

Hebrews Chapter 3 – John Karmelich

1. In Chapter 3, we are going to get into the issue of what does "God's rest" mean. Jesus Himself taught that He came to give us rest. (See Matthew 11:28.) Therefore, "God's rest" is my title for this lesson. If we as Christians "rest" in God, what does that mean? I'll give you a clue, it is a lot more than just trusting in Jesus for our salvation.
2. To explain the concept of "God's rest", first I need to review a little of the last two chapters:
 - a) In Chapter 1, the writer focused on Jesus being God, as not someone created by Him. The idea in effect is Jesus was never an angelic creature but is in fact God Himself.
 - b) This lead to Chapter 2. The arguments were laid out for how Jesus had to be fully human in order for Him to relate to us as people. This comes back to the idea that Jesus is "fully God and fully human". That way He as God could pay the price of all sins and show how we can be perfectly forgiven and accountable to God at the same time.
 - i) In other words, because God Himself paid the price for sins, we don't have to prove to Him we deserve to be with Him forever in heaven.
 - ii) At the same time, by Jesus becoming human and remaining human, we can know for sure that He understands what we struggle with in our lives. That is, trying to please Him and trying to balance living our lives with our relationship with Him.
 - iii) If we can grasp why it is necessary for Jesus to be "fully God and fully human" at the same time, we in effect have gotten the main point of this book so far.
3. All of this leads to the third chapter. As I like to remind all of us way too often, the original text did not have chapter breaks. Therefore, know that the writer of Hebrews now is going to start a different argument, and in the original text, it doesn't say "Chapter 3".
 - a) OK John, I'm starting to grasp the idea of why it was necessary for Jesus to be both fully God and fully human and why that is important. "What's next?"
 - i) What is next is learning to change from our old way of thinking. This is about our perspective of who God is and what is His role in our lives.
 - ii) To grasp that concept, often it takes time to sink in. Know that when Paul first got converted to Christianity, Galatians 1:18 says that he went away for three years in effect to think about it. My point is simply that if you ask someone to accept the idea of resting in God's finished work, often it takes a while for the concept to sink in that what they have been practicing all of their lives is wrong.
 - b) Remember that this book was written to people of Jewish background. The writer wants to make the argument why worshipping Jesus is superior to the traditional form of Jewish worship. For millenniums, Jewish people worshipped God the Father by a sacrificial system to show their commitment to trusting God. So how do you convince someone that what has been practiced for centuries is wrong? The answer is not that God didn't accept that practice. The answer is that with Jesus, they can "rest" in that they no longer have to prove their worthiness to God.
 - i) The answer is to show that Jesus sacrifice is superior to that system. It is to show that God the Father wants us to live by gratitude (i.e., "rest in Him") and trust Him, as opposed to trying to earn His respect. That is this chapter in a nutshell.
 - ii) This would be interesting if I am from a Jewish background. How does this apply to me? The answer is to examine our own ways of seeking God and asking in effect, am I trusting in Him to guide my life or trusting in myself to handle the situation of the moment? That is a key question of this chapter.
 - iii) This actually leads me back to my lesson title: Understanding what God's rest is all about. OK, I now need the rest of this lesson and eighteen verses in this chapter to explain what that means. Let's get started.

4. Hebrews Chapter 3, Verse 1: Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.
- a) If you want to convince someone to trust Jesus to guide our lives, first you need to start by explaining who Jesus is. That is how this chapter begins. Remember that the first issue we are going to tackle here is why it is not necessary to prove our worth to God. That is a tough sell not only to people of Jewish backgrounds but also for those of us from non-Jewish backgrounds as well. To explain why this is difficult, let me bring up another idea:
 - i) For most of us, our favorite topic is our self. My mother taught me a long time ago when you don't know what to say to people, ask them about their lives, as all people like to talk about themselves. The reason we do that is because it is our way of showing why our lives are important. Such conversations are in effect trying to prove whatever someone is doing at the moment is a good thing.
 - ii) This leads me back to Verse 1. For most people in order to get into heaven, they want to prove their value to God.
 - iii) I am convinced that Satan's greatest lie is that people believe they deserve to go to heaven because their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. They may say they made mistakes but they have never killed someone. Or someone might say, I have killed someone, but I have never been a mass murderer. A mass murderer might even argue why that mass murder was necessary to preserve another group.
 - a) My point is one can always say they are worthy by their own standard.
 - b) By Jesus dying for our sins, it teaches us that we don't have to worry about being "greater than" some other standard. We know as Christians that God's standard is perfection, and therefore, we don't have to prove we are greater than whatever standard we set for ourselves. My point is we can then "rest" knowing we don't have to work to earn God's approval.
 - b) With that speech out of my system, now we can now return to Verse 1.
 - i) The point is in effect, stop focusing on our self and focus on Jesus. If Jesus is who He claims He is, let me (the writer of Hebrews) explain why what He did is superior to any belief one has about trying to prove ones worth to God.
 - ii) That is what the writer meant by the phrase "fix your thoughts" on Jesus. It is not about trying to focus on Jesus every moment of the day. It is about just taking a moment here to understand Jesus in His relationship to God the Father and His relationship to us as believers.
 - c) The next thing I want you to notice about this verse is that the author calls the recipients of this letter, "holy brothers". Remember that the original intended recipients of this letter were people of Jewish background who were ignoring Jesus and turning back to their old Jewish view of God. The writer of Hebrews still considers them believers.
 - i) In other words the writer does not call them "heathen" or "former believers". Notice that that if one has been called by God and accepts that calling one cannot lose one's salvation. One can fail to trust Him to guide one's life and that is what God's rest comes into play. My point is being separated to believe in Him and trusting (resting) in Him are in effect two separate issues.
 - ii) Again, the writer is in effect calls these people "saved". However, just because they are saved, they have not necessarily entered "God's rest". That is a key point of this lesson and of this chapter.
 - d) The next thing the writer of Hebrews wants us to focus on is the fact that Jesus was an apostle. That doesn't mean He was equal to the 12 apostles. The word apostle literally means, "sent one". The idea is that Jesus agreed to be sent by God the Father. OK John, so what? The point is simply that Jesus was faithful to what God the Father called Him to do. That will be an issue in that chapter as we will compare how Jesus was faithful as a "sent one" as Moses was faithful in what God the Father called Moses to do.

- e) The final point is that Jesus is our "high priest". I've discussed that term in detail in the last lesson. The short version is that the purpose of a priest is to help people draw close to God and help people understand what it that God expects of us. A high priest is simply a phrase that means the "top priest". Think of human priests as people helping us to draw closer to God. Think of the "High Priest" as a man who has direct access to God the Father to show us what He expects of us and helps us do what God the Father wants us to do.
 - i) OK John, and the point is? The point is Jesus was sent by God the Father. Jesus was faithful to what God the Father called Him to do. Because Jesus paid the price for sin, He is now our "high priest" to teach us what is God the Father's will.
 - f) Now let me tie this whole verse together:
 - i) If we are saved, then we are the "holy brethren". (That means set apart for Jesus).
 - ii) If we are set apart for God, we ought to listen what Jesus has to say as He is God and was sent from God the Father into this world.
 - iii) The third key point is that not only was He sent, but that He is our "go between" between God the Father and ourselves. That is why we pray "through Jesus".
 - a) So why do we need Jesus as our "go between"? Of course it is to show we accept His payment on our behalf for our sins. It is also because we trust in Him to guide our lives. That is the job of our "High Priest".
 - g) OK John, for the last page and a half, you have been rambling off some pretty basic stuff here. Well we are in Verse 1. ☺ In order to understand why all of this is significant, first we had to get the "basic's" down, before we can focus on the main purpose of this chapter, which is about understanding how we enter "God's rest".
 - i) My point being that if we are going to understand how God is to be worshipped, first we have to understand our relationship with God the Father and what is Jesus role in that relationship. That in effect is what Verse 1 teaches us.
5. Verse 2: He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. ³ Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future.
- a) In these four verses, Jesus is compared to Moses. In order to understand why this is here, one has to understand how much Moses is respected by a religious Jew. Many years ago, I attended a Jewish synagogue service. At one point everyone in the room pointed with their pinky figure at a copy of the first five books of the bible, written by Moses. It was their way of honoring the Moses who brought them the book. By pointing with their pinky, it gives it less honor than honoring God Himself, but still gives honor to Moses.
 - i) The point being that religious Jews give great honor to Moses. God used him among other reasons to bring us the first five books of our and their bible.
 - ii) If the original audience of the book of Hebrews were Jewish believers who were reverting back to Judaism, it is necessary to show how Jesus is superior to Moses. That in effect is the purpose of these five verses.
 - b) OK John, most of us are not from a Jewish background. Before you explain the details of this verse, tell me why should I care about comparing Jesus to Moses? For starters, it is showing that God used specific people to accomplish great things. That does not mean Jesus is equal to those people. We may hear or read of someone famous and think, "I can never accomplish what they have accomplished". Yes God uses some people in a mighty way. However, God does not call each of us to be used on a grand scale. Just because we are not Moses (or pick your favorite example), God the Father, still wants us to focus on Jesus and not focus on whatever other people He has used to do great things.
 - i) In effect, we can give other people "the pinky" to acknowledge what they did, but to Jesus, He is the one we should point up to as God and greater than those others.

- c) With that speech out of my system, it might be good to talk a little about Moses himself.
 - i) God used Moses to write and deliver those first five bible books to the Jewish nation. Those books are pretty much in tact as they were originally written. We have copies of those books going back 2,000 years to the Dead Sea Scrolls, and they are exactly the same (with some very minor technicalities) as they were originally written. If you believed something was the word of God, you would copy it carefully to make sure it was copied perfectly. That is how it was preserved.
 - ii) Remember that God also used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. This was a man who was miraculously saved as a baby, raised as a son of the leader of Egypt, rejected that Egyptian way of life and led the Israelites out of slavery.
 - iii) In summary, God used Moses in a mighty way. Therefore, he deserves the "pinky" as a sign of respect. On a similar thought, we may give honor today to someone we know or we know of, that God has used in a mighty way. That does not make that person equal with Jesus, just someone we can respect for being used by God.
- d) This leads us to Verse 3, which talks about the "builder of the house" and the house itself.
 - i) To grasp that terminology one has to understand that this is a play on words. To explain, understand that in the bible, the word church never refers to physical building but a group of people united to worshipping God.
 - a) To steal a classic joke, "People are not chewing gum in church. The church is chewing gum." Again, the idea is to realize that the church never refers to any building but the people inside the building.
 - ii) With that bad joke out of my system, the point the writer of Hebrews is making is in effect that Moses is part of the group of people that believe in God. Jesus is greater than Moses because Jesus "made the house" and Moses is part of the house.
 - iii) OK, that requires another explanation: Let's start with the issue of how do we know we are saved? From God's eternal perspective, He called us to Him. From our perspective, we as Christians accepted His free gift of salvation. In the sense that God called us to serve Him, Jesus is in effect the "builder" (collector) of the whole family of believers, which includes Old Testament believers such as Moses.
 - a) My main point of this little commentary is simply to show that Jesus is greater than Moses. God used Moses in a mighty way, but as great as that feat was, he is still in effect part of the "body of believers" or part of "the house" as used in these verses here in Hebrews. Jesus is superior to Moses as He is the one who calls all people to be part of that "house of believers".
 - iv) But John, Jesus came a roughly a thousand years after Moses. How can you claim that Jesus called Moses to be part of the family of believers? In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am". (John 8:28, NKJV). Know that Abraham lived many centuries before Moses. The point in effect is that Jesus was claiming to be the "voice of the burning bush" in John 8:28 that spoke to Moses and claimed to be God as recorded in Exodus Chapter 3.
 - a) My point here is simply that Jesus is the one who called Moses to come worship God as Jesus is claiming He was the voice of the Burning Bush.
 - v) So how do I know if that statement in John's Gospel? The answer is evidence. History records that John was tortured and eventually killed due to his trust in Jesus. Many people are willing to die for what they believe is the truth. No one is willing to be severely tortured for what they know is a lie. John the Gospel writer believed Jesus words and was willing to be killed in horribly way as he refused to deny the truth about Jesus about who He was, even to the point of his death.
 - a) All of this leads me back to Moses. Jesus claimed to be the one who made Moses part of the "church" that believed in God. Jesus is greater than Moses as Jesus is the one who calls all of us into trusting in God the Father.

- e) The final thing to I want discuss in these verses is the issue of Moses' "faithfulness". Why is that mentioned here in these verses?
 - i) Verse 5 is saying that Moses was faithful to God in all that He commanded him to do. Moses did lead those people out of Egypt. He did deliver what we know as the first five bible books. He did organize how the worship of God is to be done.
 - ii) Did Moses make mistakes? Lots of them, as recorded in the bible. So why does the bible record a lot of Moses' faults and mistakes? To show that he is human like the rest of us. God is not looking for perfect people. God is looking for people willing to trust Him and be used by Him. That is what Moses was, and hopefully that is what God asks of you and I, a willingness to be used by Him.
- 6. Verse 6: But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.
 - a) Verse 6 finishes the comparison of believers to a single house. Let me expand upon the concept of Christians as all being a "single house". It does not mean all Christians have to join the same church denomination. It simply means we are united in our trust in Jesus both as our complete price paid for our sins and as our guidance for our lives.
 - b) I hold the view that when we get to heaven, we are still individuals, but somehow we are all united. I believe we will exist in more than three dimensions when we are resurrected. That is how the resurrected Jesus waked into a locked room. (See John 20:19, 20:26.) My point is that as Christians we are all united and therefore we are part of God's "House".
 - i) This surprisingly, leads us perfectly to Verse 6. Notice the word "over" in the first sentence of this verse. Jesus as the promises Messiah (that is what "Christ" means) is faithful to rule over God the Father's collection of believers.
 - ii) This gets back to the idea of Jesus as our "brother" as I taught in the last lesson. Yes Jesus is our brother because all believers become part of God's family. At the same time, Jesus is in charge, and He is worshipped as the "son" over God's family. I think of it as God the Father and God the Son are in charge, and we are part of His family that worship both of them as God.
 - iii) That strange point of Jesus as our God and our brother, believe it or not, leads perfectly into the second sentence of Verse 6. That second sentence talks about the concept that we have to "hold on" in order to make it there.
 - c) To explain this concept, I need to get into the classic debate about whether or not one can lose their salvation. I hold the view that once one is saved, one is always saved. The other view is one can lose one's salvation if one truly denies their trust in Jesus at some point.
 - i) If you recall from Verse 1, the writer of Hebrews called the readers of this letter "Holy Brethren". Some argue that means they were always saved. Others argue it means the writer was encouraging them to remain saved.
 - ii) Let me state here right now, I am not going to solve this debate. I just know that I believe in a perfect God that knows all things. I don't believe that I can lose my salvation because if there were a way for me to mess it up, I would have found that way by now. With that said, let me explain how that ties to this verse.
 - iii) The issue to me is about not losing one's salvation, but about one's continuing trust in God. I take the view we can't lose our salvation, but we can "mess up" our lives by failing to trust in Him to guide our lives. That was the mistake the original Jewish readers of this letter were making. That is the mistake any of us can make the moment we choose to ignore God's desire for our lives.
 - iv) To summarize this concept in one phrase: we are accountable to God.
 - a) I don't believe we have to try hard to be saved. I do believe it is necessary to make the effort in order to rest in Him. The next question is, how does one be accountable to God and rest in Him at the same time. Let me give my explanation of how that works:

- b) To explain accountability and rest, remember that we are obedient to God not because we have to, but because we want to. We should be obedient to God because we are grateful for what He has done for us. We don't live to make a difference for Him because we have to, but because we want to. We "rest" in that the full price for our sins have already been paid for.
 - c) Now let me take on the next several verses as they continue this theme.
- 7. Verse 7: So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice,⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert,⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.'¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.' "
- a) If you haven't figured it out by now, we can't get through a chapter of Hebrews without at least a few quotes from the Old Testament, and in particular the book of Psalms. Know that from Verse 7 through 11, is a direct quote of Psalm 95, Verses 7-11.
- b) OK John, why is this quoted here, and more importantly, why should I care?
 - i) One of the most amazing things to consider in the Old Testament is the concept that God took a large group of people (between one to two million) out of Egypt in a dramatic and miraculous fashion. God then, sentenced all of them to wander and die in the desert, other than two of them and all of their descendants.
 - ii) So why have such a dramatic exodus out of Egypt if they were sentenced to die?
 - a) To answer, one has to remember the classic Christian line, "It took 40 days for the Israelites to get out of Egypt, but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of the Israelites". That line means it takes a lifetime of trusting God in order to get us to trust Him with all aspects of our lives.
 - b) Back to the question: Why were the Israelites sentenced to die in the desert after being rescued out of Egypt? Does it mean they lost their salvation?
 - (1) I've come to the conclusion that I can't read God's mind. Therefore, I let Him worry about who is going to be with Him forever in heaven, and my job is to focus on my relationship with Him now.
 - (2) I've also come to the conclusion of what God wants us to learn here: to trust Him. It is about trusting Him when we don't see any other solution and the odds are stacked against us. It is about trusting in Him because we can't overcome our sinful issues by our willpower.
 - iii) Let me put it this way: Did the Israelites who came out of Egypt believe that God was real? Of course they did. They saw the plagues in Egypt and saw the parting of the Red Sea. The issue of God's existence was not the question. The question for them and for us is about trusting Him, especially in situations that appear like there is no solution possible.
 - a) The Israelites were not allowed to enter the "Promised Land" because they were too scared of the bigger enemy that lived there. We as Christians are saved because we believe in Jesus, but to truly enter God's rest, we have to let go of fears of what is going to happen to us in the future.
 - b) That leads me back to the line about "40 years to get Egypt out of Israel". It takes a lifetime of trust to appreciate that God desires to guide every aspect of our lives and for us to let go of the desire to want to fix things based on our own ability or our own resources.
- c) All of this leads to second key issue of this verse: Is there a point where it is too late?
 - i) The Israelites who left Egypt were sentenced to die in the desert while only their children got to enter the Promised Land. Therefore, with God there is always the danger in life that there is a point where God can say it is too late for you. The question for us to ponder is how does one tell when someone reaches that point.

- ii) In order to understand that principal first one has to remember a simple but true fact: "There is a God but we are not Him". What I mean by that is it is not our job in this lifetime to determine other people's salvation. All we can do as people is examine behavior. That includes our own behavior as well as the behavior of others. That does not mean we are to put down other people, it simply means we can and should determine for example, who we choose to associate with based on how people act.
 - a) But John, didn't Jesus teach not to judge others in Matthew 7:1? That verse refers to not having a condemning attitude. God still calls us on to judge behavior, but at the same time not to spend our lives putting other people down. This is why I pray for lots of people who I believe are not saved. It comes down to the idea that we don't know who is and who is not saved.
 - b) If you think about it, Jesus judged behavior all the time. He condemned the religious leaders for not recognizing Him. He worked with imperfect people in order to get those people to trust Him more. Jesus let all sorts of people follow Him who were guilty of all sorts of sins in their lives.
- d) OK John, I sort of know all of that. What does this have to do with Hebrews Chapter 3?
 - i) At this point in the text, God is publicly declaring He was angry at that specific group of Israelites. That group got to see mighty miracles and yet they refused to trust in Him.
 - ii) The issue for us is in effect is "do we trust Jesus to guide our lives or not? The Jewish Christians that this book was intended for were slipping back into Judaism out of fear of being kicked out of their society. For them to remain Christians, their family and friends would no longer accept them in their society.
 - a) Consider this: It is easy to trust in Jesus if everyone around us is also trusting in Him. If we have to live in a society where we face death or hardship due to that trust, it is hard for us to make that commitment. I also know that if a Jehovah's Witness leaves that group, they are also shunned, and often that is a very tough roadblock for them to get past.
 - iii) The writer to Hebrews is reminding us about what is that price for turning our backs on Jesus. For that generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt, the price they had to pay was they could not enter the Promised Land. I don't know if each individual in that group was saved or not. I just know there is a price to be paid in our lives if we fail to trust God with any and all aspects of our lives.
- e) With that speech out of my system, let me get back to the key question: Is there ever a point where it is too late for us to trust in Him to guide our lives? Is there a point where God can say to us, "No you can't enter My rest, because you refused to trust Me? I suppose the answer is yes, but I never want to reach that point. Are their sin issues I struggle with? Of course, I am human. The practical answer involves us avoiding situations where we know we can be tempted. If we know we are entering a situation that is a temptation for us, it is best if we can to flee from that situation in the first place.
 - i) With that said, I believe if someone makes the commitment to trust Jesus, one cannot become "unborn" if one is "born again". Think about a baby. How can a baby be "unborn" once he or she is born? However, one can lose the joy of being dependant upon God to guide our lives if we choose to turn from Him.
 - ii) To put it another way, I don't believe one can sin enough to lose one's salvation. At the same time, I do believe if we turn from Him, He will allow things to happen in our lives that are the consequences of our sin and in effect, do things that would make us want to turn back to Him.
 - iii) Bottom line: stick close to Him and avoid the type of tragedy that happened to that generation of Israelites that refused to trust Him with their lives.

8. Verse 12: See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.
- a) If you think I was hard on you over the last few verses, the writer of Hebrews is even tougher. These next few verses warn us all the more why we should stick close to God.
 - b) What the author is saying in effect is, "Yes, trusting in Jesus can be a difficult at times. Especially if one's friends, family and surrounding society have turned their back on you because of a complete trust in Jesus for one's salvation. However, if you don't want to end up on a "long death march" like that generation of Israelites, trust to believe in Jesus."
 - c) Consider the following point: Those Israelites who refused to trust God and consequently, could not enter the Promised Land were then sentenced to die by God. He decided that they would die off over the next 40 years, and not in one big dramatic act.
 - i) In other words, God did not kill all of them that moment. He made them live in the desert and they have to die off roughly over the next 40 years.
 - ii) So why such a long time frame to be punished? The answer is for us to see the consequences of living a life when one turns from trusting in Him. Living a life of not trusting in God means in effect one is sentenced to slowly die no matter how successful or famous one becomes. That is because one is living out a life that does not bring glory to God. That concept of living for one's own glory versus living for His glory is what our own wilderness experience can be like.
 - d) This leads me back to these verses. This chapter is not teaching we can lose our salvation. It is teaching us to encourage each other as believes. It is teaching us to stick close to Jesus, because in effect, what is the alternative? A lifelong death march.
 - i) My point is that if we decide to not trust God to guide our lives, we will be like that generation of Israelites sentenced to die in the desert and wasting our lives.
 - e) Again, this section warns of the danger of turning away from God. Notice the solution to this danger, which is in effect Verse 13. That verse says to encourage one another daily. Let me explain that: The older I get, the more I am convinced that the easiest way for a Christian to sin is to spend a lot of time alone or a to spend a lot of time away from the presence of other believers. That is when we are most likely to sin, when we think none of our Christian friends are watching what we do.
 - i) One of the things that is emphasized in the bible, is the necessity of spending time with other believers. It is based on the need of believers to be with each in order to encourage each other.
 - ii) To continue this idea, a reason the bible encourages us to spend time with other believers is to help us with our weakness toward sin. As I explained in the last lesson, all people are imperfect and we are born with a "sin disease". That simply means we desire to do what we know is wrong. The way we overcome that desire is not by trying harder or praying harder, but by trusting God to help us with our issues and (here it comes), spending time with other believers.
 - a) Lets face it, we are less likely to want to mess up if we know other believers are watching us. We tend to forget that God is always watching us. By encouraging other believers to stick close to God, we are also helping ourselves as well.
 - f) Does this mean I can never be with nonbelievers? If that were true, how could anyone new ever be saved? All of us know nonbelievers we need to be around during parts of our lives. My point is simply that God never calls us to isolate ourselves, either from believers or even nonbelievers. He wants us to be a good witness to all people. One way we do be a good witness is by spending time with other believers. That not only helps us with the temptation to sin, but by being with other believers, it encourages us to do the right thing even when and especially when the desire to sin comes along.

9. Verse 14: We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.
- a) Again, if one reads this verse out of context, it can definitely read as if one can lose one's salvation if one turns away from Jesus. I sometimes hear someone say in this debate issue, "Maybe you can lose your salvation, but I know I can't lose mine." ☺
 - i) Personally, I usually try to avoid that debate. If people want to believe they could lose their salvation, I don't believe I have the power to change their minds. I just know that one reason the bible uses the term "born again", is because a person can't become unborn once they are physically born. That is why I hold the view that once someone has accepted Jesus as paying the full price for their sins, they cannot lose their salvation.
 - ii) But what if that person stops believing Jesus paid the price for their sins? What if they truly no longer believe that? Can they lose their salvation? As I like to say, I can't read people's minds, I can only judge their actions. Therefore, I really don't worry too much about who is going to heaven, as in effect that is God's decision to decide who will be with Him forever. My job and hopefully your job is to worry about being a good witness for Him in all that I do. Our job is to be obedient to what God calls us to do. Our job is to "rest" in His completed work on the cross.
 - iii) But John, how do we rest in God, if we struggle with our sins and faults? The answer is not to try harder, but in effect to let go and trust that God is working in our lives to change us to be the type of person He wants us to be. That is the rest that the bible talks about. Yes we still have to live our lives. Yes, we may still have to work hard to provide for our family and ourselves. We still have to turn from things that we know are displeasing to Him. The point is we make the effort to do the right thing, but we trust that He is guiding us. We spend time not only in His word for guidance but time with other believers in to encourage each other.
 - b) OK John, nice speech. What does it have to do with this verse? The point of this verse and the point of this section of Hebrews is not about losing one's salvation, as much as it is about encouraging us to stick close to Jesus and trust in Him to get the type of rest that He desires for our lives. In other words, we don't have to try harder to please Him and try harder to avoid sin. We trust that He will lead us down the path He desires for us.
 - i) Let me move on to Verse 15 and hopefully, explain His rest a little better.
10. Verse 15: As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."
- a) From Verse 15 to the end of the chapter, we are going to come back to the topic of that specific group of Israelites who rebelled against God after they left Egypt.
 - b) First thing I want you to notice here is the word "you". The verse is saying that if that if you (that's us) hear God's voice (i.e., trust in Him to guide our lives), then we should not harden our hearts (i.e., purposely turn from Him) as you (us) did in the rebellion.
 - i) My first thought is I'm living thousands of years after those Israelites left Egypt. How is it the bible saying, "Don't rebel as I personally did in the rebellion"? Even the original audience reading this passage lived over a thousand years after that event took place. How can the bible say in effect, "you" did in the rebellion?
 - ii) The point is not that any of us were ever part of that original rebellion against God. The point is just as that original group of Israelites that came out of Egypt could still be forbidden from entering the Promised Land (a word picture of entering "God's rest"), so you and I as believers can fail to fully trust God for every aspect of our lives.

- c) My second thought about this verse is in effect, "I sort of know all of this." In other words, most of us Christians already know the danger of isolating ourselves from other believers. We know when we are alone is when we are mostly likely to do something that God would not approve of. We tend to forget that He is always watching us. We get more concerned about what our friends and our associates would think of us or what people we go to church with think of our behavior.
- i) So what is the practical solution when we are tempted to sin? Do we just avoid being in isolation? Well, sometimes in life, we have to spend time alone. Otherwise, my bible studies will never get done. ☺ It is not that we always have to be with other believers. In order for God to guide us, we need to spend time with other believers in order to encourage us to do the right thing.
 - ii) That in effect is how we enter "God's rest". It has nothing to do with how hard we work in life or what we are called to do. His rest is about trusting Him to lead us down the path that is pleasing to Him in all that we do. That is what this verse is warning us about.
 - iii) The main point of this verse is not about the actual rebellion of that generation of Israelites, but as a warning for us to not to do like them. They were well aware of His existence. They simply did not want Him to guide every aspect of their lives.
 - iv) Let me at this point, add the last few verses, and I can finish this discussion.
11. Verse 16: Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷ And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? ¹⁸ And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.
- a) These four verses describe in more detail the story of the exodus out Egypt. Remember that the original intended audience of Hebrews were people of Jewish descent. These verses are summarizing much of the Old Testament Book of Numbers. It is describing the Israelites own ancestral history. My point is that the intended audience believed this story about the Exodus is fact. Given that these facts are true, the writer of Hebrews is helping us to understand how these ancient facts are relevant to our lives today.
 - b) To explain how these verses are significant, it would probably help a little to recall some of the facts as taught in the book of Numbers as it relates here.
 - i) When the Israelites left Egypt, God told them to send out 12 spies to check out the land area where God wanted them to settle. Ten of those 12 spies brought back a report that there were giants living in that land and it would be too hard for the Israelites to conquer that place. The other two spies said in effect, "God is on our side. It doesn't matter how big or how well equipped those people are. If God wants us to enter that land and conquer those people, we can't lose." (This is from Numbers Chapter 13, Verses 26-33.)
 - ii) The mistake made of course, is that the multitude of Israelites did not believe they could conquer the residents of that land. They failed to trust what God asked them to do (conquer the land). That same group saw the plagues of Egypt and saw God part the Red Sea. At this point, that group thought that it was up to them alone to conquer the Promised Land, and they didn't think they could do it, given whatever materials they could use as weapons.
 - iii) To finish the story, God then said to those Israelites, "You don't believe me? Fine, you are all sentenced to die over the next 40 years." The Israelites then tried to enter and conquer that land on their own and they failed miserably to trust God to lead their lives. The point for us is there is some unknown point in our life where God can say to us, "it is too late for you to enter my rest".

- c) OK John, that is interesting ancient history. How do I relate to it? The point is in effect that "salvation" and "God's rest" are in effect two different entities.
- i) Think of it in terms of God calling us to be saved and then us responding to that calling by Him. It is one thing to say God exists and He rules over this world. It is another thing to trust Him daily to guide our lives. That lack of trust for God to rule over every aspect of our lives was the great fault of that specific generation of Israelites. That is also the great fault of most people throughout human history.
 - ii) Let me go back even further and discuss Adam and Eve for a moment. God only gave them one simple rule to follow: Don't eat from a particular tree. Why give that test? It wasn't so much about the fruit itself as it was the concept of learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives. When Adam and Eve sinned, God was more than willing to forgive them, but at the same time, punishment was needed.
 - a) In effect Jesus died for their sins as well as ours.
 - iii) My point here is about trust. Are we trusting in God to guide our lives or not? I am not saying we have to be perfect. I am saying the goal here is to give every aspect of our lives over to God and say to Him in effect, "OK, I can't live this life without Your help. You are in charge of my life."
 - iv) Then what? Then we have to remake that commitment regularly because it is our natural desire to want to turn away from Him. (See Romans 12:1 on that point.) God does not expect us to be sinless. He does want us to confess our sins when we realize we mess up. Confession of sin is essentially saying, "Your (God's) way of living is the right choice for my life and my choice in that situation is wrong. Therefore, I am going to turn from what I chose to do, and let You guide me."
- d) John does this entire discussion mean that if I fail to give up some bad habit of mine, God will sentence me to wander in my own "desert"? The short answer is yes.
- i) The reason God was so hard on that generation of Israelites was not that He didn't love them or care about them. Think of it this way: Even though they had to spend the rest of their lives in the desert, He still provided food and water for them to survive during that long time frame. God did not say to that generation, "You rejected me. You are now on your own." That punishment was to show them and show us what is the true cost of not trusting God with lives.
 - ii) This leads back to you and me. If we have committed our lives to serving God, then know that He loves us too much to ever leave us alone. He does not want to leave us "wandering in our desert" dealing with our own issues by ourselves.
- e) So, John, what do I practically do about my own problems? Let's say we trust God to guide our lives and we still are facing some significant problem. Now what do we do?
- i) First of all, if we are still struggling with a particular issue, that makes us normal. God never promises us life will be easy once we enter that "rest". He promises to guide us through our lives. Yes life is difficult at times. What I am saying is that we have a source of power far greater than any source we can imagine to deal with whatever we have to deal with. Yes we can and should get others to help us. The point is to trust God to lead us through issues. That is what His "rest" is all about.
 - ii) The failure of that generation of Israelites had nothing to do with believing in His existence. It is about their failure to trust Him to guide their lives and take on things that were too big for them to face on their own.
 - iii) Our failure to trust God often comes down to seeing problems that appear to be too big for us to face. We at times can fail to trust that He can give us victory just as the Israelites failed to do at that point in time. That is the lesson about trust that is emphasized here in this point in the story.
- f) With that said, let me give my closing prayer about trusting in His rest.

12. Heavenly Father, Help us to trust in You to deal with whatever it is we have to face. What is in front of us is usually way too big for us to handle on our own. Help us to remember that You desire the best for our lives. You provide the power for us to have victory over whatever it is we have to face in life. We can have rest in You in that we can have that victory due to our trust in You. Therefore, help us collectively to live to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.