

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

*...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)*

## **Completing Well (Part 1)**

*Hebrews 3:7-19*

*12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end...*

Last week we began this portion of Hebrews by examining a brief history of Israel from the exodus from Egypt up to their approach into the Promised Land. Remember that the main premise of our look into this time of Israel's history was encapsulated in the phrase, "It is possible to begin well yet finish poorly." Of the 600,000 men of fighting age, we noted that only two, Joshua and Caleb, had a genuine faith in the power of God to deliver Israel safely into the Promised Land. The rest of those men perished in the desert. We noted that their faith, although was enough to have them follow God and Moses into the desert; and was enough to see and experience the miracles and blessings of God which included the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of the army of Pharaoh, the pillar of cloud and fire, the water from the rock and the feeding of the people with manna and quail, was not strong and real enough to keep them from hardening their hearts against God, of grumbling and complaining against the works and workers of God and therefore was not a genuine saving faith. These were people whose "spiritual" experience started off with a bang yet fizzled out in the end.

And from such a history of Israel, we learned that the same is true and often common today. That there are many in the church who see and experience the miracles and blessings of God, including seeing the hand of God genuinely regenerate souls unto repentance and faith, and the partaking of fellowship among God's people. Yet, like so many in Israel at the time of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, while they may partake of many of the blessings of God, while they may have an experience or two in the past, having prayed some prayer or had some type of a change of heart for a time, those experiences have not been accompanied in some time with a real longing and heart for God; such experiences have not resulted in a continual and ongoing pursuit of God expressed by an ever-increasing desire to know God, to love God, to serve God and to rightly fellowship with His people. Many have started well only to finish poorly.

And remember then that this is the main concern of the author of Hebrews at this juncture of the letter. We began this morning by again reading Hebrews

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3:12-14, which constitutes the second warning passage of Hebrews, a warning against a disbelieving heart. We saw last week that two of the symptoms of a disbelieving heart, as seen in verses 8 and 9, are “provocation – or rebellion” and “tried – or the attitude of testing God.” These symptoms also reveal themselves as negativism and grumbling. In other words, we must examine our lives and see if we are more often than not characterized by attitudes of negativism and grumbling rather than attitudes of trust and joy in the person and workings of God.

So, as we continue on in our passage this morning, let me once again outline the text, showing where we have been and then allow the Holy Spirit to teach us as we move further on. We have broken down this warning text into three smaller thoughts, the first of which we will conclude today:

- I. A warning to listen to (3:7-11)
- II. A warning to learn from (3:12-14)
- III. A warning to live out (3:15-19)

## **I. A Warning to Listen to (3:7-11)**

Now again, we have already began examining this first warning, a warning to listen to as seen in verses 7-11.

### **A. Israel's Past (3:7-9)**

We started and have already commented again with the first thought, the consideration of Israel's history in verses 7-9. Remember that all these verses come to us from Psalm 95, a Psalm that was used every Sabbath evening to call the Jewish people to worship. It was a call to specifically “hear” or listen to the voice of God and not follow in the footsteps of their ancestors who upon hearing the word of God rebelled against it and tried God's love, mercy and patience.

### **B. God's Pronouncement (3:10-11)**

Having considered Israel's past, we now move on to seeing God's pronouncement. What is the result of Israel having hardened her heart? In short, what is the inevitable result for those, who although may have had some past experience with God, but yet no longer wonder and glory in Him today? I see three things:

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## God's Anger (3:10a)

The first result of provoking and trying God is the experience of anger. Note how verse 10 begins, *"There, I was angry with that generation..."* Can you believe it, God was angry. With what would He have been angry with? The idea of anger here is being weighed down by something irritating. How many of you have ever been angry with a fly? I mean, here is one of the smallest of insects, and it is an insect that in general does not sting or hurt you. But if one of these little creatures flies around your head, you swat at it. No big deal, but if it is pesky and keeps on flying around your face, do you not get weighed down with irritation and begin to swat more ferociously and with anger? Although God does not get exhausted, the idea of anger here is that we are trying to exhaust God with constant grumbling or complaining. Remember that grumbling, complaining, negativism and contempt were the marks of the disbelieving Israelites who did not enter the Promised Land. How much more devastating is the person who says they trust in Jesus, yet their lives are marked by grumbling, complaining, negativism and contempt for the God's person and His people? Such attitudes are gross sins that ought not to ever find a place or hearing in the people of God. Such attitudes are sins that anger the Lord God. And one of the lessons we must learn is that God is never passive or indifferent to sin. His anger against sin is every bit as robust and powerful now as it was against Israel then. Only now, as Romans 2:5 says people are storing up wrath for themselves:

***But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,***

Do not forget, beloved, that while we may find it difficult to see the so-called gross sins like murder, stealing, lust and the like in our lives (although they are there), the sins of grumbling, complaining, negativism and contempt anger God just as much. In fact, as we have already examined much of the Exodus and Wilderness Wanderings in this regard, note with me what God says concerning those who did grumble, complain and show contempt toward God in Number 14:20-23

***So the LORD said, "I have pardoned them according to your word; 21 but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. 22 Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times***

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***and have not listened to My voice, 23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.***

And here then is the lesson we must learn; if God was angry with Israel, a people whom He revealed Himself and His power to by delivering them from the physical bondage of Egypt, how much more angry will God be with those who have heard the gospel, felt its power, known its importance and yet by either direct or indirect rebellion have turned away from living out the gospel because of stubborn defiance and disbelief?

We must know that the anger of God is no temper tantrum. God's anger is a revelation of who He is and He is holy. Sin is a violation of His holiness. In a small sense we might experience this type of anger if we found our home broken into and our belongings violated. And while the punishment of sin has been taken care of for the elect in Christ, the penalty and presence of sin in humanity is awaiting the day in which it will be eliminated. This is why the author of Hebrews would write in Hebrew 10:31, *"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* God's anger against Israel only resulted in a portion that did not see the Promised Land. God's anger against unrepentant and rebellious sin will result in a portion who will not enter into Heaven.

## **God's Assessment (3:10b)**

The second result of provoking and trying God is seen in the next part of verse 10, what I am calling God's assessment. We read, *"And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways.'"* This is God's assessment of Israel; they are a people who "always go astray in their heart." The word for "astray" is interesting. It is the Greek verb "planao" from the noun "planets" from which we get the word "planet." The basic meaning of the word is "to wander around or wander off" as the planets were seen as wanderers in the sky. In Biblical usage it speaks of wandering from the truth; of being deceived or seduced away; to be lead astray. This word then graphically depicts the condition of an unregenerate man's heart; it is a heart that wanders away from the ways of God. It does not mean that this person does not know the ways of God in some degree or fashion, but rather that upon knowing what God desires and requires of him, he nonetheless determines to go some other way, his own way. The person who does not know God cannot "go astray" in this way. Only the person who has made a profession of faith, who says they want to follow God and then gives up that profession and desire, regardless of how subtle or dramatic, this is the person that goes astray.

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Our author also, quoting from Psalm 95, makes reference to the heart, the “kardia.” The heart is not simply the organ that pumps blood, but rather refers to the whole of a person. It includes not only his emotions, but also his mind, his will and his attitude. With God, there is no place for partial obedience or part-time believers. The rebel, the provocateur, the tester of God is one who has allowed his heart to have contempt and disbelief concerning the ways of God.

And is this not exactly what the next portion of our text indicates. When asking the question, why did Israel go astray out there in the wilderness? The answer is given, *“They did not know My ways.”* Listen well, beloved. Do we not have a tendency to think, *“If people just know more about God and His Word, then they would most certainly walk in it.”?* But what do we have before us. Israel was well-acquainted with God’s Word. Israel had heard it many times. The issue is not in hearing the word, but rather in living the word. As James 1:22 says,

***But prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves.***

Oh dearly beloved, it is so possible for a person to come to church week after week. To love the preaching of the Word; to support the ministries of a church; to associate with the people of God and yet never become doers of the Word. Those Israelites who fell in the wilderness, of whom God says, “They did not know My ways” did not fall because of ignorance to the word, they had heard it. If they had desired to learn the ways of God, it was right there before them. Rather than falling because of ignorance, they fell because of indifference to the Word. And many well-meaning people will fall short of the glory of God, not because they did not know the books of Bible, or did not know the truths taught be the church, but because they did not allow such things to change their lives regularly and daily.

This message is not for the person who has never darkened the door of the church. Rather the warning is to those in the midst of the fellowship. Too many are quick to hear the Word, but just as quick to plead ignorance of the Word. “I didn’t know that is what God wanted” will not be an accepted excuse before the throne of God. To sit under the teaching of God’s word and yet intentionally allowing your heart and mind to wander and ignore the clear meaning and application of such teaching to your life is spiritual suicide. In spite of your attempts to avoid God’s Word, you are still guilty. Do not squander the opportunity to really know God’s Word; and by knowing God’s Word, I mean understanding it with the intention of living it out in your life. Israel was called to

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listen to the voice of God, “Today” – that is right now. Perhaps you have squandered opportunities to know and grow in God’s Word in the past, but the question before you is not “Did you listen?” but rather “Are you listening now?” and “Are you listening ‘today’?” Do not procrastinate your repentance any longer. Rather than turning away from God, pray that you would fully turn to God.

### God’s Action (3:11)

This brings us to the third, final and most heart wrenching result found in disregarding and disbelieving God, be it ever so slightly. This third result is seen in God’s action. What will God say or do to those who, although they began well end poorly because they ultimately do not believe what God has done and said? Verse 11 holds the answer, “As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”

When Israel was out in the wilderness grumbling and complaining against Moses and the promises of God, did God just turn an eye and say, “Oh, it will be alright, they just do not understand.” No, God expected Israel to understand and He did not turn His back on their sin. Look at God’s action against Israel after the scene at Kadesh-Barnea when the people grumbled against Moses and the good report of the two spies. The Lord reports to Moses that He is ready to smite and destroy them. So Moses intercedes for Israel and Lord relents from the fullness of His anger. But follow along with what is said in Numbers 14:26-33;

**26 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27 "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. 28 "Say to them, ' As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; 29 your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. 30'Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. 31 Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey — I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. 32 But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. 33 Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness.**

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The action of God against Israel's disbelief was not allowing them to enter the promised rest of the Promised Land. For 430 years Israel had been under the burden and bondage of slavery. God sent Moses, the deliverer, who was to take them to the Promised land where, in a matter of a few short weeks, they would worship freely the LORD their God and work freely the land God had promised their forefathers. But, they did not listen, really listen to the voice of God. They sought their own comfort and pleasures in this world and therefore forfeited the bliss of God.

A word that we will come to know much better in the messages ahead is the word rest. Our text says that God swore, made an oath, in His wrath, they shall not enter My rest. What is the "rest" of God? Suffice it to say for now that the "rest" of God had more to do than simply entering the land of Canaan. Some have referred to this "rest" here as having something to do with our spiritual growth. The concern of this text is not about people who are having a problem growing spiritually. It is not about people who share common failures as sinful beings but rather it is about people who completely fail, who fail to really understand who God is and what He has done. This life is not about what man can do. The Tower of Babel proved that. Rather, this life is meant to be a display of what God does do. First, what He has done in the redeemed and second what He will do with those who disbelieve. The redeemed are to live by the principle expressed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 which says,

***14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.***

To live for Christ is true rest, as we will come to see more clearly in the weeks ahead. But to live for self, placing self first over God and others is to not enter that rest. In this context, rest is the cessation of wandering and wondering. It is to be in the protective care and presence of the Creator God. It is to see the ever fulfilling realities of His promise to lead and guide you. Right now we live by faith, with an assurance that despite what this world offers me, regardless of what this world hands me, irrespective of what my flesh may desire, I know, I know, I know in my heart that I am headed for a better country and that God will lead me there if I but continue to trust in Him as evidence for me by my living for Him.

Do not be as the many, however, who continue to tinker and toy with the idea of living for and serving God with all your heart. Be on guard for the attitude

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that wants to see God do just a little more, be more evident, be more real, be more accommodating to your propensity to sin. For a day will come when the LORD will say, “You have had enough evidences and enough time to come. It is no longer “Today” but tomorrow. The time is past and you are found wanting for real faith.

What we must learn from this warning to listen to is that if Israel was said to have had enough evidence to faithfully follow God via His servant Moses, how much more evidence do we have today to follow God via His Son Jesus Christ? We know that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of His people. We know that He rose again on the third day. We know that He has promised eternal life to those who trust Him. We know that He promised to come again to take His followers home. And yet, do you not find it a shocking statement of our Lord, who in Luke 18:8 is recorded as saying,

***However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"***

If the size and fervor of the so-called evangelical community meeting on this day is any indication, then there the answer to Jesus’ question would be, “Calm down, LORD, you will have no problem at all finding faith on the earth.” Unless of course the Lord knows something that we don’t, that not all who come to Him on that day saying, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven. Rather they will hear the words, “I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness.” These are people who will feel sure of themselves, but who obviously never stopped to concern themselves with what God thinks of them.

Just last week I learned that one of my credit card numbers had been stolen and several thousands of dollars were trying to be charged to my account. I am most grateful for my credit card company who quickly contacted me to verify the charges. What could have been thousands of dollars illegally charged to my account ended up only being one charge of \$6.44. But after I received the warning of these illegal charges, I got online and checked my account at least once a day to make sure no further false charges were being made until we could close the account. I was assured by the credit card company that no more charges would be made, but I wanted to make sure, so I checked repeatedly and continually and to be sure, one more charge did come in.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Christian life is no different in some respects. The promise of God is certainly complete and sufficient that “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). We must never doubt this promise and this word of God. We should however, be concerned with our own hearts that can easily deceive us into thinking we are



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something we are not and can easily seduce us into thinking we can live how we want, even in violation of God's expressly revealed word, and yet be promised eternal life. We must check the status of our account every day, not because God's promise is not sure, for it is, but the only way we know if we have an account with the living God is if we are living according to the terms. You see, God has promised a regenerated life. He has promised a life that strives for holiness and despises sin. He has promised a life that increases in the knowledge and understanding of His Word. He has promised a life that grows in faith, in love and in godliness. Are these things true of you? Are these your desires? Beware of a disbelieving heart that says to you such things are not necessary. Let us heed the voice of God 'Today.' Let us listen to the word of God. A good summary of what we must practice from our Hebrews 3 text is found for us in 2 Peter 1:2-10 and I close with this,

*2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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