

There is a deep desire in many for relief from strife, a rest which is not present in this world. God has promised an eternal perfect rest for those who belong to Him. That rest is available only through Jesus Christ, and so the author of Hebrews challenges his readers not to be like the unbelieving Israel of the Exodus, but rather to hold on firmly to the faith they had confidently expressed when first turning to Christ. Jewish Christians should not turn back to Moses for that rest, neither should believers today look anywhere else to find that rest. It is found only in Jesus, so we are to keep the faith.

I. *History illustrates the need to keep the faith (3:7–11).*

1. *Psalm 95 and Israel's wilderness wanderings provide the history lesson.*

There is a rest offered yet today (cf. ch. 4), but one must remain faithful to Christ to enter it, just as the readers of Psalm 95 in King David's day needed to remain faithful to enter God's rest.

2. *History will emphasize in these 2 chapters four primary lessons:*

Rest is available but it is urgent to receive; people may have knowledge but not acceptance; insensitivity to God and His will can grow; even those who have heard & professed Christ may not enter God's rest if true faith is absent.

3. *The history of Israel is an example of wrong behavior.*

For 40 years they saw and experienced God's power, provision, and presence, but constantly quarreled against God and tested Him ("Meribah" and "Massah"), ultimately at Kadesh failing to obey God to enter the land and being judged to wander and die in the wilderness.

II. *Exhortation requires keeping the faith (3:12–14).*

1. *Be watchful.*

This is a corporate and individual responsibility. It is necessary because some could profess Christ, but not really be changed. It is necessary to hold to Jesus Christ and not just believe in God.

2. *We are exhorted to encourage one another.*

This mutual responsibility is a continuing, frequent need. Because of sin's deceitfulness and the insensitivity of the sinner's heart, an outside observer is needed to exhort and correct. If we are not encouraging one another to avoid sin and live righteously, we are being disobedient.

3. *We are exhorted to hold to what we have believed.*

Living out a solid confession of faith in Jesus Christ, shows that we have truly become sharers in Him. The author of Hebrews assumes that his readers have the correct confidence. We also must be trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone to be our Savior.

III. *Dangers emphasize the importance of keeping the faith (3:15–19).*

1. *Unbelief can grow despite experiencing God's power and presence and despite having professed belief at some time previous.*

Despite Israel's positive experience with God and profession of commitment, they rebelled. The same danger exists today, to make a profession of faith, experience God's blessing, yet rebel against Him.

2. *Unbelief may not bring immediate judgment, but judgment will certainly come.*

Israel was not immediately punished for quarreling, not killed outright for rebellion, but allowed to die over 40 years. It is possible today as well to profess Christ, be part of a church, but have an unbelieving heart without suffering any apparent consequences ... yet.

3. *Unbelief is revealed in disobedience and assures God's certain response.*

Israel's true heart condition was revealed when they would not obey in the face of a great challenge. Disobedience reveals unbelief and is often considered the same as unbelief. The opportunity to obey is a blessing in that it reveals our heart condition. Are we truly believing?

The author of Hebrews draws a conclusion in verse 19: Israel was not able to enter God's rest, because they did not believe. The readers were to learn that they needed to remain faithful to what they had professed. Ultimate rest is only found in God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, keep the faith. Hold on to Jesus Christ and encourage one another daily that none of you be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Questions for further reflection:

- What are you trusting to be right with God?
- Where do people look for rest? Where are you looking for rest?
- What challenges of obedience do you face which reveal if you truly trust God to be the good and great God He is?
- How can we develop a church culture where we can more freely give and receive this type of encouragement?

