

*School of the Word*  
**Hebrews**  
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### HEBREWS 3:7-4:14

#### Sequence

- ▶ Heb 3:7-4:14
- ▶ In the letter as a whole
- ▶ Reading, reactions, questions
- ▶ The narrative and argument
- ▶ Commentary
- ▶ Reflections
- ▶ St Paul
- ▶ St Augustine

#### In the Letter as a whole

- ▶ 3:1-6 The Son is greater than Moses
- ▶ **3:7-11 Faithless people**
- ▶ **3:12-19 Failure to enter God's rest**
- ▶ **4:1-11 God's rest is still available**
- ▶ **4:12-14 The word of God is alive and active**
  
- ▶ Question: why was a "new" salvation necessary?
- ▶ Salvation through Jesus = a new exodus / Passover / Moses

#### Reading, reactions, questions

**Heb 3:7** Therefore, as the holy Spirit says:

8            "Oh, that today you would hear his voice,  
               'Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion  
                                   in the day of testing in the desert,  
 9            where your ancestors tested and tried me  
                                   And saw my works  
 10          for forty years.  
               Because of this I was provoked with that generation  
                                   and I said, "They have always been of erring heart,  
                                   and they do not know my ways."  
 11          As I swore in my wrath,  
                                   "They shall not enter into my rest."'"

**12** Take care, brothers, that none of you may have an evil and unfaithful heart, so as to forsake the living God. **13** Encourage yourselves daily while it is still "today," so that none of you may grow hardened by the deceit of sin. **14** We have become partners of Christ if only we hold the beginning of the reality firm until the end, **15** for it is said:

"Oh, that today you would hear his voice:  
 'Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion.'"

**16** Who were those who rebelled when they heard? Was it not all those who came out of Egypt under Moses? **17** With whom was he "provoked for forty years"? Was it not those who had sinned, whose corpses fell in the desert? **18** And to whom did he "swear that they should not enter into his rest," if not to those who were disobedient? **19** And we see that they could not enter for lack of faith.

**Heb 4:1** Therefore, let us be on our guard while the promise of entering into his rest remains, that none of you seem to have failed. **2** For in fact we have received the good news just as they did. But the word that they heard did not profit them, for they were not united in faith with those who listened. **3** For we who believed enter into [that] rest, just as he has said:

“As I swore in my wrath,  
‘They shall not enter into my rest.’”

and yet his works were accomplished at the foundation of the world. **4** For he has spoken somewhere about the seventh day in this manner, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works”; **5** and again, in the previously mentioned place, “They shall not enter into my rest.” **6** Therefore, since it remains that some will enter into it, and those who formerly received the good news did not enter because of disobedience, **7** he once more set a day, “today,” when long afterwards he spoke through David, as already quoted:

“Oh, that today you would hear his voice:  
‘Harden not your hearts.’”

**8** Now if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken afterwards of another day. **9** Therefore, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God. **10** And whoever enters into God’s rest, rests from his own works as God did from his. **11** Therefore, let us strive to enter into that rest, so that no one may fall after the same example of disobedience.

**Heb 4:12** Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. **13** No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account. **14** Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

#### **The narrative and argument**

- ▶ The desert wandering (time of renewal)
- ▶ The water from the rock (Massa and Meribah)
- ▶ The entry into the land (Joshua)
  
- ▶ Close reading of Psalm 95
- ▶ Close reading of Genesis 2

#### **Hebrew 3:7-11 Faithless people!**

- ▶ Close reading of Psalm 95
- ▶ NB Therefore
- ▶ The Holy Spirit
- ▶ Forty years — the people or God?
- ▶ Cf. Ex 17:1-17, Number 20:2-13, 14:20-23, 28-35

#### **Part I: Invitation to praise**

Ps 95:1 Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord;  
cry out to the rock of our salvation.  
2 Let us come before him with a song of praise,  
joyfully sing out our psalms.  
3 For the Lord is the great God,  
the great king over all gods,  
4 Whose hand holds the depths of the earth;  
who owns the tops of the mountains.  
5 The sea and dry land belong to God,  
who made them, formed them by hand.  
Ps 95:6 Enter, let us bow down in worship;  
let us kneel before the Lord who made us.  
7 For he is our God,

we are the people he shepherds,  
the sheep in his hands.

### Part II: Warning

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:

- 8 Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, (= “the rebellion” in the LXX)  
as on the day of Massah in the desert.
- 9 There your ancestors tested me;  
they tried me though they had seen my works.
- 10 Forty years I loathed that generation;  
I said: “This people’s heart goes astray;  
they do not know my ways.”
- 11 Therefore I swore in my anger:  
“They shall never enter my rest.”

### Hebrews 3:12-19 Failure to enter God’s rest

- ▶ The author picks up key expressions: today, turn away rebel, unbelief listen, harden, disobey, rest.
- ▶ Style: homiletical midrash (ruminating exploration).
- ▶ Take care: i.e. a warning not to lose the greater gift in Jesus
- ▶ Unbelieving = rebellious (not atheist)
- ▶ Lack of faith, unbelief was the problem then and could still be the problem now
  
- ▶ Today remains open
- ▶ “Beginning of the reality” (*‘hupostasis’* resolution, essence)
- ▶ Vv. 15-18: Israel is discussed while the readers are addressed
- ▶ Failure to enter: Kadesh (Numbers 14)
- ▶ This constitutes a severe warning (see text)!

When Moses repeated these words to all the Israelites, the people mourned greatly. Early the next morning they started up high into the hill country, saying, “Here we are, ready to go up to the place that the Lord spoke of: for we did wrong.” But Moses said, “Why are you now transgressing the Lord’s order? This cannot succeed. Do not go up, because the Lord is not in your midst; do not allow yourself to be struck down by your enemies. For there the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you, and you will fall by the sword. You have turned back from following the Lord; therefore the Lord will not be with you.”

Yet they dared to go up high into the hill country, even though neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses left the camp. And the Amalekites and Canaanites who dwelt in that hill country came down and defeated them, beating them back as far as Hormah. (Num 14:39–45 NABRE)

### Hebrews 4:1-11 God’s rest is still available

- ▶ Direct address to the hearers/readers
- ▶ Israel received the good news, but failed
- ▶ The same could happen to us
- ▶ Rest: originally, the promised land
- ▶ Now: a share in God’s ‘rest’ or ‘being’ (Gen 2:2)
- ▶ Then: rest started at the moment of creation
- ▶ This rest is both in the future and in the present
  
- ▶ Israel was disobedient in the desert
- ▶ They did indeed enter the land, but not the rest of God
- ▶ This is signalled in Psalm 95 in several ways
- ▶ The use of “today”
  - The use of the oath, excluding Israel from rest
  - David — author of the Psalm — speaks of a continued offer of today, long after Joshua
  - The LXX assigns the Psalm to David

- ▶ Because the today is still open, the Psalm can be applied to those who believe in Jesus

#### Hebrew 4:12-14

- ▶ Scripture is God speaking to us *now*
  - He made my mouth like a sharp-edged **sword**, concealed me, shielded by his hand. He made me a sharpened arrow, in his quiver he hid me. (Isa 49:2 NABRE)
  - Your all-powerful word from heaven's royal throne leapt into the doomed land, a fierce warrior bearing the sharp **sword** of your inexorable decree, And alighted, and filled every place with death, and touched heaven, while standing upon the earth. (Wis 18:15–16 NABRE)
- ▶ Soul, spirit, joints, marrow, heart: i.e. the whole person
- ▶ Account: lit. *logos*
- ▶ We cannot conceal our inmost thoughts from God

#### Reflections

- ▶ Faith will be increasingly significant in Hebrews
- ▶ Communities of faith, rather than individuals
- ▶ Christian life as pilgrimage, a rhythm of life, leading to our "rest" in God
- ▶ The Word of God in Christian life
- ▶ St Paul
- ▶ St Augustine

**St Paul:** 1 Cor 10:1 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, 2 and all of them were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 All ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ. 5 Yet God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert. 6 These things happened as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did. 7 And do not become idolaters, as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel." 8 Let us not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell within a single day. 9 Let us not test Christ as some of them did, and suffered death by serpents. 10 Do not grumble as some of them did, and suffered death by the destroyer. 11 These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall. 13 No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it.

**St Augustine:** Ch. 25. — *He Prays God for that Peace of Rest Which Has No Evening.*

50. O Lord God, grant to us your peace, for you have supplied us with all things, — the peace of rest, the peace of the Sabbath, which has no evening. For all this most beautiful order of things, "very good" (all their courses being finished), is to pass away, for in them there was morning and evening.

Ch. 26. *The Seventh Day, Without Evening and Setting, the Image of Eternal Life and Rest in God.*

51. But the seventh day is without any evening, nor has it any setting, because you have sanctified it to an everlasting continuance that that which you did after your works, which were very good, resting on the seventh day, although in unbroken rest you made them that the voice of your Book may speak beforehand unto us, that we also after our works (therefore very good, because you have given them to us) may repose in you also in the Sabbath of eternal life.

Ch. 27. *Of Rest in God Who Ever Works, and Yet is Ever at Rest.*

52. For even then shall you so rest in us, as now you work in us; and thus shall that be your rest through us, as these are your works through us. But you, O Lord, ever work, and are ever at rest. Nor do you see in time, nor do you move in time, nor do your rest in time; and yet make the scenes of time, and the times themselves, and the rest which results from time.