



# Knowing what the Hebrews knew

Old Testament background for Hebrews 3:1-4:13



## God's rest

The Old Testament begins with a description of God creating the world in six days (Genesis 1:1-2:1).



Read about what God did on the seventh day in Genesis 2:2-3. *This is quoted in Hebrews 4:4.*

## A story of miracles and rebellion

Very early in the biblical story, God chose Abraham and told him that He would bless all nations on earth through him (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham became known as "the father of all who believe" (Romans 4:16). Among other things, God told Abraham that his descendants would be oppressed as slaves for 400 years, after which God would punish the oppressors and deliver His people (Genesis 15:13-14).

Abraham's grandson Jacob, also known as Israel, took his family to live in Egypt (Genesis 46-47). God had brought Israel's son Joseph to a position of power in that country (Genesis 45). However, as the generations passed, the Egyptians forgot about Joseph and began to oppress the people of Israel (Exodus 1). God chose an Egyptian-raised Israelite named Moses to lead His people out of slavery, revealing His own name to Moses as "the LORD" (the name is literally translated "I am") (Exodus 2-4).

Through a series of miracles, including terrible plagues, the LORD commanded the Egyptian Pharaoh to let the Israelites go (Exodus 5-10). Pharaoh stubbornly refused until the final plague struck, in which all of the firstborn Egyptians died suddenly (Exodus 11:1-12:33). The Israelites were freed, but Pharaoh then changed his mind, sending his army after them. Trapped by the Red Sea, the Israelites appeared to be headed for destruction before the LORD intervened again. This time He parted the sea for the Israelites to pass through, while the pursuing army was drowned as the waters returned (Exodus 12:34-15:21).

Once on dry land, drinking water and food were hard to come by, and the people continually and bitterly complained. However the LORD miraculously provided drinking water, bread from the sky (called manna) and meat (in the form of quail) (Exodus 15:22-16:36).



With this background in mind, read what happened next in Exodus 17:1-7, at a place that came to be known as Massah and Meribah. *This story is a key to understanding Hebrews 3:7-4:13.*



## A song that looks back

Joshua became the leader after Moses died, and he led the people of Israel into the promised land beyond the desert. Centuries later the people of Israel were living in that land under the rule of a series of kings. A large number of songs called "psalms" were composed, including many traditionally thought to be written by King David. One of those psalms directly referred to the events of Exodus 17:1-7.



Read Psalm 95. *The last four and a half verses of this Psalm are quoted in Hebrews 3:7-11, and Hebrews 3:12-4:13 is basically a mini-sermon based on those quoted verses.*



# Engaging with the message

Questions & answers for Hebrews 3:1-4:13



## Hot spots

- 1) What's alive for you in this passage? (Things that stand out, "aha" moments, questions you have, etc)



## Digging into the passage

- 2) Jesus is compared with Moses in 3:2-6. In what ways does the author show Jesus to be (a) similar to Moses and (b) different to Moses?
- 3) "Rest" is a key theme in this passage. Re-read all of the references to rest and then write one sentence that you think summarises what is meant by "rest" in this passage.



## Connecting life and faith

- 4) The author warns of the danger of being deceived by sin (3:13).
  - a. What is one specific sin that is deceptive?
  - b. What is deceptive about it?
- 5) Why do you think the Israelites rebelled, despite seeing so many spectacular miracles?
- 6) In what specific way(s) is the story of the Israelites' rebellion relevant to you in your faith journey?
- 7) How can you guard yourself against hardening your heart (eg 3:15) and so missing out on God's rest?
- 8) Describe a time when you experienced the word of God as "alive and powerful" and/or exposing your "innermost thoughts and desires" (4:12-13).