

HEBREWS 3:7 - 4:13 THE NATURE OF GOD'S WORD

The third of our studies in the Letter to the Hebrews takes in most of chapters 3 and 4. In this study, rather than work our way through the passage section by section I want to take a key verse, set it in its context, and ask some relevant questions of this verse, finding our answers in the two paragraphs.

The important verse is *Hebrews 4:12*, 'For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart'.

That is our text for this Bible Study - a statement about the Word of God. Let us, therefore, ask our questions and see whether they open up the whole section of chaps. 3 and 4.

1. **What is the Word of God being referred to?**

Our question simply is this: *What is this Word of god?* Is it the whole Bible? The whole of the New Testament? Or the Old Testament? Or is it simply a passage from the Bible that is being spoken about?

The writer to the Hebrews has just made a remarkable statement about God's word, as to its nature, its effects etc. He had in mind particularly Psalm 95. Several verses of this Psalm are quoted in chap. 3 of Hebrews, and then the words are applied to the people who received this letter. Hebrews makes one or two cross references to Genesis 2:2, but it is mostly the Psalm that is being used and applied. So when the writer to the Hebrews makes this statement about the Word of God he has firstly in mind this passage from the Old Testament.

However, we ought not to stop there. Let us do a little bit of detective work. Five statements are made about this Word of God. Let us look at two of them for the moment. God's word is living: like God Himself it is alive, and it imparts life. Acts 7:38, re. "living oracles" received by Moses on Mt. Sinai. Had the character of God Himself, and could also impart life.

1 Peter 1:23, re. "the word of God that lives and abides". Used of the Old Testament in 1 Peter applied to the Gospel. What is true about Psalm 95, that it is living, is also true about other parts of God's word. Indeed, we could say that the whole of the Old Testament is living.

The second statement about the word of God is that it is "active". Or we may say it is powerful. It is like God Himself. And this need not surprise us - that God's word should be of the same character that he is. Indeed, God's word is so unlike man's word. It is self-fulfilling. It fulfils the purpose for which it was uttered. Your word or my word is so different. Sometimes people will hear us, sometimes they will not. But whether they carry out our instructions or not is another matter. Those who are parents will know what I mean. We can talk till we are black and blue in the face without any assurance that our word will be obeyed, our instructions will be heeded.

The self-fulfilling character of God's word is noted clearly in Isaiah 55:11 and Jer. 23:29. What the write to the Hebrews says is predicated of the word of God in the Old Testament. And we may say that the whole of the Old Testament is divine word. It is not only Psalm 95 that is living and active. It is the whole of the Old Testament. Am I right in interpreting it this way? Well, let us note the way the writer to the Hebrews quotes from other parts of Scripture. Ps. 110, Gen. 2, indeed dozens of references. he

believed the whole lot was spoken by God. These statements are true about all of the Old Testament, and we may add all of the New Testament too.

Application re. reading of God's word - its effects, etc.

2. **To Whom was this Word Spoken/Addressed?**

Psalm 95 was addressed to a group of persons living some years after the events of the Exodus. They were in the promised land of Canaan (dating of the Psalmist) but there were lessons which they could learn from the events of the Exodus, the warnings given to the people of the Psalmist's day were not of mere historical or archaeological interest to the people of the first century who received this letter. They were not simply digging up their past to find out what happened to a few of their ancestors. God's word was being addressed to them on the spot in the first century. Let us look carefully at the Old Testament quotations:

a. **3:7, "as the Holy Spirit says" (levgei), and not SAID**

It is clearly the word of God, it is the word spoken by the Holy Spirit that is being addressed in the here and now. The particular letter may have been penned by the human author, the writer. He was quoting various passages from the Old Testament. But what really mattered was that God the Holy Spirit was actively speaking. He had spoken to the Psalmist's generation. But His speaking had not ceased. The Holy Spirit was taking that Old Testament passage and riveting it to the consciences of these first century Christians.

b. **3:15, "while it is said, i.e. being said NOW" (ejn tw~z levgesqai)**

A repetition of the text. Why? Because a further application is being made - who were the rebellious ones? Therefore beware. And the speaking is that of God - being said, i.e. by Him. Once again the point is made about the divine authorship and the divine speaking.

c. **4:3, "he has said (sc. and keeps on speaking"), ei[rhken**

The perfect tense is used to indicate that it is God who spoke during the Psalmist's day, but He continues to speak here and now.

d. **3?13, God's "today" is still here**

The Hebrew Christians are to take certain remedial steps. They are to beware lest there be an evil, unbelieving heart in any one of them. And they are to take decisive steps - they are to exhort one another every day so that none of them will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Let's ask our question again: To whom was this word addressed? Well, the word of God was addressed first of all to the wilderness generation, those who experienced the Exodus - that mighty deliverance of God. But the word of God does not stop there. It was also addressed to the people of the Psalmist's day. The events of the Exodus, and the warnings were not simply of patriarchal interest. God had a word for them too. So here is a second generation to whom God's word comes. But as we have already seen the writer to the Hebrews is convinced that God the Holy Spirit is at that very moment speaking through his letter. The word of God spoken before is being spoken again. God's today is still here. Generation number three. But we cannot even stop at this point. For God's word about striving to enter His rest, about taking care lest there be in any one an evil unbelieving heart is addressed to you and to me - generation number 4. To whom

is it being addressed? You and me. And when we leave this place after our time together we can never be the same. The word of God will have spoken and we must go either one way or the other. either we respond to God's word or we do not. We cannot remain in neutral gear.

3. What does this Word contain?

As we turn to Psalm 95, in particular, and ask this question we receive several answers. We might ask the same question of the whole of the Old Testament or indeed of the whole of the New Testament. Time does not permit us to do this, and we restrict our remarks to the Psalm. But we notice in partial answer that God's word contains history. Information is given, even in the one or two verses quoted in the passage, about the wilderness generation. But is not simply history. It is history that is interpreted, inspired history. We do not simply learn that there were some Israelites who perished in the wilderness. We are told why they perished. They heard the word of God and they were rebellious. They did not take God at His word, and the results for them were disastrous. V. 17 says that their bodies "fell in the wilderness". The English translation is rather polite. Literally the original means that their bodies "fell", but cf. 1 Cor. 10;5 - God overthrew them - they were scattered all over the place.

In God's word we learn God's mind. We understand His reaction to things: He tells us He was angry with this wilderness generation, and this because they had had evidence of His grace and mercy for a period of 40 years. It wasn't as though they didn't have a clue as to what God was like. His presence to bless them was there day in and day out. They had experienced His mighty deliverance at the Exodus. They knew what it was to have miraculous and supernatural provision made for them, in food, in water, in

guidance, etc. he was with them in a hundred and one ways. But they went astray. God's ways are strange to them. They did not understand, in the end, the nature of spiritual things. They had not known His ways. His thoughts were higher than their thoughts. How about us?

So God's word contains history, but it is inspired history. We learn about God's assessment, His reaction to the events, and so we are in a tremendous position. We are not left in the dark about ultimate issues. This takes us on to the next point.

God's word contains encouragements and warnings. Clearly from the epistle to the Hebrews we see that God does not delight in the loss of men and women. He is not glad, rubbing His hands together when a disaster like this occurs. He has no pleasure, He says, in the death of the wicked. consequently He warns His people not to harden their hearts. The Hebrew Christians, on the basis of these warnings are to take care lest an evil heart of unbelief be present in *anyone of them*. (Spell out). Practical steps are to be taken so as to avoid this kind of heart (spell out re. exhorting one another - avoids the blind spots). Sin is deceitful. It hardens the heart. They are to be on guard every moment.

But furthermore the word of God contains promises and encouragements. God's people are to be stirred up to press on. 4:9, they are told that there is still a sabbath rest open and available to the people of God. The door has not been closed. it is not too late, for the promise of entering God's rest has been left open: 4:1. Note the encouragement of 4:10. So Christians are "to fear" (4:1); they are to strive (4:11) since they have not yet reached that final rest. They haven't arrived so they must press on. For us in society that is going down the drain too quickly, that is almost sunk in materialism. And we know that inroads are being made into our own lives. And we are troubled by it all. The word

of God contains such messages for our benefit. We are to hear , we are to listen carefully. We are to be open, brutal, frank, and deadly serious with ourselves, for we don't want to go the same way as that generation.

4. **What are the characteristics of the Word of God?**

(See notes on 4:12)

5. **What effect does the Word of God have?**

Dividing. Life)(Death. Wilderness generation.

Lays us open to the view of God Himself. (Exposition of v. 13).

6. **What should a man do when confronted with this Word?**

Injunctions of the passage. Flee to God. Don't run - hopeless.