

Katamares: 3:1 to 4:2.

3:1 Consider Jesus

Door, Shepherd, Messenger, Sheep, Priest and Apostle.

Basil the Great: According to the words of the wise Solomon in the Proverbs,² he was created. “The Lord,” he says, “created me.” And he is called “the beginning of the evangelical way” which leads us to the kingdom of heaven, since he is not a creature in substance but was made the “way” in the divine dispensation. For “being made” and “being created” have the same meaning. In fact, as he was made a way, so also was he made a door, a shepherd, a messenger, a sheep, and, in turn, a high priest and apostle, different names given according to the different conceptions. Letter 8.³

3:2–5 Faithful in God’s House

The Word of God Is Also Called Angel and Apostle.

Justin Martyr: The Word of God ... is also called “angel”⁸ and “apostle” for as angel he announces what it is necessary to know, and as apostle he is sent forth to testify to what is announced. As our Lord himself said, “He that hears me hears him that sent me.”⁹ This can be made clear from the writings of Moses, in which this is to be found: “And the angel of the Lord spoke to Moses in a flame of fire out of the bush and said, ‘I am he who is, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, the God of your fathers; go down to Egypt and bring out my people.’ ”¹⁰ ... But these words were uttered to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, an apostle, who was first the Word and appeared, now in the form of fire, now in the image of the bodiless creatures.... The Jews, continuing to think that the Father of the universe had spoken to Moses when it was the Son of God, who is called both angel and apostle, who spoke to him, were rightly censured both by the prophetic Spirit and by Christ himself, since they knew neither the Father nor the Son.... What was said out of the bush to Moses, “I am he who is the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and the God of your fathers,” was an indication that they, though dead, still existed and were Christ’s own people. For they were the first of all people to devote themselves to seeking after God, Abraham being the father of Isaac, and Isaac of Jacob, as Moses also recorded. First Apology 63. ¹¹

A High Esteem for Moses.

Chrysostom: Being about to place him before Moses in comparison, Paul led his discourse to the law of the high priesthood; for they all had a high esteem for Moses.... Therefore he begins from the flesh and goes up to the Godhead, where there was no longer any comparison. He began from the flesh, from his human nature, by assuming for a time the equality, and says, "as Moses also was faithful in all God's house." Nor does he at first show his superiority, lest the hearers should start away and straightway stop their ears. For although they were believers, yet nevertheless they still had strong feeling of conscience as to Moses. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 5.4.12

Creator and Creation.

Photius: "One who has been worthy of much more glory." He discussed in what ways Moses is equal to Christ, now he talks about Christ's superiority. "Of much more." Who is that? Christ, who is the Word incarnate. "More glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself." Now he talks about the highest superiority of God over human beings. He says Moses was a faithful ruler over the whole household, that is, over the whole people, yet Moses himself was one of them. Therefore, the humanity of Christ is worthy of so much more honor than the honor of Moses, as the creator is superior to the creation, "just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself." By "house" he means the people who were with Moses, yet Moses was one of them while Christ was the one who created the house. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 3.3. 14

Faithful Servants.

Clement of Rome: The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Christ, was sent from God. Thus Christ is from God and the apostles from Christ. In both instances the orderly procedure depends on God's will. And so the apostles, after receiving their orders and being fully convinced by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and assured by God's Word, went out in the confidence of the Holy Spirit to preach the good news that God's kingdom was about to come. They preached in country and city and appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this any novelty, for Scripture had mentioned bishops and deacons long before. For this is what Scripture says somewhere: "I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith." 15

And is it any wonder that those Christians whom God had entrusted with such a duty should have appointed the officers mentioned? For the blessed Moses too, "who was a faithful servant in all God's

house," 16 recorded in the sacred books all the orders given to him, and the rest of the prophets followed in his train by testifying with him to his legislation. Now, when rivalry for the priesthood arose and the tribes started quarreling as to which of them should be honored with this glorious privilege, Moses asked the twelve tribal chiefs to bring him rods, on each of which was written the name of one of the tribes. These he took and bound, sealing them with the rings of the tribal leaders; and he put them in the tent of the testimony on God's table. Then he shut the tent and put seals on the keys, just as he had on the rods. And he told them, "Brothers, the tribe whose rod puts forth buds is the one God has chosen for the priesthood and for his ministry." 17 Early the next morning he called all Israel together, six hundred thousand strong, and showed the seals to the tribal chiefs and opened the tent of testimony and brought out the rods. And it was discovered that Aaron's rod had not only budded but was actually bearing fruit. What do you think, dear friends? Did not Moses know in advance that this was going to happen? Why, certainly. But he acted the way he did in order to forestall anarchy in Israel and so that the name of the true and only God might be glorified. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Now our apostles, thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ, knew that there was going to be strife over the title of bishop. It was for this reason and because they had been given an accurate knowledge of the future that they appointed the officers we have mentioned. Furthermore, they later added a codicil to the effect that, should these die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. In the light of this, we view it as a breach of justice to remove from their ministry those who were appointed either by them (i.e., the apostles) or later on and with the whole church's consent, by others of the proper standing, and who, long enjoying everybody's approval, have ministered to Christ's flock faultlessly, humbly, quietly and unassumingly. For we shall be guilty of no slight sin if we eject from the episcopate men who have offered the sacrifices with innocence and holiness. 1 Clement 42–44. 18

3:6 Faithful as a Son

Faithful over Our Souls.

Ephrem the Syrian: But since he said, "as Moses," do not think that he is as Moses; "the glory of this" high priest "is greater than that of Moses inasmuch as the maker of a house has greater honor than the house." Similarly the honor of the Lord and the Son is greater than that of the servant Moses. "Every house was built by someone," but "he who created Moses" and "built all things is God. And Moses was certainly faithful," but as an assistant, "as a servant was faithful to testify to the things that were to be spoken

later.” In truth Christ is not a faithful servant like Moses, but “as a son” he was faithful, and not over the shrine of the temple but over the souls of people. In fact, “we are his house if we stand firm in his confidence” and are not brought into disorder while “in the glory of his hope.” But if we transgress, we cause his suffering. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. 19

3:7–13 *Do Not Harden Your Hearts*

He Reminds Them of the History.

Chrysostom: From hardness comes unbelief. As in bodies the parts that have become callous and hard do not yield to the hands of the physicians, so also souls that are hardened yield not to the Word of God. For it is probable that some even disbelieved those things which had already been done; hence he says, “Take heed.” ... Because the argument from the future is not so persuasive as from the past, he reminds them of the history in which they had lacked faith. For if your fathers, he says, because they did not hope as they ought to have hoped, suffered these things, much more will you. To them also is this word addressed, for “today,” he says, is “ever,” so long as the world lasts. Therefore, “exhort one another daily, as long as it is called ‘today.’” That is, edify one another, raise yourselves up, lest the same things should befall you. “Lest anyone of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Do you see that sin produces unbelief? For as unbelief brings forth an evil life, so also a soul, “when it is come into a depth of evils, becomes contemptuous”¹ and, having become contemptuous, it endures not even to believe, in order thereby to free itself from fear. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 6.3–4.2

Separation from the Living God.

Photius: Many have evil, unbelieving hearts. To have an evil, unbelieving heart means to have no faith. Evil is the love of property, wantonness, alcohol, and the like.... Beware that your heart may not become evil and unbelieving; unbelief, he says, is separation from the living God. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 3.12.3

3:13 As Long as It Is Today

Today Clearly Means for All Time.

Cyril of Jerusalem: Take also another like expression. "To this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds." ⁵ Does "to this day" mean "up to the time that Paul wrote the words and no longer"? Does it not mean until this present day and indeed to the very end? And if Paul should say, "We are come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ, having hope, when your faith is increased, to preach the gospel in lands beyond you," ⁶ you can see clearly that the phrase "all the way" sets no limit but indicates what lies beyond. With what meaning, therefore, ought you to recall the words "till he has put all enemies"? Just the same as in another saying of Paul, "But exhort each other daily, as long as it is called 'today,' " which clearly means for all time. For as we must not talk of a beginning of the days of Christ, so never suffer anyone to speak of an end of his kingdom. For Scripture says, "his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom." ⁷ Catechetical Lectures 15.32.⁸

By "This Day" He Means Daily.

Cyril of Jerusalem: "Give us this day our superessential bread."⁹ Ordinary bread is not "superessential," but this holy bread is superessential in the sense of being ordained for the essence of the soul. Not of this bread is it said that it "passes into the stomach and is discharged into the drain."¹⁰ No, it is absorbed into your whole system to the benefit of both soul and body. By "this day" he means "daily," as in Paul's "while it is called 'today.'" ¹¹ Mystagogical Lectures 5.15. ¹¹

That They Might Never Be Without Hope.

Chrysostom: He said "today," that they might never be without hope. "Exhort one another daily," he says. That is, even if persons have sinned, as long as it is "today," they have hope; let them not then despair so long as they live. Above all things indeed, he says, "Let there not be an evil, unbelieving heart." But even if there should be, let no one despair, but let that one recover; for as long as we are in this world, the "today" is in season. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 6.8.¹⁴

The Present Age Is One Day.

Severian of Gabala: He introduces the present age as one day. ¹⁵ Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 3.13.¹⁶

3:14 *We Share in Christ*

We Have Come to Be Through Faith.

Chrysostom: What is the beginning of confidence? It means faith, through which we subsisted and have come to be and have been made to share in being. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 6.4.¹⁷

3:17–19 *Unable to Enter*

They Died in the Desert.

Jerome: They died, for they could not enter the promised land. They merely looked over toward the land of promise, but they could not enter it. The Jews beheld the promised land but could not enter it. They died in the desert.... We, their children, under the leadership of Jesus, have come to the Jordan and entered the promised land. Homilies on the Psalms 10 (Psalm 76).²⁰

Because They Did Not Believe.

Ephrem the Syrian: “To whom did he swear that they should never enter his rest?” To those who did not want to obey Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb ... “So we see that they were unable to enter” the land promised to them, not because of their evil actions, even though they were wicked, but “because of unbelief” in the Word of God. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. ²³

4:1–11 *Strive to Enter That Rest*

Law Mixed with Faith.

Ephrem the Syrian: We also had the promise to enter into the kingdom through our faith and spiritual way of life, as well as those who accepted the command through the law so that ... they might possess the land granted to them. “But the message” of the law “which they heard did not benefit them because it did not meet with faith” in the hearers. “We who have believed” in Christ and his gifts “enter” faithfully “that rest.” They, on the other hand, did not enter into that rest in consequence of the vow made through David, who said, “I swore in my anger that they should not enter my rest.” ⁶ Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews 4.⁷

Faith Joins Us Together.

Photius: He says, "Not having joined themselves⁸ to the things they heard," that is, the things they believed. How was it possible for them to be joined to those things? "By faith," he says, that is, through faith. For if the latter had believed as the former had, they would have been joined together into one, since their faith would have joined them together and blended them together. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 4.2.⁹

Rest in God.

Augustine: Our heart is restless until it rests in you. Confessions 1.1.¹⁰

Order of Tears Toward Entering Rest.

Isaac of Nineveh: I am speaking of that order of tears which belongs to those who shed tears unceasingly both night and day. Whoever has found the reality of these things truly and accurately has found it in stillness. The eyes of such a man become like fountains of water for two years' time or even more, that is, during the time of transition: I mean, of mystical transition. But afterwards you enter into peace of thought; and from this peace of thought you enter into the rest of which St. Paul has spoken, but only in part and to the extent that nature can contain it. From that peaceful rest his intellect begins to behold mysteries. And thereupon the Holy Spirit begins to reveal heavenly things to you, and God dwells within him and raises up the fruit of the Spirit in you. And from this he perceives dimly ... the change nature is going to undergo at the renewal of all things.... When you enter into that region which is peace of the thought, then the multitude of tears is taken away from you, and afterwards tears come to you in due measure and at the appropriate time. This is, in all exactness, the truth of the matter as told in brief, and it is believed by the whole church. Ascetical Homilies 14.¹¹

Rest That Is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Chrysostom: He says that there are "three" rests: one, that of the sabbath, in which God rested from works; the second, that of Palestine, in which, when the Jews had entered, they would be at rest from their hardships and labors; the third, that which is rest indeed, the kingdom of heaven, where those who obtain it do indeed rest from their labors and troubles. Of these three then he makes mention here.

And why did he mention the three, when he is speaking only of the one? That he might show that the prophet is speaking concerning this one. For he did not speak, he says, concerning the first. For how could he, when that had taken place long before? Nor yet again concerning the second, that in Palestine. For

how could he? For he says, "They shall not enter into my rest." It remains, therefore, that it is this third. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 6.1.12

Sabbath Rest for the People of God.

Photius: Just as the first "rest" did not prevent there being a second rest, so neither does the existence of a second rest prevent the existence of a third and more perfect rest.... Then it is clear that there is a certain other rest beyond those rests which have been spoken of, and that this rest is hallowed not for any who happen to chance upon it, but rather "for the people of God." But truly the people of God are "those who believe" in him and who keep his commandments. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 4.3–11.13

There Remains the Sabbath of God.

Ephrem the Syrian: In fact, if Joshua, the son of Nun, who allowed them to inherit the land, had settled them and given them rest, they still would not speak at all about the "other day of rest." Indeed, Joshua made them rest, because he gave them the land as an inheritance, but they did not rest in it perfectly, as God perfectly rested from God's works, for they lived in toils and wars. If that rest was not a true rest, since Joshua himself, the giver of their rest, was urged by the wars, if this is their condition, I say, there still remains the sabbath of God, who gives rest to those who enter there, as God rested from God's works, that is, from all the works which God made. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews 4.15

The Kingdom of Heaven Is a Sabbath Rest.

Oecumenius: "Sabbath rest." Sabbath is translated "rest." Then a certain third rest remains, that of the kingdom of heaven. And he calls it a sabbath rest from the archetype of the rest of the sabbath, on which "God rested from his works." ¹⁶ Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 4.9–10.17

For You Also.

Chrysostom: But what is "after the same example of unbelief"? As if one should say, why did they of old not see the land? They had received clear evidence of the power of God; they ought to have believed. But yielding too much to fear and imagining nothing great concerning God and being faint-hearted, they perished. And there is also something more to be said, as, that after they had accomplished the greatest part of the journey, when they were at the very doors, at the haven itself, they were sunk into the sea. This I fear, he says, for you also. This is the meaning of "after the same example of unbelief." On the Epistle to the Hebrews 7.3.18