

# The Book of Hebrews: Entering God's Rest

By Dan & Brenda Cathcart

The video version is available at: <https://youtu.be/nP3QxfKJbHI>

The Reading for this teaching is Hebrews 3:1-5:11

In the opening of this teaching series from the Letter to the Hebrews, we saw that the author, who ever he might be, was very knowledgeable of the Temple practices and the priesthood. We established the superiority of the Son of God, that is Yeshua, over that of the angels in Heaven. We saw that the letter to the Hebrews was written at a time when the believers in Jerusalem were cut off from, not only access to the Temple, but cut off from the people of Israel as well. They could no longer meet at the Temple complex and were cut off from participation in the Temple worship practices and festivities. To the believer, this was as if they were cut off from God himself.

In the opening verses of the Letter to the Hebrews, the author assures the reader that they are not cut off from God. The earthly Temple and its festivals and rituals is but a shadow of the greater heavenly Temple and access to the very throne of God through Messiah Yeshua. How is access to God accomplished? What does it really mean to be faithful? How do the believers draw near to God without benefit of the Temple and its rituals? And what are Yeshua's qualifications to be the Messiah and what does it mean to enter into God's rest?

Our reading this week opens with establishing the faithfulness of the Son Yeshua as our High Priest and making a comparison with the faithfulness of Moses.

Hebrews 3:1-2 NKJV 1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, 2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house.

There is an interesting phrasing in this passage that is somewhat Hebraic in nature. Something like a word play. The Greek word translated as calling in verse 1 is "klay'sis" #2821 in the Strong's Greek Concordance from a root word meaning to call aloud, to bid, or someone who's name was called. It corresponds to the Hebrew word "Vayikra" which literally means "and He called" meaning God is the one doing the calling. Also Vayikra is, as we know, the Hebrew name of the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of the Torah.

God is the one who calls us to faith in His High Priest of a higher order. Yeshua is, in turn, faithful to God who appointed Him as our Heavenly High Priest. The comparison to Moses continues.

Hebrews 3:3-6 NKJV 3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. 5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

In faith Moses built a physical house, or tabernacle, for God in the wilderness. The house that Messiah builds begins with the body of believers. The promise is that if the believers hold fast to Messiah by faith and confidence, then entering into the house or Temple which Messiah Yeshua has built is assured. This house is the real goal! The earthly Temple is only a shadow of this better Temple built by Yeshua!

The continuing theme of the letter to the Hebrews is the heavenly sanctuary. First Fruits of Zion in their work "Chronicles of the Apostles" writes:

"The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews points out that the Jerusalem Temple reflects of a truer, heavenly Sanctuary not made with hands. He points out that the Aaronic Priesthood points to the heavenly, angelic priesthood, and that the high priest on earth corresponds to Messiah's position within the heavenly Temple where He is seated at the right hand of Glory."<sup>i</sup>

It is a gross misinterpretation of the letter to the Hebrews to say that it speaks of an abolition of the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system. That is not what the author is saying. The writer is encouraging the believers to persevere in their faith despite being cut off by a corrupted and backslidden priesthood. But there is an uncorrupted and incorruptible heavenly Temple and the Messianic high priesthood which assures their access to God and secures their eternal soul.

The importance of remaining faithful in light of the believers' present circumstances is emphasized by the writer quoting Psalms 95.

Hebrews 3:7-11 NKJV 7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. 10 Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

Verse 7 uses the word "today." And the opening phrase of this quote is so important to the point the writer is attempting to get across to his readers, that he repeats it in verse 15 and yet again in the next chapter. We also see the word "hear." It is from number 191 "ak-oo-o" meaning to hear with understanding. This corresponds well with the Hebrew word Sh'ma which is the exact word used in the Tanach in Psalms 95 verse 7 where the quote is derived. The believer is to hear God's voice with understanding and obedience. The hardened heart might hear God's voice but would fail to understand and obey it—Turning instead to evil and unbelief.

Hebrews 3:12-15 NKJV 12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

The morale among the believers of Jerusalem and throughout the diaspora was at an all time low. They had witnessed or had otherwise heard about the execution of James the Just. They had seen other of their community persecuted and jailed if not executed as well. Now having been cut off from Temple worship, it was time for them to leave Jerusalem!

They were beginning to see the prophecies spoken of by Yeshua Himself come to fruition. They had witnessed several false prophets and those claiming to be the promised Messiah rise and fall in recent months and years. While teaching His disciples one day on the Mount of Olives, Yeshua spoke of these very days they were now witnessing firsthand. Yeshua's words were recorded by Matthew and were in circulation in those days.

Matthew 24:9-12 NKJV 9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10 "And then many will be offended, will betray one another,

and will hate one another. 11 "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12 "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

Perhaps the first two questions posed at the opening of this teaching are now answerable. How is access to God accomplished? What does it really mean to be faithful? Access to God is accomplished through the son Yeshua. Just like the children of Israel were called to follow God's chosen leader Moses, so believers are called to follow Yeshua.

As the situation in and around Jerusalem continued to deteriorate rapidly, many of the believers began to flee the city and head to Pella in the wilderness of what is today the Jordanian desert. It seems a kind of reverse exodus. The writer of Hebrews continues to use the exodus from Egypt as an analogy to their plight.

Hebrews 3:16-19 NKJV 16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

This series of question was designed to remind the readers of Hebrews of the failures of the Children of Israel while exiled in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. The Children of Israel were promised a rest in the land to which God was taking them, and they failed to achieve that rest and enter the land because of their unbelief that God could and would provide for them and protect them in their darkest hours.

Psalms 95:8-11 NKJV 8 "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work. 10 For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

The writer of Hebrews is telling his readers not to make the same mistake as they face some very dark times ahead.

Hebrews 4:1-2 NKJV 1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

Skipping to verses 6 through 10.

Hebrews 4:6-10 NKJV 6 Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, 7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. 9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. 10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

The writer of Hebrews is referring not only to God's completed work of redeeming His people from Egypt and securing the Promised Land as their inheritance, he is referring back to the completion of God's work in the creation. God labored for six days and on the seventh day He rested.

Genesis 2:2-3 NKJV 2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

So, the rest that believers enter into is like both the inheritance of the Promised Land and the rest enjoyed on the Sabbath. This rest remains in full effect!

Next the letter to the Hebrews speaks of being diligent to God's commandments and keeping to His word as being the key to entering into that rest. It is the word of God that keeps them centered and focused on the goal of God's rest. This is what the writer of Hebrews says keeps them faithful. The children of Israel in the wilderness had the presence of God with them day and night in the midst of their camp. The believers in this day actually had something better, they had a covenant written on their hearts through Messiah spoken of and promised centuries earlier through the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 NKJV 31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah- 32 "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Now the believers had it within their grasp to enter this promised rest through obedience to God's commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 4:11-13 NKJV 11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

In this dire time, the believers are reminded of the compassionate High priest, Yeshua, who gives them the confidence and boldness to approach the throne of grace, finding mercy.

Hebrews 4:14-16 NKJV 14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

How does Yeshua accomplish this? How is He uniquely qualified to function as a heavenly high priest? How is Yeshua a high priest of a higher order?

Hebrews 5:1-4 NKJV 1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. 4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Here the writer of Hebrews is illustrating the shortcomings of the Aaronic priesthood. The high priest was to be called of God and hold the position for life. At this time in history, the high priesthood was so corrupted by a mafia like system of money, bribery, and graft run by the family of Ananias that it could hardly be considered called of God. For many years, this corrupt system was in place and brought only earthly glory to men, not glory to God.

This heavenly high priest is a high priest forever. Not a mere angel appointed by God, He could only be the one who is higher than the angels, the Son of God!

Hebrews 5:5-11 NKJV 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." 6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek"; 7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

It is indeed hard to explain! Who is Melchizedek? This name is mentioned in only two places in the Hebrew Bible, the first being Genesis 14:18 and then in Psalms 110:4 The name "Melchizedek," number 4442 in Strong's Hebrew Concordance means King of right. Melchizedek was both king of Salem, the early name for Jerusalem, and priest of the city.

Yeshua is this Son of God and heavenly high priest of this higher order. He is Melchizedek, the king of righteousness. As we go forward over the next few weeks in our study of the letter to the Hebrews, we will further examine Yeshua's unique position as our heavenly high priest of the order of Melchizedek; the shadow nature of the earthly sanctuary, and how faith has played out with the patriarchs in history, for the believers of this troubling time, and for us today.

Study Questions:

1. Hebrews chapter 3 speaks of the "holy brethren" being partakers of a "heavenly calling," what is the nature of this calling? How does the writer of Hebrews apply this calling to the believers?
2. Psalms 95 is quoted numerous times in this section of Hebrews, specifically verses 7 through 11. The author of Hebrews and the Psalm admonish the believer not to harden their heart. What does that mean in the biblical context and how does one avoid hardening their heart?
3. The main point in this teaching is about entering God's rest. What is this rest and how do the believers enter into it?
4. Consider the 3<sup>rd</sup> question posed at the beginning of the teaching – How do the believers, as well as us today, draw near to God without the proscribed method instructed in the Torah? That is, without the Temple and its rituals?
5. In what ways were the believers of this time (62-65 AD) seeing a fulfilment of the prophecies spoken of by Yeshua Himself and recorded by the disciple Matthew? (Ref. Matthew 24 specifically)
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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