the promises of what they were approaching in 'the land flowing with milk and honey'. Entering into rest is when God says, 'Now I know you fear me' – and takes an oath of blessing. When God takes an oath, the promises begin to flow into our lives. We watch God fulfilling his promises. It is supremely restful. Nothing can stop the blessing of God once God takes an oath. But such a level of blessing requires that we hear his voice and keep our hearts tender towards him. 'Entering into rest' is not heaven. It is not assurance of salvation. It is not the millennium or 'the victorious life'. It is not the new heavens and earth. It is the reward for persistent faith. It is inheriting the promises. It is experiencing God's oath.

• *Get to know the 'ways' of God*

• *Persevere in faith*

Then we inherit the promise God has sworn – 'enter into rest'



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