

Hebrews 3:12-19 – Hold Firm to the End

After definitively proving that Jesus, God's Son, is superior to the angels, the focus was changed to a comparison of Jesus and Moses. Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses. Moses was faithful in God's house as a servant while Jesus was faithful in God's house as a Son. In the context of the comparison between Jesus and Moses, Psalm 95:7-11 was quoted. Following the quote, an application was given from the passage and then observations were made from the passage. In the beginning of chapter 4, Psalm 95:7-11 continues to be the focus with application, observation and interpretation mixed together. The normal steps of Bible Study are 1) observation, 2) interpretation and 3) application, in that order. But this is a letter and not a Bible Study how-to guide.

Read Hebrews 3:12-14.

The exhortation of Psalm 95:7-8 was "do not harden your hearts" when you hear God's voice. In Hebrews 3:12, what application was drawn from Psalm 95:7-11? ESV and NASB have "fall(s) away from". KJV has "departing from". NIV has "turns away from". BDAG has the meaning "distance oneself from some person..., go away, withdraw". What does it mean to "fall away from the living God"? What do people mean when they say that someone has "backslidden"? Is this Biblical? Can a true Christian have "an evil, unbelieving heart"? This phrase probably ties back to "do not harden your hearts". It is interesting to note that the verse begins with "brothers". (3:12)

In verse 13, what was recommended to prevent falling away from God? The word "today" ties back to Psalm 95:7. "As long as it is called 'today'" is an interesting phrase. It is always "today" (until the end of time), so we should exhort one another every day. What can cause hardening of the heart? "Hardening" ties back to Psalm 95:8. (3:13)

Verse 14 states in the ESV and NIV that "we have come to share in Christ". KJV has "we are made partakers of Christ". NASB has "we have become partakers of Christ". The word is used 5 times in Hebrews and once in the NT outside of Hebrews. It is used in Luke 5:7 of Peter and Andrew's partners in fishing, the sons of Zebedee. BDAG says the word can mean "sharing/participating in" or "(business) partner, companion". For this verse, BDAG favors "sharing in" but also says that the meaning could be "partner". Kittle (TDNT) says the meaning of the word is generally "participant" and is related to the verb "have a share in". Kittle says that this verse indicates a "participation in Christ". Hebrews 3:1 uses the same word in the phrase "share in a heavenly calling". What does it mean to "share in Christ". (3:14)

What condition is there to "share in Christ"? The word "hold" was also used in 3:6 for "hold fast". ESV and KJV have "confidence". NASB has "commitment". NIV has "conviction". BDAG favors "commitment to an expressed obligation". Kittle goes against the grain and favors the translation "To cling to the beginning of the reality (of God)". See 2:3. (3:14)

Read Hebrews 3:15-19.

Verse 15 re-quotes Psalm 95:7-8 which is what verses 12 and 13 were tied to. Verse 16 is also tied to it. (3:15)

Verses 16-18 contain three sets of questions and answers based on Psalm 95:7-11. The answers are all given in the form of a rhetorical question. Maybe that is where "Jeopardy!" got the idea to always give answers in the form of a question. That is a joke, son. KJV does not translate verse 16 as two questions (NKJV does), but it does translate verse 17 as two questions. The question in verse 16 contains the words "heard" and "rebelled" based on "hear" and "rebellion" in Psalm 95:7-8. Who were those who heard and rebelled? What was the application for the readers/hearers of Hebrews? How were they like the Israelites who were led out of Egypt by Moses? (3:16)

The question in verse 17 contains words from the first part of Psalm 95:10. With whom was God provoked for 40 years? For "provoked", BDAG has "to be very upset over something someone has done, be angry, offended, provoked". What was the application for the readers/hearers of Hebrews? How could they provoke God in a similar way? See Numbers 14:20-35. (3:17)

Verse 18 contains a question and answer pair in one rhetorical question. The beginning of verse 18 is based on Psalm 95:11. To whom did God swear that they would not enter his rest? ESV and NASB have "disobedient". NIV has "disobeyed". KJV has "believed not". The specific word was not used in Psalm 95:7-11, but the idea is there. BDAG has "disobey, be disobedient". BDAG notes that some translations "with less probability" use the meaning "disbelieve". What was the application for the readers/hearers of Hebrews? How could they fail to enter God's rest? (3:18)

What was the conclusion drawn in verse 19? Most Christians are familiar with the well known chapter on faith in Hebrews 11. Obviously "faith" is an important theme in the book. (3:19)

Verses 12-14 are used by some to say that a Christian can lose their salvation. What passages would you point to that clearly state that a true believer in Christ, saved by grace, cannot lose their salvation? It will be helpful to keep those verses in mind as more passages later in the book are also used by some to claim that we can lose our salvation.