

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 3, Verses 7-19
Notes From Class on September 1, 2009
Last Revised on (September 4, 2009)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Before we begin I would like to make sure that you have everything you will need.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

If your Bible happens to be the English Standard Version ("ESV") then you are all set.

If you are using an English translation other than the ESV, then it may also help you to have the three handouts which I have prepared.

One has the ESV text of Hebrews, Chapters 2 and 3. (This is the same handout as we have used in previous weeks.)

The second handout has the ESV text of Psalm 95 and the first seven verses of Exodus, Chapter 17.

The third handout has the ESV text of the first 38 verses of Numbers, Chapter 14.

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and, then, let's get started.

Review of Hebrews Chapter 3, Verses 1-6

Please turn to Hebrews, Chapter 3.

Last week we read the first six verses of this chapter:

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses---as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

The last full sentence of this passage, that is the last full sentence of Hebrews, Chapter 3, verse 6 reads: "**And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.**"

"And we are his house..."

Q. Who are "we"

A. The preacher who is delivering this inspired sermon, those who first heard it, and those of us who later read it.

Q. What do "we" all have in common?

A. Hopefully we are all among the "holy brothers who share in the heavenly calling," of whom we we read in Verse 1 of Chapter 3.

As we discussed last week, "**brothers**" here means "brothers and sisters."

"**Holy**" means set apart for God and therefore separated from the world.,

"**Heavenly calling**" probably means called **from** heaven by God **to** heaven.

If we are indeed among these holy people, then we are part of God's own household.

Counted among our number is the faithful Moses, and many others.

Faithful above us is Christ, the eternal son of God and God. whose unqualified supremacy was extolled in Chapters 1 and 2 and who, in the first part of Chapter 3, has also been described as the apostle and high priest of our confession.

Moses is sitting beside us at the table.

Jesus is at the head of the table.

The table is in God's house.

Our seat at the table is absolutely **assured** by God's calling and the work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

This is **why** we can be confident and boast in our hope.

To "**boast**" in this way is not sinful, because we are not boasting in our own glory but in that of our God and savior.

Because of **Him**, we are already saved, citizens of heaven, and all of the other good things the Bible has to say about those who are among God's people.

The only troubling element here are the following five words: **"if indeed we hold fast."**

"Hold fast" means to "grab tightly" to "never let go" to not "let slip through our fingers" or "neglect" that which we first believed, and which was and is and must continue to be the basis for our hope.

"If" suggests that the the state of "holding fast" is not assured; that some of us might not hold fast.

"Indeed" suggests that appearances might be deceiving, that there may be some who purpose to hold fast and/or who seem to hold fast but do not actually hold fast.

Interestingly the preacher says "we" and so seems to include **himself** and, perhaps, others in authority under this same threat of the possibility of not holding fast.

Maybe he is just being polite, but I do not think so. Even Moses stumbled as did David and Peter and many others.

So here we are at the start of today's lesson.

By virtue of all that we have read and learned in the first two chapters of Hebrews and the first six verses of Chapter 3, we Christians have every reason to be filled with hope and joy.

Like Moses himself, we are headed into heaven and/or the world to come to be one of God's children with and under the Lordship of Jesus.

But all of this seems to hang on the thread of these five words "if indeed we hold fast."

And mind you: Verse 6, of Chapter 3, is not the only place in Hebrews where this slender thread is seen.

We have already seen it at Chapter 2, Verses 1-3a, which reads: "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

There the Law delivered by Moses is held up as an example. To break it had dire consequences, even including physical death, and possibly even the threat of something worse than physical death, if being "cut off from the people" portends something worse than physical death, as I have always suspected.

So what would be the penalty for neglecting the much greater salvation held forth in the Gospel of Christ?

How would God respond if we ignored his own dear son, whom he gave for our salvation?!

Would he not need to reject us utterly?!

It is scary to think about this. And we will see this concern again and again as we read on.

Indeed one of the author's central purposes for this entire sermon we are studying would seem to be warning those who have once confessed Christ to continue to do so, with continuing boldness and confidence, lest they slip away

Clearly "slipping away" is understood by the author of Hebrews to be a very bad thing.

Tonight's Lesson

And now for tonight's lesson where, beginning in Verse 7, our author calls God himself to testify on this weighty matter!

Verse 7a reads: "**Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,**"

The author understands that the Bible is God's speech written, that it can, and continually does, speak to us anew and afresh, which continuing speech and our continued hearing are two of the many gracious works of God, the Holy Spirit.

As the Holy Spirit says....and has been and still is and will ever will be saying...

The passage he quotes beginning in Hebrews 7b is part of Psalm 95, which the author to Hebrews understands to be a Psalm of David (4:7), although it is not so inscribed.

In both ancient and modern times, this Psalm has been an important part of both Jewish and Christian worship.

For the Jews it is still recited as part of the inauguration of Sabbath worship and this may be a continuation of practices dating back to the time when this temple was still standing in Jerusalem, before Hebrews was written.

For the Anglican Communion this Psalm has long been part of the order of morning prayer, set forth in their Book of Common Prayer.

I don't know how it has been used in each of the other branches of Christianity.

But I do recognize verses 6 and 7 of Psalm 95 as the lyrics of a popular modern worship song, which we have sung many times here at TBC. Don't you?

Please turn to Psalm 95. We read:

We read: Oh come, let us sing to the LORD, let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! 2Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! 3For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. 4In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. 5The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. 6Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us

kneel before the LORD, our Maker! 7For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, 8do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, 9when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. 10For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and have not known my ways." 11Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

This psalm which comes to us even now in the power of the Holy Spirit, and even in popular modern worship songs, has been read by Christians and Jews going back almost 30 centuries!

But it looks back to events more ancient still.

In 1 Kings 6:1 we read:

"In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the LORD.

This means that the complete occupation of the promised land and completion of the construction of the temple in Jerusalem took nearly 500 years from the time that Moses led the people through the Red Sea and out of captivity in Egypt.

Therefore from the time of the Exodus until today, almost 35 centuries have passed, more than 100 generations in the lives of man, yet the events surrounding the Exodus continue to inform our worship and the word of the Holy Spirit regarding the importance of God's chosen people remaining faithful to him.

It makes even me want to dance and sing or something, to realize what we have here in our hand in the Bible, a testimony to the long faithfulness of God in speaking to us! Wow!

A voice sings from the Temple of Solomon, a song written by David, about the time when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and when they were unfaithful and put God to the test.

This song is echoed in the Sabbath worship of Jews and morning prayers and praise songs of Christians ever since, and to this very day!

Do you think this might be **important**!?!

What does the Psalm say and what does it mean?

Well, the first six verses of Psalm 95 and the first part of verse seven are not quoted in Hebrews.

But they are in the mind of all who hear the psalm. and must be in ours.

Please look once again at Psalm 95, verses 1-7a

They speak of the utter and inexpressible greatness of God and why we, who are his people and the sheep of his pasture, are moved to kneel and bow down before him, in joy, thanksgiving, praise, and worship.

As we have discussed, this song has played an important part in the worship of God by his assembled people, in many settings, for something like 3,500 years.

This is church music. And at least in part it is a song of worship and of praise!

But isn't it just amazing that whenever this song has been sung or recited, the joyful, worshipful context of vv 1-7a has always been joined and followed by the somber warning of vv 7b-11.

Or at least it should have been if those who were leading worship had properly understood this song!

And it is the latter portion of this psalm, that the author of Hebrews quotes here.

The quotation begins (Psalm 95:7b = Hebrews 3:7b): "**Today, if you hear his voice,**"

"**His voice**" is clearly God's voice.

"**you**" is clearly his people: "the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand" referred to in the first part of the same verse of Psalm 95.

Wherever God's people gather to worship, as they bow before him and sing his praise, they are supposed to hear this warning: "**if you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts..**"

In other words, do not willfully ignore or disobey God.

Notice that this statement is meaningless to anyone who does not hear the voice of God...

Therefore the Holy Spirit is speaking only to those who do hear the voice of God: the people of God's pasture, the sheep of his hand.

And the Holy Spirit knows who hears God's voice, because he is specifically the One who causes such hearing to happen!!

What this means, and we all know that it is true, is that it is possible to truly hear God's voice and also to ignore it, and this is an intensely dangerous thing to do!

I have examples in my own life. I'll bet some of you do too. Times when you heard God's voice and willfully ignored and disobeyed it, with hard and nearly fatal consequences to follow...

We now get an example from the Bible. Indeed the leading Biblical example on this point

Hebrews, Chapter 3, verses 8--9 read:

do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.

The author is quoting from a minor variant of the Greek NT (LXX) or perhaps is quoting loosely from the LXX.

In our Bibles, of course, Psalm 95: 8-9 is a translation from the Hebrew Language version.

This explains why there are some differences in our Bible between Hebrews 3:8-9 and Psalm 95:8-9.

This is easy to see on the handout I made for you, with the text of Psalm 95, because I have printed the corresponding text from Hebrews just beneath the text of Psalm 95. Please look there.

As you can see, both versions begin the same way: "**do not harden your heart**"

And both proceed to give an illustrative example, which might at first glance appear to be a different example, but isn't.

The LXX version quoted in Hebrews refers to "**the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,**"

This description could apply to many days in the life of Israel in the Exodus generation and since.

The Hebrew text, as translated in our Bibles in Psalm 95, seems to point to a specific day in the history of Israel, but only as an example of their general tendency..

It reads, "**as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness.**"

This reference to Meribah and Massah points us to Exodus, Chapter 17. Please turn there, and let's read verses 1-7.

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at

Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

This, then, is clearly the incident that the Psalmist has in mind in Psalm 95, verse 8

As narrated in Exodus, this event happened just after the crossing of the Red Sea,

The crossing of the Red Sea, followed the miracle of passover and all of the other plagues and signs and wonders whereby the Lord through Moses had led the people out of Egypt.

Then, just after crossing the Red Sea (at the end of Chapter 15) God had made the water at Marah sweet to drink.

Then in (in Chapter 16) the people had grumbled in hunger and been miraculously fed with manna and quail.

Finally in Chapter 17 as we have just read, the people again rebelled against Moses until God miraculously produced water for them to drink,

The place where this happened, we are told in Exodus 17:7 was called Massah --- a Hebrew word that means testing.

And it was also called by the name of Meribah --- a Hebrew word that means quarreling.

These names were chosen for this place because of the quarreling of the people of Israel and because they tested the Lord at that place by saying, "**Is the Lord among us or not?**"

The Hebrew Bible translated as our Old Testament preserves the proper place names, while noting the basis for the names.

The Greek Old Testament quoted by the author of Hebrews, retains the basis of the names only, and does not treat them as proper nouns.

In any case there can be little doubt that both versions have the same incident in mind (i.e. the one we just read from Exodus 17)

All versions of the psalm agree in the first part of verse 9, where we read that this was an incident "**where your fathers put me to the test.**"

Q. What does it mean to **test** God?

A. To continue to ignore and disobey his commands, in effect, to see how long God will remain patient before taking action against those who offend him. (Surely we all test God in this way far too often.)

A. To demand proof from God of his existence and his character

Exodus 17:7, as we just read, ended this way: "And because they tested the Lord by saying, **"Is the Lord among us or not?"**"

This reminds me of Jesus' words that it is a wicked generation that demands a sign?

Indeed most of us do sometimes rather wickedly test God in this way.

Do we really require more proof from God?

The last part of Hebrews 3:9 reads "**and saw my works for 40 years.**"

Indeed they did!

The last part of Psalm 95:9 reads "**and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.**"

When we study the Old Testament, we just marvel at the fact that the Exodus generation could see so much proof of God's power and goodness and yet continue to ignore and disobey his commands.

Here now God is speaking in his own voice...and quoting his own voice, which is kind of interesting:

"Therefore," he says in verse 10 of Hebrews 3, "**I was provoked with that generation and said, "They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways."**"

The translation of the Hebrew text appearing in Psalm 95, verse 10 is much the same."

Notice here that God speaks **collectively** of the entire wilderness-wandering generation of Israel as if it had a single, big, bad heart that always went astray ... and never knew his ways.

This is an example of the figure of speech called synecdoche --- where a part is put for the whole or the whole for a part.

Israel of that generation was certainly as described, **in general**, but does that description extend to Moses, Joshua, Caleb, and the like and, if not, who else is may be excluded from this denunciation.

We might easily describe Christians in Nazi Germany as having been irredeemably wicked, without meaning to include Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and his companions.

And at least some who seem irredeemably wicked in every generation come good in the end; in his generation the Apostle Paul may provide the best example.

So let's do always bear in mind that we are dealing here in a general way with a whole **generation** of people, which usually behaved badly as a group but nevertheless consisted of individuals, at least some of whom (especially Moses, Caleb, and Joshua) God **himself** could describe as faithful in all my house, as we discussed last week.

But having said that, there can be no question about how God felt about that particular generation of Israel in general.

He swore in his wrath, "**they shall not enter my rest.**"

That is the last verse of Psalm 95.

The author of Hebrews will go on to offer his interpretation of the Psalm, starting in verse 12 and continuing beyond the end of this present chapter 3. We will be struggling to understand his interpretation for the next few weeks.

But before we go there, I think we had better first refresh our memories regarding the particulars from the Old Testament of God's having sworn in his wrath, "**They shall not enter my rest.**"

Q. Who are "**they?**"

A. That wilderness wandering generation of Israel.

Q. What is God's **rest?**

A. Canaan, the promised land. (Or does it refer to more than that?)

Please turn, now, to Numbers Chapter 14, verses 1-38.

How many of you are familiar with the incident described here? Please have a look as I summarize it.

Here we read of another day in the wilderness which the people rebelled against God, and one much on the mind of the author of Hebrews.

This is just after the passage we read last week, in Numbers, Chapter 12, where God declared Moses to be a servant faithful in all his house.

Shortly after that, the Lord spoke to Moses, telling him to send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which he promptly did.

For 40 days the Israelite spies checked things out. Then they came back and made their report.

Everyone agreed that the land was good --- flowing with milk and honey, as they said.

But the majority report from the spies, was that the people who occupied the land were too fierce and numerous to be overcome.

Only Caleb and Joshua were ready to obey the Lord and move to occupy the land.

The rest were afraid and ready to go back to Egypt!

And they were angry.

They even had the idea to stone Caleb and Joshua and Moses and anyone else, I suppose, who favored the idea, ridiculously dangerous as they thought, of obeying God and moving to occupy the Land.

But God intervened, on behalf of his servant Moses and those others who had remained faithful, offering to strike the unfaithful ones with pestilence and to disinherit them.

That was the threat put forward by God.

In addition, God promised to make Moses, himself, a nation greater than Israel. (14:12).

But Moses interceded for the people, also defending God's own glory, and this not for the first time, or the last, and begged that God would pardon the iniquity of the people.

Now we come to what we want:

I am reading from Numbers 14, starting at verse 20:

"Then the LORD said, "I have pardoned, according to your word. 21But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, 22none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, 23 shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.

Now it does seem clear, to me, what God meant when he said to the wilderness-wandering generation of Israel that they would "**not enter his rest.**"

He meant that they would not enter and occupy and possess the promised land.

But this exclusion did not apply to **all** of Israel.

It applied only to those who were adults at the time that the decision was taken to disobey God and refuse to enter and occupy the promised land, and who concurred in this decision.

We know that is what is meant, because, by way of **exception**, Caleb is noted as one from that generation who **would** enter the land.

And at the beginning of Deuteronomy it is made clear that except for Caleb and Joshua, that entire generation of adults must die before the younger generations would then be allowed to enter and occupy the land, under the leadership of Joshua and Caleb.

OK? So that is the Old Testament story that is being pulled into Hebrews in the middle of Chapter Three.

Remember: this flows out of the comparison between Christ and Moses which we read last week in Verses 1-6 of Chapter 3.

We understand that everything is all set for those who belong to God, so long as we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope,

which is pretty much the **opposite** of what the wilderness wandering generation of Israel did.

Except for Caleb and a few others, they all seem to have **NOT** held fast their confidence and their boasting in their hope.

As a result they made God angry.

Through the intercession of Moses, these people were not all wiped from the face of the earth, although those spies who incited the rebellion were struck down by a plague.

But most of the people, even those adults who were incited to rebel, were not afflicted by a plague or other suffering, except that they continued to wonder for 40 years and never entered the promised land.

Only those who held fast their confidence in the hope of entering the promised land were able to enter, and this seems to have been a very small part of that generation.

Importantly even **Moses** could not enter the promised land, because of some disobedience on his own part near the end. (Dtr. 32:51)!!

So that generation of God's household, including their leader Moses, lived more difficult lives than they needed to, had they only held fast to their confidence and their boasting in their hope --- like Caleb did!

Any questions on all of this?

OK now let's begin to read the preacher's interpretation of this Psalm and the lessons he draws from it.

Verses 12 - 15

Will somebody please read Hebrews, Chapter 3, verses 12 through 15 in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku).

Thank you. Now will somebody please read those verses in English (ESV)

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.¹⁵ As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Thank you. Having evoked this story from the Torah, via Psalm 95 which, itself, adds some commentary, our author adds some inspired comments of his own.

He begins (verse 12) **"take care brothers, lest there be in any of you, and evil, unbelieving, heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.**

Sin and unbelief are essentially the same thing, as we have been discussing.

We quite easily fall away from God, and into sin and disbelief, as the story of the wilderness wandering generation under Moses shows us.

So we all really do need to **"take care."**

This includes the author of Hebrews and **even Moses himself!**

This includes David and Solomon and Peter and Paul and all the Apostles and all the saints.

This really is a message for ALL the brothers, that is ALL the brothers and sisters, that is for the WHOLE FAMILY of God, and not for each of us individually.

None of us can accomplish this alone. This is a consistent teaching of the whole Bible, proven by our own experience, isn't it?

We all need to be exhorted and so must bear our fair share of exhorting others. This is a group activity.

Our common desire is to ensure that none of us should become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Verse 13 reads: **"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."**

Sin is tricky, deceitful.

It corrupts us little by little, slowly and secretly at first until, by the time we notice it, if we still can notice it, it is too late to escape easily, if at all, and may be impossible to escape without help from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

That is why it is imperative that we watch and assist one another!! Constantly. Daily.

Verse 13 says that we must do this "as long as it is called today."

Q. What do you suppose he means by that?

n.b. some in the class thought this referred to the second coming of Christ, when "today" would finally be over. Others thought it might refer to the span of each man's life --- we will all die, unless Christ returns first --- and death is the end of "today" for us. Still others suggested the following line of reasoning:

A. Today is not yesterday and it is not tomorrow.

Yesterday and tomorrow are both beyond our help.

For we humans today is the only day in which we live and work.

It is the only day in which we worship God, hear his voice, obey it, exhort others, and respond to their exhortation.

There should be no procrastination---putting off for tomorrow a faith and obedience that belongs to today.

At some point, it becomes too late, such as when the wilderness wandering generation of Israel actually came to the time to enter the promised land and refused to do so, preferring instead to return to Egypt!

At that point, sadly, God gave them part of what they wanted --- he allowed them to not enter his rest, and they wandered instead under his protection for 40 years until it was time for them to die and for their children and grandchildren to enter the land of promise.

God graciously did not give them **all** of what they thought they wanted.

He did not let them go back into slavery taking their children and grandchildren with them.

But still I imagine that the vast majority of people in that generation of wilderness wanderers, lived a life with little hope or joy or confidence in the world to come.

I guess they died as they lived, subject to the "lifelong slavery of the fear of death" (2:15).

How terribly sad, for them, although we are taught by Paul that all of their sad experience was, by the grace of God, for our benefit. (1 Co. 10:1-13)

We are **NOT** told what happens beyond the grave to the people of that generation.

Among the rabbis who believe in the world to come, some have argued that the people of that Exodus generation have no share in it: that they are cut off from the people eternally.

We can be fairly certain, I think, that that some of that generation are among God's eternal household, including some who did **NOT** (Moses) and some who did (Joshua and Caleb) enter the promised land in their lifetime.

Verse 14 must be a kind of key holding together all that we have been talking about last week and this.

He has just exhorted us to take care of one another (vv 12, 13) and now in verse 14 he says **"For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."**

We holy brothers and sisters who share in a heavenly calling who, along with Moses, God's faithful servant, Caleb, Joshua, David, the author of Hebrews and many others, comprise God's family under the headship of God's firstborn son Jesus Christ. This is what we **share**.

"if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."

The last clause of this verse 14 is evidently very difficult to translate.

The term "**confidence**" which is used in most modern translations may be less than perfect because it suggests that what we are to hold until the end is merely a confident **feeling**.

Others including some of the patristic fathers have suggested that a better translation might be something like "hold our original ("standing," or "state," or position," or even "substance") until the end.

Still others prefer a translation more grounded in the will such as maintaining our original "resolve" or "determination" until the end.

It is likely, in my opinion, that our author is leaving a range of possible meanings open here quite intentionally, as he surely had the words and the skill to have been more precise, had he wished to be so.

In addition to being imprecise about **what** it is that we must hold from the beginning until the end,

our author also leaves rather open the question of **what beginning** and **what end** are in view.

I think the beginning would almost certainly be when we first confessed our faith in Christ and thereby entered the visible Church.

I think the end would be ... well ... without end, if we have indeed been joined to the true Church, one of the holy brothers and sisters who share in a heavenly calling. and not part of the visible church only.

For God's children, eternal life has already begun.

But **are** we **indeed** among these holy brothers and sisters who share in the heavenly calling?!

Are you? Am I?

The only insight we can have into the state of another man's soul, is what he confesses, and what he does based on his confession.

Only God can see the heart.

If one of us should seem to fall away from the living God, by ignoring and disobeying God's commands, or even recanting his confession, then he or she would be in special need of exhortation, for so long as it is called today, and also in need of intercessory prayer, as Moses surely modeled for us in what we read. And also, perhaps, in need of hearing the gospel anew and afresh.

We brothers and sisters are commanded to exhort one another, and to proclaim the gospel to all the world, constantly.

which is part of our own obedience to the word of God.

"As it is said," (I am reading verse 15, which belongs with what went before) "**Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.**"

Rather we are to hear and obey and proclaim his word while we still can.

Verses 16-19

Would somebody please read Hebrews, Chapter 3, verses 16 through 19 in English (ESV)

For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Thank you, would somebody please read it in Japanese? (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you.

Why did the preacher think that his original audience (whom he knew) needed to hear this sermon?

Do you suppose they were sitting there asking themselves that question, and maybe even feeling a little bit insulted?

Why is he saying these things to us? (They may be asking) Do we not share in the same confession with the preacher? Are we not all part of the same body of believers? Why is he telling us the stories we already know of the Exodus?

The series of questions which form verses 16, 17 and 18 seem to get at this.

Despite their standing within the visible church, by which I mean those who openly confess to be Christians, they are at risk and in need of admonishment by the preacher and in need of the mutual admonishment of one another because it is so very easy for those who are once called by God, and who begin to follow him, to stop listening, or to stop hearing, or to stop understanding, or to stop obeying, or even to wilfully rebel against God himself.

I have done so myself, haven't you?

The proof of this is the wilderness wanderers.

These were the ones who heard and saw God in action and then rebelled.

It was actually their hearing that made the rebellion possible and so reprehensible.

When we really know what God is telling us to do and simply refuse to obey. What a terrible thing that is.

Did the wilderness-wandering generation know what God commanded?

Absolutely yes and without possibility of confusion, they knew. Because they had angels and other signs and wonders and they had Moses, who was a faithful servant of God, an apostle and priest of God.

There could be no mistake. And their understanding was put on display by their departure from Egypt.

They got started in the right direction.

The beginning of their story was glorious beyond compare.

Were these people who God led out of Egypt the same ones who provoked him for 40 years in the wilderness?

Why yes, they were the same.

The same ones who died in the desert, never having entered the promised land?

Yes they were one and the same.

So **being chosen by God is no guarantee of good behavior** seemingly.

The rather miserable and shameful life they lived was because of their disobedience and their unbelief which are, indeed, one and the same thing.

If we would do better, we would believe and obey, and encourage one another to believe and obey, every day, until the end of our life in this world.

What comes after that --- heaven and the world to come ---or something else--- is on the horizon of what is being discussed here, I think, but only on the horizon here in Chapter 3.

Here the main point seems, to me, to be that a Christian congregation, having made a good start with their original confession of Christ, is in some ways like the children of Israel when they crossed the Red Sea following Moses.

The point for the children of Israel, was not just to be chosen, or just to get started following God. The point was to persevere in obedience to God under his servant Moses, despite various hardships, and to arrive at the promised land and to enter and occupy it in accordance with God's instructions through Moses. All of which had been planned out ahead of time and promised in some detail to Abraham. God himself was going to persevere and make good on his promises. But the line between promise and fulfillment was not going to be straight and predictable or easy for all who would walk it. For example the generation that left Egypt rather gloriously was, with a few exceptions, going to die in obscurity in the wilderness and in a way that was rather humiliating, both in the eyes of human history and also in the eyes of God and all his angels.

Likewise the point for the Christians being addressed in this sermon, was not just to confess Christ, join a group of those who also confessed Christ, be zealous for a time and do some good works, and then become hard of hearing and negligent and finally let slip through their fingers that which they first believed. It was not to allow the deceitfulness of sin to creep in amongst them and cause them to become hard and disobedient. No! They were saved for a higher purpose and the preacher reckons it is his job to remind them, just as Paul and Peter and James and John and the other Biblical authors do. Just as they and we are all to admonish and assist one another, least we stumble into an obscure and embarrassing place in salvation history as did the wilderness wandering generation.

Let's pray.