

## Prayer

Keep our eyes on Your Cross O Lord, and save us from the perils of temptation. Keep us from misunderstanding what You have said to us, from leading others astray, or from enjoying the fruits of our sin or wickedness. Keep our souls and spirits fixed firmly on the Cross, and the life and death of Christ our Saviour, until He comes in glory! AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

*(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)*

### Prayer ideas

*Write down a report about your day in one paragraph. Read this out as to the Lord, and check out how you feel about this when you do it. Listen, to see if the Lord is speaking to you through this exercise.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who do not know the Gospel.** *Pray for those who are actively seeking the Good News of God found in Jesus Christ. Pray that the church will not inadvertently place barriers in front of people that prevent them from discovering the truth about Jesus.*
- *Give thanks to God for the blessing of food and drink, and all that you have eaten and drunk in the last day*
- *Pray for people whose lives are made difficult through poor pay and working conditions.*

## Meditation

The politician works to organise and control the world.  
But Christ alone knows the true path of history;  
He sees the sins that destroy human plans.

The economist gives advice based on financial projection.  
But Christ knows the true value of everything;  
He holds the future in His hands for all to see.

The entrepreneur seeks opportunities to generate wealth.  
But Christ is the source of all earthly things;  
He gives it all away with incomparable love.

The celebrities believe they can conquer the world.  
But Christ alone knows how such victory is won;  
He is known by the Cross throughout the world.

The impact of the 'great' people we read about each day,  
Is set against the only true measure of fame;  
The millions of lives saved forever by Christ.

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## Bible passage - Hebrews 3:7-11

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'If only you would hear His voice today, <sup>8</sup> your hearts might not be stubborn as in the Rebellion, the day of testing in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup> where your ancestors tested me and saw what I did <sup>10</sup> for forty years. For this reason I was angry with that generation, and I said, "Their hearts are always wandering because they do not know my ways." <sup>11</sup> So I swore in fury, "They will never enter my rest."'

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# Bible Study

## Review

Hebrews chapter 3 begins with a clarion call for God's people to hold Jesus Christ in the highest esteem, and make sure that no other figure in church history or even Biblical history is given higher prominence (3:1-6). Jesus fulfills the entire purposes of God and He has God's complete confidence and His complete authority. The writer of Hebrews seems to be someone of great personal confidence, faith and hope (3:6), and throughout our passage today, he appears to have tried to warn the early church not to behave like the people of God of the past, who showed the opposite of this; doubt and rebellion (3:8).

Yesterday, we read about the danger of giving Moses greater 'honour' than Jesus, something that may have been done by early Christians who came from a like were the people of the Old Testament. If you read the Old Testament extensively, you will find that this is a continual refrain, as book after book complains about the stubbornness of Israel and her rebellion. Indeed, the prophets spoke primarily because of Israel's inability to follow their God properly (e.g. Isaiah 30:1, Ezekiel 2:5, Jeremiah 5:23).

Most of the passage we have read today (apart from the first six words) is a quote from Psalm 95:7b-11. This Psalm was used at the time of Jesus as an introduction to worship on the Sabbath Day (Saturday), in most synagogues. If you look up this psalm you will find that it begins wonderfully with words not unlike many of our modern worship songs today 'Come, let us sing to the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!' and continues with joyous worship until half way through verse 7. Then suddenly, the tone changes, and God's worshipping people are challenged not to be stubborn, or put God to the test, or go their own ways (Psalm 95:8-11), exactly as quoted in our passage today. Hebrews warns the Christian church not to go the way of the Old Testament people of God.

The psalm refers to what is perhaps the supreme example of Israel's folly, when she refused to be guided by the Lord after they left Egypt and were wandering in the wilderness. Israel balked at entry into the Promised Land when faced with the opportunity, and they were condemned to a further 40 years of desert life before they could enter into God's promises. Looking carefully at what happened, the people of Israel were led astray by doubting God's power to protect and His power to guide. Numbers 13 and 14 reveal that Israel believed the foes arrayed against them in Canaan were too great for them to invade, so they 'tested' God's patience by refusing to accept His gift of the Promised Land. In the same way today, it is possible for people to test God because of their doubts, and so miss out on His gifts! Even today there is evidence of the same thing happening all around us, and this passage of Hebrews alerts us to it!

Israel's rebellion caused a separation with God, which is indicated here in this passage by the writer's description of God's fury, in verse 10. This shows God's emotional involvement with His people, for He yearns for their acceptance and faith. He wanted this from His Old Testament people and He longs for this from His New Testament people. So when those who claim to believe in God walk their own way, God is left frustrated and unable to deliver the blessings He longs to give. Here in this passage, we read that the people of Israel are told they will never '*enter into my rest*' (3:11); the same applies to God's New Testament people who cannot receive the full assurance of salvation or the gifts of the Spirit if they test God by doubt and rebellion.

It is worth noting the fact that this passage identifies the root of the problem here more as rebellion than doubt. Most of us experience moments of doubt about what we believe; yet we do not necessarily rebel against our Lord, we are merely searching to find our faith again. The real spiritual trouble is caused by persistent doubts that cause people to follow their own ways rather than God's ways; it was true of the people of Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 13,14), and is still true for those who rebel to this day.

Most Jewish people looked back on the Exodus from Egypt as a 'golden' era in the life of the People of Israel, when the people were liberated from Egypt to begin their journey towards the 'Promised Land' (Exodus 12-14). Unfortunately, the people slipped up and could not receive God's blessings, so let us make sure that we do not follow the same pathway. Now that Jesus has died, God will most certainly make a Bride out of His church, but that does not mean that some will not rebel and become the object of God's wrath. But this will not happen if we keep Christ before us as our comforter and guide.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage teach us about obedience and doubt?
2. Share with one another all you remember of what happened when the people of Israel sinned against God during their time in the wilderness (e.g. Exodus 16-18 and 32 and Numbers 13).
3. Is there much evidence in the life of the church of the sins mentioned in this text? If so, how, when and where may they be found?

### **Personal comments by author**

*Most of us know what it is to struggle with doubts, and we cannot deny that people do. However, part of this struggle is the knowledge that ultimately, doubt is not compatible with faith, and can never be. Doubt, whether it shows itself in stubbornness, testing God or going one's own way, is not a place of comfort and nor should it be. It is part of the journey of the soul that needs to be left behind if we are to experience the fullness of our salvation and the glory of peace with God. In some parts of the church, doubt is heralded as a form of spiritual maturity, but it is nothing of the sort. It is a place of ultimate insecurity in which there is no rest.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- **Something to think about:** Search your own soul for the insecurities of doubt. There is no shame in having doubts, but we do need to recognise that they are things that invite us to 'go further' and overcome our problems. After searching for your doubts, commit them to God and ask Him to help you deal with them appropriately, so that you can grow in faith.
- **Something to talk about:** Share with those who are close to you any concerns you may have about whether you are truly saved, and seek to listen to what others share with you. Make sure that you do not criticise people for searching for the truth, only rebelling against God.

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## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Your love draws me onwards, through even the trials and temptations of life. Your love draws me to the Cross where, inexplicably, I have nothing left to give You. I am empty before You, but You fill me up with praise, because the Cross is empty and You are alive! All glory be to You, Lord Jesus Christ!  
AMEN