

WSC 43-44 “Grace before Law: the Preface to the Ten Commandments”
Deuteronomy 11
Psalm 105
Hebrews 3

April 28, 2013

I’d really like to read the whole of Deuteronomy 7-11 today –
since the whole passage really gets at our theme of “Grace before Law.”
But if you turn to Deuteronomy 7,
I will read portions of the whole passage to give you a feel for the whole.

7:6-19

8:11-20

9:4-12 (and then after recounting the story of the golden calf and the new tablets)

10:12-22

Introduction: Grace before Law from Abraham to Joshua (Dt. 11 and Ps. 105)

There are three temptations that Moses warns about in this sermon.

(7:17) Do not say in your heart, “these nations are greater than I” –

but remember the LORD and his mighty deeds against Egypt!

(8:17) Do not say in your heart, “My power and the might of my hand
have gotten me this wealth” –

but remember that the LORD is the one who gave you the land!

(9:4) And do not say in your heart, “It is because of my righteousness
that the LORD has brought me in to possess the land” –

it is not your righteousness,

but God’s faithfulness to his covenant with your fathers!

Let’s think for a moment about these three temptations.

The first (“the nations are greater than I”) is the temptation to think that it’s all up to us.

When I look at my enemies, I realize that I can’t win.

What do you do when you *know* that you can’t win?

You resort to strategy and compromise.

Sometimes that’s a good idea.

But God said to take possession of the land.

Israel looks at their enemies and says,

“Well, that’s not going to happen!

So, how can we do the next best thing?”

Moses says, don’t forget who God is!

It’s not all up to us!

If God says that he’s going to give us the land,

then we need to believe God – no matter what your enemies may look like!

The second (“my power has gotten me this wealth”)
is the temptation of materialism.
You may think that you have built your own little empire –
it's easy to be proud of what you have accomplished!
“I'm good at what I do.”
Paul Miller (in *The Praying Life*) suggests that if there is anything in your life
that you don't pray about –
that means that you don't think you need God's help in that area!
“I'm doing fine at this, why should I need God...?”
Remember that it is God who gives all good gifts.
If you think that you can do it without God,
don't be surprised if God takes it away!

The third (“it is because of my righteousness” that God gave me the land)
is the temptation of moralism.
God said that if we obey him then he will bless us –
therefore it must be because of our righteousness
that we have been blessed.
Now it is true that God says that if his people obey him, then he will bless them.
But that doesn't mean that he will bless them *because* of their obedience!
He will bless them *because* of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!
After all, if you start making reward and blessing dependent on your obedience,
then (as Moses points out) you are going to be in trouble –
because you are a stiff-necked and rebellious generation!

Notice that God's answer to all three temptations is to remember that *grace* precedes law.
It is by grace that Israel will enter the land.
It is by grace that Israel will take possession of the land.
And it is by grace that Israel will remain in the land.

Israel's obedience to the Law is absolutely necessary to their possession of the land.
But Israel's obedience is never the *reason* for their possession of the land.

Our Shorter Catechism makes the same point in questions 43-44.

43. Q. What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments is in these words, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

44. Q. What does the preface to the Ten Commandments teach us?

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments teaches us, that because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all His commandments.

I cannot resist pointing out that these three temptations in the wilderness

bear a striking resemblance to the three temptations in the wilderness in the gospels:
The devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread.
The devil tempted Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple.
The devil tempted Jesus by offering him all the kingdoms of the world –
if Jesus would only worship him.

Trust in your own power – trust in your own righteousness – you can't defeat me, join me!
And, interestingly enough, Jesus understood exactly where these temptations came from –
because all three times he quotes Deuteronomy 6-9 in answer:
“Man shall live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”
“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”
“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”

Jesus is the Israel who is tempted in the wilderness –
and where Israel had failed, Jesus succeeds!

Our psalm of response, Psalm 105, retells the story of Israel from Abraham to Joshua,
reminding us that God's covenant and promise is at the heart of the gospel –
and that our obedience to the law is our *response* to God's great mercy!

Sing Psalm 105
Read Hebrews 3

Last time we looked at Deuteronomy 6,
where Moses tells us to teach our children to love, fear and obey the LORD.

There is a danger that we will be moralistic with our children.

“Do this because God says so!”

It's true.

God does say so.

But is that how God speaks to you?

No, God says “do this because I have loved you.”

“Do this because I have redeemed you.”

“Do this because I have bought you with the blood of my only Son.

You are mine.”

Teach *this* to your children.

Teach them that obedience flows not from guilt, but from gratitude.

If you always discipline your children for every infraction,
they will never learn grace.

But when you have mercy on them, and do not deal with them as they deserve,
teach them!

If you just “let it slide” because you're tired and grouchy,
that will not teach them grace!

Rather, tell them: what you did was wrong – and it *deserved* judgment –
but God does not deal with us as our sins deserve,
and so I will show mercy to you as God has shown mercy to me!

Hebrews 3 reflects on the same rebellion in the wilderness that Moses addressed in Dt 6-11.
Israel had heard the word – the Torah (the Law of God) –
but Israel rebelled and disobeyed the Lord.
Hearing was not mingled with faith.

The story of Israel reminds us that it is not enough to say:
God saved you, therefore you should obey him!
All Israel *heard* the preface to the Ten Commandments.

43. Q. What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments is in these words, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

And all Israel heard what this teaches us:

44. Q. What does the preface to the Ten Commandments teach us?

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments teaches us, that because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all His commandments.

Hebrews 3 tells us that what was missing in the wilderness generation was one thing:
faith.

1. How Christ Is Better than Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6)

Therefore, holy brothers,^[a] 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^[b] 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.

a. The Faithful Son and the Faithful Servant

Hebrews 3 starts off by contrasting Moses and Jesus.

Hebrews is concerned that you might drift away.

Chapter 2 began with an exhortation to “hold fast” to the message that you heard.

Chapter 3 begins with another exhortation to “hold fast”

“Hold fast your confidence and your boasting in your hope.”

Hebrews reminds us that God has subjected everything under the Son's feet.
We don't see everything under his feet—
we see a world that seems very much out of control:
tsunamis and earthquakes around the world,
Chechen terrorists striking fear in Boston,
and modernity wreaking havoc even on the church of Jesus Christ.
That's why Hebrews reminds us that while we don't see everything in subjection to him,
we do see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor *because of the suffering of death*.

The kingdom of God does not come through the power and majesty of human conquests,
but through weakness—through the foolishness of the cross—
through the foolishness of the message that has been preached to you.
We see Jesus, the one who partook of our weakness—our flesh and blood—
so that we might partake of his glory.

So when Hebrews calls you to hold fast your confidence and your boasting in your hope,
he is reminding you to hold fast to Jesus.
In the midst of temptation and trial,
consider Jesus.

The theme of chapters 3-4 is that the faithfulness of Jesus is to characterize our lives as well.
The words for faith/belief/unbelief/faithfulness are used 8 times in these 33 verses,
each time at the very heart of the exhortation.

And so you need to consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.
Think about Jesus in relation to Moses.
Hebrews says that Jesus was faithful to him who appointed him,
“just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.”

Hebrews could have said, “Moses failed.”
Remember how Moses struck the rock?
Remember how God judged Moses by forbidding him to enter the land?
But Hebrews doesn't mention that.
He doesn't want to compare Jesus to Moses *at his worst*.
He wants to compare Jesus to Moses *at his best!*

So he points out that Moses was faithful in all God's house.
After all, God had declared of Moses, that he is unique among prophets.
God speaks to Moses “face to face”
Moses alone has seen “the form of God”
No other prophet is ever given such direct access to God.
In other words, you don't get any more faithful than Moses.

Nowhere in Hebrews are Moses' failures ever mentioned.
Because Moses' failures are irrelevant to the point.
Moses, whose face reflected the glory of Yahweh,
Moses, who alone was permitted to speak mouth to mouth with God Almighty,
Moses, who was God's agent of the great redemption from Egypt,
was but a servant in the house.
He was a faithful servant—he was the greatest servant—
but he was a servant.
And a servant is but a member of the household.

But Jesus is the faithful Son.
He is not merely a servant in the house,
but a Son over the house.
“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.”

Moses face shone with the reflected glory of God—a glory that was fading.
But Jesus' face shines not with a reflected glory—
after all, as Hebrews 1 said, he is the radiance of God's glory—
both because of the glory that he shared with the Father in the beginning
and because of the suffering of death
He shares in the glory of God both in his eternal sonship,
and in his inherited sonship.

Hebrews spends a lot of time talking about the high priestly work of Christ.
But this high priestly work is grounded in his identity as the Son of God.
Jesus is the apostle and high priest of our confession.
Why?
Because he is the faithful Son.

Adam was created as the son of God.
He was supposed to live as a faithful reflection of his Father's glory,
but he did not.
And throughout the scriptures,
the plan of redemption is always geared around the theme of sonship.
Abraham is promised an inheritance.
Israel is called “my son, my firstborn”
God promises to make David's son his own son.

All of the covenants in the Bible are grounded in this filial relationship,
because covenant is the historical reflection
of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

In every covenant, man is brought into an inheritance through conformity to the image of God.

Jesus is the Son who receives the promised inheritance.

In Hebrews 1:4—Jesus has inherited a name more excellent than the angels.

He is the one who has entered God’s rest,
and all things have been subjected under his feet.

He has received the inheritance that was promised to Abraham, to Israel, and to David.

Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son.

God told David in 1 Chronicles 17:14 that David’s son will be “faithful in my house,”
and God told Samuel that there would be a faithful high priest
who would have a faithful house. (1 Sam 2:35)

Jesus is the faithful Son of David.

Jesus is the faithful high priest who establishes God’s faithful house.

But what is God’s house?

You are.

The word “house” can mean either a physical house, or the “household.”

And Hebrews is playing off this double meaning.

Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses in the same way
that God has more honor than the universe he created.

Just as God has built all things (through the Son—1:2),
so also Jesus Christ has built God house.

And Jesus is the one who has built this house.

God built the house of creation;

Moses built a replica (a scale model, as it were) of the Son’s house;

But only the Son has built the house where God and man can dwell together.

And we are that house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

b. So Hold Fast to Your Hope

You are God’s house.

Yes, that has a twofold sense:

you are the *household*—those who dwell in the house;

but also you are the house—you are the structure in which God has chosen to dwell

If you hold fast your confidence and boasting in your hope.

We can’t gloss over the “if.”

The “if” reminds us that when we say that “grace comes before law” –
we do not thereby nullify the law!

Obedience is important – indeed, it is necessary!

Because “if” you do not hold fast to Christ,

then you are not God's house.
Perseverance in faith and hope is a part of what it means to be God's house.
And Hebrews knows that you need perseverance.
You need to hold fast.

Because just like Israel and Jesus faced temptation in the wilderness –
so do we!

Hebrews turns to Psalm 95 in reflecting upon Israel's wilderness rebellion.
He says,

“Don't you make the same mistake they did.”
God had just redeemed them from bondage and slavery in Egypt.
He had just saved them.
But just because you heard the message
doesn't mean that you're going to enter the promised land.
You must believe the message.

Yes, grace comes before law –
but this grace must be received by faith!
Hearing must be blended with faith.
And faith must persevere until the end.

2. How Today Is Better than Yesterday (Hebrews 3:7-19)

⁷ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,*
“Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ *do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,*
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹ *where your fathers put me to the test*
and saw my works for forty years.
¹⁰ *Therefore I was provoked with that generation,*
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.’
¹¹ *As I swore in my wrath,*
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

a. Yesterday: the Wilderness Rebellion (v7-11)

The grumbling of the wilderness generation is infamous.

In Ex 14, when the Egyptians pursue them, the Israelites cried out,
“it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians
than to die in the wilderness.”

But then God opens a way through the Red Sea,
and the Israelites pass through on dry land—but the Egyptians perish in the waters.
Only three days later—three days after seeing God part the waters—

the people are complaining because the water of Marah is too bitter,
and so the LORD sweetens the water by the hand of Moses.
A month later they are grumbling that they don't have enough food
and so the LORD sends quail and manna from heaven.
Then a few days later they are out of water again,
and rather than ask in faith, it says that "the people quarreled with Moses."

In a span of less than three months God has delivered them from Egypt,
he has brought them through the Red Sea on dry land,
destroying the Egyptian army in the waters,
he has given them water twice, bread from heaven every day.
And all of this he did for a rebellious, ungrateful people,
who continued to grumble and rebel in a matter of hours after each new gift.

By the time they get to Sinai, three months after the Exodus from Egypt,
the people of Israel have already rebelled five times.

Then in Exodus 32, while God is giving the law to Moses,
the people rebel and make idols to worship.
And when they leave Sinai, it starts all over again.
In Numbers 11 there are two rebellions.
Then in Numbers 12 Miriam and Aaron oppose Moses.
Then in Numbers 13-14 ten of the 12 spies rebel against Moses,
and Israel refuses to enter the promised land.
As if that is not enough, then in Numbers 16, Korah leads a rebellion,
attempting to seize power from Moses and take over the leadership of Israel.
In Numbers 20, Israel again complains about water a third time,
and this time Moses, furious with the people,
disobeys God and strikes the rock, instead of speaking to it,
thereby bringing the curse of the rebellious generation upon himself.
And finally, in Numbers 21, comes the final rebellion,
as the Israelites complain about their wanderings.

Twelve times the scripture records the rebellions of Israel.
No matter how many times God was gracious to them,
they kept rebelling.

You know what it sounds like?
It sounds like a child—like a two-year old
who keeps doing the same thing over and over again.
And if you are gracious and kind, and give them what they want,
then they get spoiled and demand even more.
And if you discipline them, then they just get more sneaky about it!

There is a reason why Israel sounds like a two-year old.

When God said, "Israel is my son, my firstborn," he meant it!

Paul tells us in Galatians 4 that Israel was the son of God in his minority.

Israel is acting like a two-year old, because he is one!

This is not to excuse Israel's rebellion.

A rebellious two-year old is not innocent!

Rather, God is teaching his children what it means to be his people.

If you rebel against him, judgment will come.

And so those who rebelled were forbidden to enter the promised land.

Psalm 95 concludes with that solemn oath:

"As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest."

And so the wilderness generation fell in the wilderness,

and died outside the land of Promise.

And Hebrews 3 warns us not to be like them!

b. Today: Hear and Believe (v12-19)

¹² 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."

¹⁶ 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.

Blending exposition and exhortation, verses 12-19 then apply the lessons of yesterday to today.

Verse 12 and verse 19 both use the same language

to signal the beginning and end of the paragraph.

"Take care, brothers, [literally, "see"] lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart...."

The same words "see" and "unbelief" appear also in verse 19:

"So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief."

Because we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief,

therefore we must keep our eyes open, "looking out" for unbelief today.

Because the root of apostasy is found in an "evil, unbelieving heart,"

which leads you to fall away from the living God.

And so verse 13 urges you to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”
Hebrews assumes that you will be seeing other believers “daily”
and urges you to exhort one another.

Don’t be bashful about warning each other.
If you see your brother or sister weighed down by sin,
don’t hesitate to say something!
And this means that you need to know each other well enough –
and be *known* by each other well enough –
so that you can do this!

Because the alternative is to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
If you only see each other once a week,
then you can hide the “real” you behind a facade.
It doesn’t have to be “church” events.
(don’t wait for the church to come up with something –
if you need to be with the people of God, then get on the phone!)
We provide some “church” events
for those who have a tough time doing it on their own.
If you look back over the last week and have to say,
“hmm, I haven’t had any Christian fellowship since last Sunday”
then Hebrews is telling you that something is wrong.

Thus saith the LORD!

You need each other!
And if you are trying to make it, just you and your family by yourselves,
then, in the end, you are in peril
of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews sees our life together as an essential part of our perseverance.

And perseverance is the final test of genuine saving faith.

Saving faith is a faith that perseveres to the end.

As Hebrews 3:14 puts it,

“For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold fast our original confidence
firm until the end.”

Hebrews closes the paragraph with a series of rapid fire questions that flow from Ps 95.

3:16 For who, having heard, rebelled?

Was it not all who came out of Egypt through Moses?

3:17 And by whom was he provoked forty years?

Was it not those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?

3:18 And to whom did he swear they would not enter into his rest, if not to those who were

disobedient?

3:19 Thus we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Did that give you whiplash?

They rebelled – they sinned – they were disobedient...

so we see that they were not able to enter because of *disobedience*, right?!

No, Hebrews says, “they were not able to enter because of unbelief.”

Hebrews understands that behind all the rebellion–

behind all the idolatry–

was unbelief.

They did not believe God’s promises.

They did not believe that God would do what he had said.

And so Hebrews speaks to you,

and he says that you now live in the wilderness,

in between redemption and rest,

in between promise and fulfillment;

You stand on the brink of the Promised Land!

God has promised you eternal rest,

will you enter?

Do not harden your hearts!

Do not disobey his voice!

But believe the good news that has come to you.

Conclusion: Entering God’s Rest by Faith

We don’t have time to explore chapter 4 today,

but Hebrews goes on to say that Jesus is the true Joshua

who has led his people into that eternal rest.

And so now you are called to enter that rest–

and persevere in faith until the end.

It was not the law that brought Israel into the land and gave them an inheritance.

It was Joshua who caused Israel to inherit the land.

And yet, as Hebrews 4:8 says, even Joshua did not give them *rest*.

And “we who have believed enter that rest” (4:3).

You will not find rest by “just trying harder”!

You will find rest by believing in Jesus, the Son of God,

who is the great high priest who has passed through the heavens,

and has brought us near to God.