

2. Verses 5-6 continue the same argument regarding Jesus and Moses, but with further elaboration. To this point, the writer expressed Jesus' superiority over Moses in terms of the distinction between a house and the person who builds it: Moses was faithful as part of God's covenant house, and the same is true of Jesus. But He excels Moses in that His place in the house reflects the fact that He is its builder. Jesus is part of God's house as its cornerstone, so that the rest of the house is built upon Him. But He is also the One who is building it as His Father's everlasting and most glorious sanctuary (cf. Isaiah 28:16; Zechariah 6:9-15 with Matthew 16:18, 21:33-44; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

The writer used house imagery (signifying God's household as well as His dwelling place) to make His point about Jesus' superiority, and here he added another dimension to it: Moses was faithful as a *servant* in God's house, while Jesus was, and continues to be, faithful as a *Son* over God's house. Moreover, he made explicit what he previously only implied, namely that Moses' ministration as a faithful servant was preparatory and prophetic: In God's design, it served to testify of things that would later be declared (v. 5b). Indeed, this testimony was openly evident even in Moses' lifetime; he himself recognized that his calling as Yahweh's prophet/mediator prefigured another to come.

- a. The writer used the concept of God's house to correlate and distinguish the ministrations of Jesus and Moses, but he had a larger purpose than simply demonstrating Jesus' superiority to Moses. *Ultimately, his concern was with his readers and the way these truths affected them.* He wasn't speaking about God's house in generic, or even Israelite terms, but as that concept has now attained its ultimate significance in relation to Jesus. As Moses has found his fulfillment in the Messiah, so has the covenant house that Moses served. Moses was God's prophet/mediator for the house of Israel; Jesus serves that role for restored Israel. But as Jesus is related to Moses according to the principle of promise/fulfillment, so it is with their respective houses: The house that Jesus presides over isn't the rehabilitation of Old Covenant Israel; it is the New Covenant household that consists of true sons and daughters in the Son. This house is the everlasting dwelling of God that Jesus is building in and on Himself.

This is the premise for the writer's insistence that the house that Jesus presides over as a Son is comprised of those – and only those – who “*hold fast their confidence and the boast of their hope firm until the end*” (v. 6). It is precisely the nature of God's new house that allowed the author to speak so definitively (and include *himself* in his affirmation). Because it's God's true dwelling place consisting of living stones who share in the living Cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4-5), there is no doubt as to who inhabits it: Taken up in the life of God through union with Christ by the Spirit, the sons of this house abide forever (cf. 3:14). To claim otherwise is to contend that God can lose what is part of Himself. He has permanently joined Himself to His human creature in the incarnate Son, so that all who share in the Son are equally joined to the One who sent Him. To be in the Son is to be in the Father (John 14:18-20, 17:20-23), and to be in the Son and Father is to be in the Father's house (John 8:31-36, 14:1-20). For a son of the house to depart from it, Christ Himself would have to be torn apart.

The nature of God's new creational house insures that its children abide in it forever. They have been freed from that which kept them from entering the house, and their liberation means that nothing outside the house can extract them from it. On the one hand, the power that set them free preserves them; on the other, their freedom – and their accurate perception of it – holds them in the house, for they recognize that there is nothing outside to return to. Having been made alive in the Spirit, they are unable to return to the realm of death (Ephesians 1:15-2:7).

Thus the members of God's restored house are marked by steadfastness of mind and heart that expresses itself in a persevering life. They are those who are tenacious in holding onto *who* they know, and not just *what* they know. They hold fast their confidence, but not as clinging to their own boast. Rather, they cling to the *One* in whom they boast; the One who is their hope.

The writer insisted that the true children who compose God's house are those who hold tightly to His Messiah, and some have perceived echoes of Essene theology in this theme as well. Recall that the Essenes (the Jewish Sect associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls) expected two messianic figures, both of whom were to be subject to Michael, the archangel, and some scholars have argued that it was the influence of this doctrine on his readers that led the Hebrews author to emphasize Jesus' superiority over the angelic hosts. Some see the same dynamic at work in the present context. For the Essenes taught that *they* – the faithful among Israel who'd renounced the corruptions of the Jewish ruling establishment and its priesthood by removing themselves to the Judean wilderness – were the true covenant community of the messianic age; they were the restored "house" that God had promised through His prophets. If the readers of this epistle were indeed being influenced by Essene doctrine, the writer's emphasis here makes all the more sense: It isn't faithful Israelites who form God's true and everlasting house, but those who hold tightly to Jesus and the truth as it is in Him.

b. Whatever factors lay behind the writer's concern, his point to his readers was straightforward, and he turned to the Scriptures – and specifically to the experience of the Israelite people – to reinforce it (3:7-11). The passage he cited is taken from Psalm 95, which suits his use for several reasons.

- The first is the way the psalm is structured. It's composed of two distinct sections that play off one another in such a way that each acts to underscore and intensify the significance of the other. The first is a passionate call to the children of Israel to worship their covenant God and King, not only because of His goodness and faithfulness to them, His covenant house, but also because His goodness is over all His works; He is the Creator and great King over all the earth (vv. 1-7). The second section tempers this call with a warning against the continual tendency toward unbelief and rebellion against God. What had plagued Israel from the very beginning – and made their long history a woeful tragedy – continued to be a threat in each generation (vv. 8-11).

- The second thing that makes this psalm appropriate is its subject matter. The Hebrews writer was deeply concerned that the pressures being applied to his readers might cause them to loosen their hold on Jesus and His gospel, if not walk away from Him altogether. What better way, then, to get their attention and renew their resolve than to remind them of their forefather's plight and its terrible consequences? These Jewish Christians knew their nation's history, and understood all too well the insidiousness of unbelief and the disastrous fruit it bears. Their forefathers had fallen prey to unbelief and idolatry, even while claiming devotion to Yahweh, and they could find themselves in the same predicament.

And their danger was all the greater if their Jewish countrymen were pressing them with the charge that embracing Jesus amounts to rebellion against Israel's God. If that was indeed the case, Psalm 95 is all the more relevant. For, by it, the writer was underscoring that the opposite is true: Departing from Jesus, who is Yahweh's Son-Messiah, is what leads a person away from Israel's God. It is those who don't hold fast to Him that are guilty of hardening their hearts against Yahweh's words and ways.

- A final reason for using this psalm is its place in Israel's faith and historical practice. During Jesus' lifetime, Psalm 95 was part of the liturgy for initiating the Sabbath, and this practice continues in Jewish circles to the present day. This use is understandable, since the psalm opens with an enthusiastic call to worship Yahweh. But it also reminds the worshipper of the significance of Israel's Sabbath and the importance of honoring it, in that it highlights the failure of the wilderness generation to enter God's *rest* (sabbath) because of their unbelief and rebellion.

Psalm 95 captures in summary fashion Israel's life with God: Yahweh's covenant son, chosen and uniquely granted to know Him (Acts 14:16; Ephesians 2:11-12), had the singular privilege of worship and devotion. The son had experienced the Father's delivering hand, goodness and provision, and yet refused to trust Him and hold tightly to Him. Physical challenges, deceitful hearts, and lying influences filled Yahweh's people with fear and distrust and hardened their hearts.

Though this pattern of unbelief largely characterized Israel from the time of its exile in Egypt, through the captivities and beyond (cf. Ezekiel 20:1-29; Nehemiah 9; Daniel 9:1-15; Malachi 1-4; cf. also Matthew 15:7-9), Psalm 95 focuses on a particular episode that occurred just prior to Israel's arrival at Sinai after departing from Egypt. That episode is recorded in Exodus 17:1-7, and involved the people's grumbling and quarreling with Moses when they found themselves without water. The irony of this situation was that they had only days before experienced Yahweh's mighty hand at the Red Sea and sung His praises as the Deliverer who was bringing them into His sanctuary land (Exodus 15). Now, faced with dry throats and no water, they accused Moses of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them and their children and livestock in the wilderness.

The historical situation recounted in Psalm 95 epitomized the dynamics of the failed relationship between God and His covenant people, and so the need for Him to arise on their behalf. If Israel were to fulfill its Abrahamic calling, Yahweh would have to find a way to make Israel become Israel *indeed*; He would have to bring about the reality that the Mosaic administration longed for. Thus the psalm is a suitable instrument for the Hebrews writer, whose purpose in writing was to encourage His Jewish readers that their faith and confidence in Jesus as Yahweh's Messiah wasn't misplaced; quite the opposite, it was vital.

- Their countrymen and tradition pressed them to place their hope in Moses (John 5:45-46), but Moses had fallen short as God's mediator. He led the people of Israel through the wilderness for the forty years of "the provocation," but couldn't lead them to their God and to their rest in His sanctuary land; all of the generation that left Egypt (except Joshua and Caleb) perished in the wilderness, *including Moses Himself*. Though they had their "today" in which they heard Yahweh's voice through Moses, they hardened their hearts and refused to listen to Him – despite having experienced His supernatural deliverance and ongoing provision.
- Now, these Hebrew readers had their own "today," in which they, too, were faced with Yahweh speaking to them through His chosen prophet and mediator. But it wasn't Moses speaking the Lord's words, but the One whom Moses prefigured – the One who is the incarnate Word; the One who embodies Yahweh and His promised return to Zion. And so, if their forefathers' hard hearts and unbelief were culpable, resulting in their death in the wilderness, how much more would *theirs* be, if they now turned from the One whom Moses predicted (ref. again Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The Hebrews writer addressed himself to fellow Jews who'd embraced Jesus as the Messiah and begun to follow Him as disciples, but now appeared to be in danger of walking away from Him. It was out of concern for this that the author penned his epistle, and he felt that there was no better way to exhort his readers than to remind them of the pattern of unbelief and divine judgment that was Israel's legacy. Were fellow Jews pressing them to return to Judaism under the guise of remaining faithful to Israel's God? If so, they needed to understand that there was no "faithfulness" to return to. Indeed, the faithful in Israel's history were those who looked in faith to the day when Yahweh would arise, liberate and renew Abraham's household, and that had now occurred in Jesus the Messiah (Luke 4:14-21; cf. John 8:56). To return to the former order was to bind themselves again with the chains He's broken (cf. 10:1-18; also Galatians 2:1-5:12).

This was the writer's concern and perspective, and later readers have done injustice to his instruction by focusing on other questions. He wasn't implying that a person can "lose his salvation," but neither was he arguing that some of his readers had a false faith. He was simply affirming what Jesus had: *The one who endures to the end will be saved*. Union with Him is everlasting, but the truth of this is born out through an enduring faith.