



Peninsula City Church

Anchored

Your Bible the Word of God

Michael Podhaczky

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Contents

Your Bible the Word of God3
Introduction3
1. Context, context, context3
2. What are the historical origins leading up to the passage?9
3. What kind of writing is it?10
Some Concluding Thoughts12
Appendix One13

Your Bible the Word of God

Introduction

Q. Do you think that we can read each section of the Bible the same way? If so, why?

Our theme for reading the Bible this year of being 'Anchored' in the Bible is that of the 'Word of God.' As part of this season of encouragement to read the Bible, a verse used from the Letter to the Hebrews has been used. That is,

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12 NASB).

Imagine someone who is not a Christ-follower (or even your young child or grandchild, nephew, or niece) heard you use this verse. Then they asked you what this meant, what would you say to them? How would you help them in plain English without using Christian jargon to understand what it was saying? We can all talk the talk when we are with our community. However, how many outside of our community would know what we are talking about?

Here in this brief paper, we will look at this verse from the Letter to the Hebrews. Firstly, we will look at the context in which it was written. Then secondly, due to this context, we will look at its historical origins. Finally, we will look at the various types of Bible literature used to write Hebrews 4:12.

1. Context, context, context

Q. What does Hebrews 4:12 mean?

We can all read or listen to the Bible and enjoy what is being said, and that is great. However, how many times do we stop and think about what we have just read? We all need to be more than mere readers of the Bible; we also need to study it. We need to understand why something has been said or done in what we are reading. We also need to know who the original audience was and what was being addressed in the literature to them at the time. In addition, we need to ask what was going on at the time of the writing, who said it and to who it was said. Then we need to know what was expected of the original audience and now of us. Only then can we ask what has the Spirit of God said to us from the passage/s and should be our response.

a. What is the context of this verse?

The verse mentioned that is Hebrews 4:12 is part of the third and fourth chapters of the letter. We are told that it was written to a group of Hebrews. These were Christ-followers who were attempting to live for Jesus Christ. The problem was that they were also trying to keep the Law of the Torah as well.

If we were to attempt summarising the letter to the Hebrews, it might be as follows,

"Hebrews emphasises the superiority of the Christian faith and teaches that Jesus Christ is superior to the prophets, angels, Moses and Aaron."¹

The teaching regarding the person of Jesus Christ within the letter is quite full. It has been declared that if we "Tear the page and it will bleed."²

¹ Elwell, Walter A. & Yarbrough, Robert W. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2005), 358.

² Jensen, I.L. *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), 409.

The letter can be broken down into two main sections, i.e. (Heb 1:1-7:28; and 10:19-13:25). It also has quite a large portion or hinge in (Heb 8:1-10:18). The writer shifted their emphasis within the plot at each of the segments or thought breaks. In other words, in Heb 1:1-7:28, the writer dealt with what these Hebrew Christ-followers have in Jesus Christ, i.e. Then the next section deals with the teaching on the practical outworking of this truth. The writer to the Hebrews begins this practical section with "Therefore..." outlining the hands-on ways to put the first section into practice in Heb 10:19-13:25.³

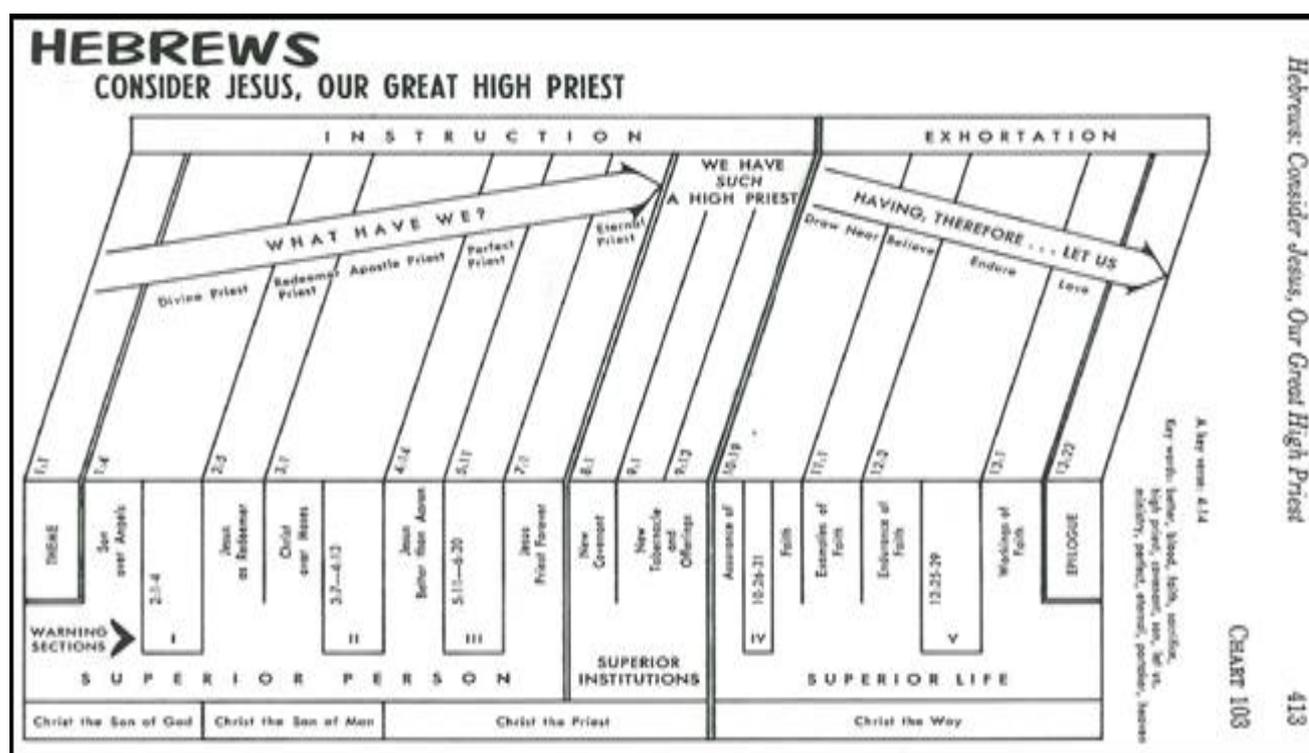
The hinge builds on the central motif of Jesus Christ as the great High Priest. Specifically, the writer pointed out a balance between right belief (orthodoxy) and proper practice (orthopraxy). Consequently, this break becomes the hinge on which the letter flexes. It is an acceptable way of seeing the letter, provided it is not forced, and the letter remains a whole.

The sections can be outlined as follows:

- Section one - teaching: 1:1-7:28
- Section three - practical: 10:19-13:25

There is one hinge, which strategically sits at the following points: 8:1-10:18

See the outline laid out below,⁴



So, the first section of the letter Hebrews 1:1-7:28 could be seen as dealing with Jesus being better (or superior) than anyone or anything to this point. As a consequence, it might be broken down as follows,

I. The superiority of Christ's person: 1:1-4 – 4:13⁵

- a. Superior to the prophets: 1:1-3

³ Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*, 410-413.

⁴ Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*, 413.

⁵ *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts: Old and New Testament*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 447-448.

b. Superior to the angels: 1:4-2:18

c. Superior to Moses: 3:1-4:13

II. The superiority of Christ's work: 4:14-10:18

a. Superior priesthood: 4:14-7:28

b. Superior covenant: 8:1-13

c. Superior sanctuary & sacrifice: 9:1-10:18

Within the letter, the writer gave five warnings to the Hebrew Christ-followers to continue living their new life in Jesus Christ. The reason for these warning was that they were attempting to live for Christ and keep the Law. So, the writer warned them not to try to live the new Kingdom of God life like that at all. These warnings were as follows,

- The first warning: Do not neglect so great a salvation: 2:1-4
- The second warning; Do not miss entering the rest: 3:7-4:13
- The third warning: Regarding spiritual immaturity: 5:11-6:20
- The fourth warning: Was to live by faith as the just: 10:26-31
- The fifth warning: Disobeying God's voice: 12:25-29

It is the second warning that we are interested in here for the context of our passage and which we are using for the Anchored theme this year.

In the second section of Hebrew 1:1-7:28 (namely, Hebrews 3:1-6, 7-4:13), the writer dealt with the subject of Jesus being better than Moses. The Hebrew Christ-followers needed to ensure that they had entered the rest by faith in Jesus Christ and not by obeying Moses. It was not through following every part of the Torah that had they entered into a relationship with God. So, it will not be by keeping the principles of the Torah that they will continue in this relationship.

The writer to the Hebrews, having introduced the matter that Jesus Christ is better than Moses in Heb 3:1-6, called Jesus Christ "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (Heb 3:1). Moses was not good and as holy as Jesus was; he was only a person who also needed salvation. The writer compared Jesus Christ and Moses by way of a building illustration,

"For He (Jesus Christ) has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honour than the house" (Heb 3:3 NASB).

Jesus Christ is better than Moses since He is the ultimate fulfilment of the Torah (Matt 5:17). The writer went on to say that these Christ-followers were (and we are also) part of this house, with a conditional clause introduced by their use of 'If' and then states the condition.

"But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end" (Heb 3:6 NASB).

i. What was the warning that the writer gave them?

The warning was that these Jewish Christ-followers were to learn from Israel's failure and not imitate them, but make sure that they enter the rest. The writer used a Psalm to highlight Israel's disobedience, i.e., Psalm 95:7-11. The writer gave this second solid warning to the Jewish Christ-followers in Heb 3:7-4:13. It dealt with an illustration from the life of Israel, who had not entered the rest of the land. That is,

⁷ “For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness; ⁹ when your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work. ¹⁰ For forty years, I loathed that generation and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. ¹¹ Therefore, I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest (it is *katapausis* Gk or יָנוּחוּ Heb., and not Shabbat)” (Ps 95:7-11 NASB).

In this section of the letter to the Hebrews, one motif sounds out; it is that of ‘entering God’s rest.’ What follows is a basic outline of entering the rest of Christ. So, what might this section of Scripture be called to highlight the warning? Here are three possibilities, and any could be helpful here.

- Christ is the centrepiece of all that we believe.
- When the promise of rest is mixed with faith.
- A strong warning against unbelief.

[For more of a breakdown on this matter, click here on](#) Appendix One.

The following outline covers all that is brought out in these three suggested headings. That is,

A. Jesus greater than Moses: 3:1-6:

1. Moses as a servant: vv2,3
2. Jesus as a Son: v6
3. Jesus greater: vv1,3

B. A warning that rejecting Jesus is more serious than rejecting Moses: 3:7-11:

1. This was based on Ps 95:7-11; cf. Ex 17:2-7; Num 14:23,28-30
2. Numerous stages of Israel’s failure:
 - i. Not hearing God’s voice: v7
 - ii. Hardening their hearts: v8
 - iii. Testing God: v9
 - iv. Going astray in their hearts: v10
 - v. Not knowing God’s way: v10
3. The result, the never entered the rest: v11

C. A warning against unbelief: 3:12-15:

1. Unbelief is evil, i.e., it is not a weakness, but a sin to be repented of: v12
2. Double protection against unbelief:
 - i. For the individual: take care (be careful): v12
 - ii. For the collective: encourage one another (exhort): v13

D. A series of important questions: 3:16-18:

1. The questions: vv16-18
2. Because of unbelief or faithlessness: v19

This kept Israel out of the promised land (the rest) their inheritance cf. Deut 3:20; 12:8,9; 25:19. So, within this context, disobedience equals unbelief.

E. Can the truth of 'rest' of God be forfeited: 4:1-10:

1. Therefore, two sides to the promise; offering something good (rest), but the possibility of missing the rest: v1
2. Not mixed with faith: v2
3. Believed (past tense), entered (present tense): vv3-5
4. We have been invited to share His rest: v4; cf. Gen 2:2; Ex 20:8-11
5. Not enter My rest: v5; cf. 3:11; 4:3
6. Disobedience (unbelief) kept them from God's promised rest: 6
7. So, unbelief, repent today of this unbelief: v7
8. The rest never fully happened under Joshua (so, *another day* in v8); even though Israel entered the land, they never fully obeyed the Lord's commands. So, they never entered fully into the possession of their inheritance (*the land*) or even permanent rest, cf. Josh 23:1-13
9. Ceased from work: v10

F. Encouragement to enter God's Rest: 4:11-13:

1. Be diligent, i.e., make every effort, for He will give you the strength to do so. The bad example of disobedience (*unbelief*): v11
2. God's word is actively alive and energetic; it is a sifter and analyser of the reflections and conceptions of the heart, even disobedience and unbelief: v12
3. The heart as to whether or not one has entered the rest is open before God. That is literally, to expose the neck, to bend backward to expose the neck, to be gabbled as in choking a person, or to be cut with a knife or sword, i.e., to be powerless or limp.

b. Which is the correct word usage here in Hebrew 4:12 for the 'Word' of God?

Three words are used in the New Testament for the word 'word.' These are the Greek words *logos*, *rhema* and *graphe*. Although they may be translated as English, they have a history and their various meanings. This problem with reading our English Bible is we do not know which one is used in which passage. If we did, it might help give us a deeper understanding of what God, through the author, was saying. Now, we can use tools to help us, like lexicons, concordances, and some Bible dictionaries. Some websites can help us; here are three examples:

<https://biblehub.com/tools.htm>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/tools/>

<https://www.bibletools.org/>

So, here we will briefly explore these three words for some understanding and see which one is used in Hebrews 4:12.

- a. *Logos* (λόγος): It is used over 330 times in the New Testament. So, John in his gospel was not the first to use it in the New Testament, but He was cutting edge in using it for the person of Jesus Christ when expressing His divinity. It was in use in the 5th century BC in Greece, so way before the New Testament usage. For example, the likes Plato, Socrates,

and Homer to mention some who were using it. It was used in Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric by the Greeks or thought process.⁶ Some of its early usages were,

“from the root λεγ leg -, to collect, to pick up, to recount, to speak...”⁷

It initially has been translated in numerous ways in the New Testament. Then as it came into the New Testament, it came to mean the words or phrases spoke and the Word of God. Here in this context of Heb 4:12, it is logos that is used.

- b. Rhema (ῥῆμα): It is used 67 times in the New Testament. Luke was the primary user of the word, i.e., he used it 32 times and John 12 out of all of the uses in the New Testament. It has the idea of a “statement, discourse, and an explanation.”⁸ The word was also in use by the 5th century BC in Greece, but its usage was far less than logos. It was usually used in the context of a spoken word or message. It is used in places like Luke 1:38
- c. Graphe (γραφή): It is used 51 times in the New Testament. It was predominantly used for the word to write or etch. However, it could mean the word in some instances but mostly meant Scripture, Scriptures or even writings related to the means written words of the Bible.

So, the words logos, rhema and graphe can have different meanings. However, they are sometimes used the Bible in the same passage. So, it is essential to check with a helpful Bible resource to help you see which word is being used when. For example,

“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings (*rhema*), has one who judges him; the word (*logos*) I spoke is what will judge him at the last day” (Jn 12:48 NASB).

However, there are times when they are interchangeable. For example, in the Letter to the Ephesians, we see that rhema is used instead of graphe.

That is, the author may use rhema for written word or Scripture instead of graphe,

“That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (*rhema*)” (Eph 5:26 NASB).

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (*rhema*) of God (Eph. 6:17 NASB).

Alternatively, the writer may have used logos instead of Rhema to refer to the spoken word,

“Some of the multitude, therefore, when they heard these words (*logos*), were saying, “This certainly is the Prophet (Jn. 7:40 NAS)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word (*logos*) they shall never see death” (Jn 8:51 NASB).

So, we can see that it is not always as clear cut as we like since there are variations to the rule. That is why we need to check what we are reading with a reliable source.

⁶ “Word frequency information for λόγος.” <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/wordfreq?lang=greek&lookup=lo%2Fgos> (9th June 2021).

⁷ Brown Colin (Gen., Ed.). “λόγος.” In *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Vol. 3: Pri-Z. (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency, 1978), 3:1081.

⁸ Brown Colin (Gen., Ed.). “ῥῆμα.” In *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Vol. 3: Pri-Z. (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency, 1978), 3:1119.

2. What are the historical origins leading up to the passage?

Q. What is meant by the progressive revelation of the Word of God?

The Bible was written over a long time by various God selected and divinely inspired authors. We need to remember there are five main views within Biblical Hermeneutics regarding interpreting passages like this one. The one which provides the most complete perspective is what is called the Redemptive-Historical View. It has been said regarding this interpretive method that,

“The historical-redemptive view succeeds in this area, neither downplaying nor centering the human role in interpreting the Scriptures, as well as in not decentering or downplaying the role of God the Holy Spirit in supernaturally causing men to see Christ in all of Scripture, the unity of the Scriptures, and how the individual Christian is a part of God’s unfolding drama of redemption.”⁹

As a result, what was revealed to the God chosen authors was progressive. For example. The writer of the Hebrews had Christ revealed to them and Psalm 95 and what was recorded in the Torah. When writing the Torah, Moses knew nothing of the Psalms or the Letter to the Hebrews.

Consequently, the Bible was not static or stagnant in what it revealed. Instead, its revelation was progressive or increasing in the revealed knowledge and understanding. Hence, it is unfolded throughout the Bible, as God revealed more about Himself and His ways. For example, the writer to the Hebrews understood the idea of progressive relation and spoke about it in their opening words,

¹ “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:1-3 NASB)

Therefore, the hermeneutical principle that God did not reveal everything all at one time but progressively throughout the time can be seen through the writing of the Bible. One Charles Hodge, a theologian of the 19th century in his Systematic Theology under the heading, ‘The Progressive Character of Divine revelation said,

“The progressive character of divine revelation is recognized in relation to all the great doctrines of the Bible... What at first is only obscurely intimated is gradually unfolded in subsequent parts of the sacred volume until the truth is revealed in its fulness.”¹⁰

In light of this, the writer to the Hebrews used an account of Israel’s disobedience in Psalm 95:7-11 to warn the current audience to enter the rest of God. The writer gave the second of these warnings in the letter to the Jewish Christ-followers in Heb 3:7-4:13. The writer used an example from the life of Israel, who had rebelled against God and had not entered the rest of the Promised Land as recorded in this section of the Psalm. That is,

⁷ “For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice (or *O that you would obey*), ⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah (Meaning, *place of strife*), as in the day of Massah (Meaning, *temptation*) in the wilderness; ⁹ when your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work. ¹⁰ For forty years, I loathed that generation and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know

⁹ Diaz III, Hiram R. “Review of Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views.” *In Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*. By Stanley J. Porter & Beth M. Stovell (eds.). (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 244.

¹⁰ Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, Vol. 1: Introduction. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 446

My ways. ¹¹ Therefore, I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest (Lit. *resting place, place of quietness, מְנוּחָה menuwachah*)” (Ps 95:7-11 NASB; cf. Ex 17:1-7; Num 20:1-13; Ps 78:15-20).

Yet, we notice that the Psalmist was speaking about an earlier time in the life of Israel's wanderings in the desert, which was due to their rebellion. The Psalmist talked about when Israel complained to Moses about having no water when camped at Rephidim, Ex. 17:1-7. Moses cried out to God for water, and He said to strike a particular rock, which Moses did, and miraculously water came out of the rock. However, due to the people's complaining, Moses named the place Massah (meaning, *place of strife*) and Meribah (meaning, *temptation*). It was this that the Psalmist used to warn their own generation in Israel, not to be like those in the desert but to enter the rest themselves. Then again, in Numbers 20, we have a similar situation where they wanted water again and complain to Moses about it. Moses reminded them of the last time this had happened, Num 20:13. However, Moses could not have known what the Psalmist would write to another generation who would find themselves in the same situation of rebellion against the Lord. So, what had been shown to the Psalmist was progressively revealed. On the same matter, the writer of this Psalm could not have known that the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews would quote them in their letter.

3. What kind of writing is it?

Q. Can we read this passage and the related passages the same way?

Here we will briefly look at what is known as genre. That is, what kind of writing styles are used here in these accounts. Well, the writer to the Hebrews wrote what is called an Epistle, i.e., a letter. The writer outlined the warning and the facts surrounding the purpose for the warning for these Hebrew Christ-followers. In doing so, the writer quoted from a section of Psalm 95, which is poetry in its style. They interpreted the information of the Psalm in light of the events of Numbers 20 and applied it to the situation that they were addressing. In doing so, they quoted Ps 95:7-8 three times in this section in Heb 3:7-8,15; 4:7b. That is,

⁷ “For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice (or *O that you would obey*), ⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah (Meaning, *place of strife*), as in the day of Massah (Meaning, *temptation*) in the wilderness” (Ps 95:7-8 NASB).

Then the writer also quoted Ps 95:11 twice, i.e., Heb 3:11 and 4:3.

“Therefore I swore in My anger, ‘Truly they shall not enter into My rest’” (Ps 95:11 NASB).

So, we see that we already have two different types of genre, a letter and poetry, which are to be read differently. In other words, we would not read poetry the same way that we would read a letter. It is the case here with these two genres.

Then when the Psalmist wrote Psalm 95, they interpreted the events recorded in Numbers 20. The section in Numbers is what is called narrative. A narrative is an account of events, which took place. The events took place in real-time in history, involving real people, real places and events. In other words, it was a story about something, which had already taken place in the past. So, this section would be read differently from the Psalm, which is poetry, not the writings of Hebrews, which is a letter.

The following are some helpful things to keep in mind when reading the different genres of the Bible.

When reading any of the New Testament letters, remember they were not written in a vacuum. They have a historical context. Most of the letters (mainly Paul's) can be found within the Book of Acts. What that means is, as we are reading the Book of Acts and come to one of the places that a letter was named after, it will be helpful to read that letter. So, it is crucial to remember the context. We do not know who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews or when they wrote it, but we know that the writer dealt with some real issues. To do this as well as we can, we need to ask three questions,

- First: What did it mean to the original audience in their setting?
- Second: What is one thing that stands out to me from my reading?
- Finally: What is to be my response to this one thing?

At the best of time, poetry can be challenging to understand even from our own culture and context. So, it will take a bit of background study to understand the nuances, images, and poetic language used when it comes to Hebrew poetry. There are usually two main ways, which people read the Psalms. One of them is just to read them, not considering the context but merely drawing on the shared human emotions and feelings. When one is crying out to our Heavenly Father and praying the words that unit our shared humanity with its highs and lows, it can be done. Therefore, as it has been pointed out,

“Psalms is one of the most practical books of the Bible, wondrously suited to the human heart.”¹¹

The other way to read the Psalms is to do some more in-depth reading and studying to try to understand its context, setting and genre as we have done here. It can be done by reading and learning about what has been written. In doing so, we may consider the why, where, who, how and the what of the Psalm. The primary source of poetry within the Bible and especially the Old Testament is the Psalms.

Then we also came across another genre called a historical narrative or a story from the past, e.g., Numbers 20. Remember that the Bible is not a history book. However, it is a mega-story made up of numerous stories all rooted in their past, like Numbers 20. The current genre considers this past context of the larger biblical narrative and its multiple interrelated stories. The most significant contextual key to remember is that God is the ultimate character, focus and hero of all narratives. It is not the people within the story. They are human and have flaws, just like all people and need redeeming. So, to get to try to understand the context of what has happened, the following three principles will be helpful. That is,

“Take It at Its Word: Three Principles.”¹²

The first principle for reading any text is to read it as it presents itself.

The second principle is to let the text interpret itself, beginning with the nearest context and expanding to include the entire Bible.

Third, reading a historical narrative accurately depends on reading a lot of it—a lot of the time. The more we read, the more we notice patterns and the intent of those patterns.

Applying these three principles can help in trying to understand the historical context found in the narrative, which one is reading. Things to look for will be,

¹¹ Jensen, Irving L. *Jensen Survey-2 Volume Set-Old and New Testaments*. (Loc. 4405 of 17908). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

¹² “How to Read Historical Narrative.” <https://www.equip.org/article/read-historical-narrative/> (10th June 2021).

“The setting of a narrative, or historical context, involves physical (specific places, objects, or activities), cultural (customs, social values, belief systems, world view, attitudes), and temporal (political, national, and world events) dimensions. These must be considered in relation and interaction with the characters and plot... While the story itself may be studied on its own for its own message, the surrounding stories, the flow of thought of the larger work, as well as its historical and cultural setting affect how the individual story is to be heard.”¹³

In closing, a helpful piece of advice needs to be offered. That is, you might be able to relate to the story or something in it. Even so, remember the original intent of the story and then, and only then, seek the application and how you are to respond.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Q. Do you think that we can read each section of the Bible the same way? If so, why?

So, in conclusion, the writer to the Hebrews built on the previous section of 1:1-2:4 ‘Christ the Son of God,’ His deity; that is, (2:5-4:13) dealing with ‘Christ the Son of Man,’ and particularly His humanity. They drew on the illustration from the Old Testament of the rebellion of Israel to the point that the first rebellious generation died in the desert. Hence, they demonstrated that this generation of Israel never entered the rest of the Promised Land or their rest in God. The writer to the Hebrews building on this challenged the Jewish Christ-followers (to whom they were writing); wanted them to learn from this and enter into the rest in Jesus Christ and His completed work themselves.

We also need to learn from this and realise that we have already entered into the rest ourselves. It happened when we were born again into the new life by faith in Jesus Christ. If that is the case, we also need to continue by faith and not by self-effort but by trusting Him to guide us, and we are to obey Him. Namely, Jesus Christ has completed the work of salvation, and we need to rest in Him and in this fact that it has been done. This understanding of the rest after the completed work was built on the truth found in Gen 2:1-3 that God completed His work and then rested. Remember, there is nothing that you can add to your salvation. As we read the Word of God, which is a sharp two-edged sword used by the Holy Spirit will cut right down into our lives. He will do this to test our life right to our very core to see if we are resting in Jesus Christ and His finished work. Be assured that He has already been trying us right into the thoughts and intents of our heart motives and will continue to do so until we breathe our last breath.

Remember that God is at work in our lives every day, every moment of the day. One of the ways He is at work is through His Word. In the hands of the Spirit of God, He continues working to transform us. That is,

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12 NASB).

The Word of God is the most excellent authoritative tool for transformation that has ever been made, whether we believe it or not. If we can accept it, God has only good for us, even if we need to suffer. If we do not, let Him do what needs to be done in us and not become more Christlike.

¹³ “Guidelines for Interpreting Biblical Narrative.” <http://www.crivoice.org/narrguide.html> (10th June 2021).

Appendix One

The warning, which came from this illustration, was that these Jewish Christ-followers should learn from Israel's failure and not copy them, but make sure that they enter the rest. The warning can be broken up into two main sections and four minor sections as follows.

- The warning: Heb 3:7-19
 - Be faithful, so “Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me...” (vv8,15): Heb 3:7-15
 - Israel's failure in the desert wanderings, so “For who provoked Him when they had heard?": Heb 3:16-19
- The rest and the rest-giver: Heb 4:1-13
 - The promise of rest, so “let us fear lest any of you come short of it” (v1): Heb 4:1-10
 - The Word used to test if one has entered the rest, so “Let us, therefore, be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall...” (v11): Heb 4:11-13

This section stands out in the writer's use of the word “today” (Heb 3:13,15; and 4:7). It is used within the context of the rest in God's, Heb 3:11; 18; 4:1,3,5,8-11. The writer to the Hebrews focuses on God having entered the rest in Gen 2:2, and Israel was to do the same but did not. The Jewish Christians needed to make sure that they followed God's example and not rebellious Israel. The language that the writer used of Israel's failure to enter the rest was very strong. For instance, note the following,

- “Do not harden your hearts...they provoked Me” Heb 3:8
- “...your fathers tried Me by testing Me” Heb 3:9
- “...I was angry with this generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways’” Heb 3:10
- “I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest’” Heb 3:11
- “Take care...lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God” Heb 3:12
- “...lest anyone of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” Heb 3:13
- “Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me” Heb 3:15
- “...who provoked Him” Heb 3:16
- “...whom was He angry for forty years? ...those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?” Heb 3:17
- “...to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?” Heb 3:18
- “...they were not able to enter because of unbelief” Heb 3:19
- “...let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it” Heb 4:1
- “...we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” Heb 4:2
- “...we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest’” Heb 4:3

- “Although His works were finished from the foundation of the world” Heb 4:3
- “They shall not enter My rest” Heb 4:5
- “...failed to enter because of disobedience” Heb 4:6
- “...Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” Heb 4:7
- “...be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience” Heb 4:11

The writer to the Hebrews then helped them see the power of the Word of God in this whole process, to illuminate how that Israel in their heart had fallen short of entering the rest in God. They used phrases like,

- “Do not harden your hearts,” Heb 3:8
- “They always go astray in their heart” Heb 3:9
- “An evil, unbelieving heart” Heb 3:12
- “Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me” Heb 3:15
- “Do not harden your hearts” Heb 4:7

Then they use the following illustration warfare on the inner being of the person through the divine use of the Word of God,

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12 NASB)

It is the case for all, and no one can hide from God, which comes through strongly in this translation,

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable” (Heb 4:13 NLT)