

## 5 – CONTRASTS AND CHALLENGES

### Hebrews 3:1 – 4:13

Chapter 3 is the start of a section that can be characterized as a mini-sermon. It runs through to 4:13 with its main emphasis being exhortation rather than theology. The theological contrast between Moses and Jesus comes in the few short verses at the beginning (3:1-6).

Having led the Israelites from slavery in Egypt through the wilderness to the Promised Land, Moses was the great hero of the Hebrew tradition. To him was attributed the whole panoply of the Law and the composition of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Continuing his exposition of Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, the author of this letter gave him two other titles unique in the NT: apostle and high priest (3:1).

The two titles are not synonymous. They describe quite different roles. An apostle is one sent to speak for and represent the one who sent him or her. Jesus did that to the extent that we now regard his words as if God was speaking to us. A priest - and even more so a high priest - represents us before God.

Both Moses and Jesus fulfilled their distinctive missions in their time. But Jesus “is worthy of more glory than Moses,” the author claims, for a particular reason. Whereas Moses was faithful as a servant *in* God’s house, Jesus was faithful *over* God’s house as a son, enjoying a special and direct relationship with God.

Furthermore, while Moses, as Israel’s greatest prophet, spoke for God “testifying to the things that would be spoken later,” Jesus was God’s final word. This is what God intended all humanity to be in our faithful relationship to God.

Throughout this comparison of Moses and Jesus, the metaphor of a house is used. In vs. 6, the author clinches his argument that we too are God’s house *if* we too are faithful as were both Moses and Jesus. Faithfulness is not a foregone conclusion.

The rest of passage 3:7 to 4:13 is a strong exhortation to faithful endurance for those threatened with falling away. It contains three separate themes based on a quotation from Psalm 95. The reference to an experience described in Exodus 15-17. Freed from slavery in Egypt and provided with manna for their journey in the wilderness, the Israelites still complained bitterly while refusing to trust God. Because of their rebellion and hardness of heart they suffered the consequences: their generation did not enter the Promised Land as they hoped they would.

The second key theme draws on the experience of the next generation of Israelites who actually did enter the Promised Land. They did not enjoy the happy rest they had expected. They were constantly beset by the hostility of the Canaanites they displaced.

The author directed this illustration at his fellow Christians of his own generation. Their expectations of salvation through Jesus Christ might be similarly disappointed. While they might be constantly buffeted by the realities of daily living in the world, they could be assured of peace and security in the purposes and promises of God.

The third key theme reminds these struggling Christians of the daily challenges of the life of faith. Every day presents its challenges and opportunities for faithfulness. We need fidelity and perseverance along with the support and encouragement of our fellow pilgrims.

The passage ends with a stern warning of judgment.

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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS

1. In comparing Moses and Jesus, Hebrews leaves no doubt about who is the greater. In what way do you think the commandments given by God to Moses are of lesser importance than the way Jesus represents God to us and us to God?
2. Does the story and picture of the Transfiguration provide a similar instance of Jesus' supremacy?
3. In what ways do you believe that the example of Israel's rebellion against God is a fair description of us and the Christian church today?
4. How does God judge us and the church today?
5. How do the challenges to our faithfulness provide us with opportunities to serve as God expects of us?



### CLOSING PRAYER

Go before us, O Lord, in all our ways that our doing may be begun, continued and ended in you and be to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

### OPENING PRAYER

By your grace, O God, you have made us living stones to build your spiritual temple. May our living become a sacrifice of love holy and acceptable too you following Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. Amen