

## Hebrews Study Session 6 - 3:7-19

Last week we began our study of Hebrews 3. As mentioned, chapters 3 & most of chapter 4 go together. The main theme of these two chapters is remaining faithful to God. To do this the author of Hebrews used two examples in order to make the case for how important it is to be faithful to the Lord who saved us. Last week we examined the positive example which was a comparison between Moses and Jesus. While Moses was a faithful servant, Christ was faithful as the Son of God. Thus, the Word of Jesus is superior to the word of Moses. This week we're going to look at the end of chapter 3 in this session. This will be the negative example or the example of faithlessness and unbelief. At the end of this session we're going to be introduced to the believer's rest or God's rest. It is a truth used in Hebrews ten times (twice in chapter 3 and eight times in chapter 4). It is critical to understand the link between faith and the believer's rest in order to understand this passage of Scripture.

### II. The negative example of the wilderness generation of Israelites [Read Hebrews 3:7-11]

#### A. The example given.

The author makes the shift from the example of Jesus and Moses' faithfulness to God to the faithfulness of the wilderness generation.

Q: What is the first word of v.7? (*therefore*)

Q: What do we do when we encounter this word in Scripture? (*It lets us know that the point which is about to be made is going to be built upon or is parallel to what we just said. So we need to remember what was just said in vv.1-6 mainly that Jesus and Moses were both faithful, as well as the other points from last week.*)

Notice that the author again is making a lengthy quote from the Old Testament. Again, rather than giving any credit to the human author, the writer of Hebrews points to the Holy Spirit being the source of the Scripture. The author has a very high view of Scripture and inspiration.

"Says" - this word is in the present tense. It means that it's an ongoing communication. The author was saying that the Holy Spirit is speaking to his audience right now. What was spoken in the past was of immediate relevance to the listeners at that very moment they heard it. This construction of words is used in one other place in the New Testament. Paul was planning on returning to Jerusalem where he and everyone else knew it was extremely dangerous for Paul to venture. A prophet, Agabus, makes a prophecy concerning Paul.

**[Read Acts 21:11]** - The words spoke by Agabus had immediate relevance for Paul at that very moment. Paul needed to heed these words immediately.

Q: What implications does this have for us today? (*That we need to be attentive to what God says to us and consider that it needs to be acted upon immediately.*)

Q: What are some of the factors that keep us from acting immediately on the Word of God as we hear it?

One factor that kept this small body of believers from acting upon the Word of God as they heard it preached to them was that they were wavering in their faith. They were having doubts as to whether they should remain firm in their commitment to Christ or return to the teachings of Moses under the Law.

**[Read Psalm 95:7-11]** - The main point of this Psalm is how Great our God is and how worthy He is of our praise, thanksgiving and faithfulness. There are two places mentioned here that are significant due to what happened at these places. (The order of the two places was reversed in Hebrews from Psalms)

a) Massah - it is a place in the wilderness. However it came to mean “rebellion”. This event happened when the twelve spies returned from the Promised Land and ten gave bad reports.

**[Read Numbers 14:6-11]** - From this point on, rather than just saying “rebellion” (against the Lord) the Lord often used the word “Massah” to remind them of their rebellious heart.

b) Meribah - it is another place in the wilderness. It came to mean testing. Not God testing them but the congregation putting God to the test where they demanded proof that He was still with them. There was no water and they believed God had deserted them and left them to die.

**[Read Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:13]** - This means to test the Lord and provoke Him to action (and anger). Taken together, these are the places where God’s past redemption was forgotten. Divine promise no longer motivated the people.

Q: What motivates you to do God’s will?

In v.8 the exhortation for the original audience (and us) was not to harden their hearts like the wilderness generation did. Harden means to “*dry up, or stiffen, to lose resilience and become hard and brittle, thus to render stubborn*”. In context of both the Old Testament passages and Hebrews harden means to disobey the voice of the Lord in accordance with one’s own desires. The tense of the verb “harden” is in the aorist. This means that the hardening happened in the past and those hearts are still hardened at the time the writer brought it up. The hearts of the wilderness generation were always hard is the implication. Like all people, they began life as spiritually lost. The difference is that they had seen the wonders of God repeatedly and still refused to believe God’s promises and constant presence were true.

Q: What are some of the traits of a spiritually hardened heart? (*it is a heart of unbelief, unfaithfulness to anything except itself, unteachable, unseeing (of God and His activity), and others but these fit the current contexts*)

Q: How does a heart become hardened? (*quit trusting God, forgetting God's past works on our behalf, and other responses*)

Q: Look at v.9 - what made the hardening of the hearts of the wilderness generation so heinous? (*they had seen the mighty works of God in person and often*)

Q: What was the charge brought against the wilderness generation v.10? (*they always go astray in their hearts and do not know God's ways*)

Q: How many years did the wilderness generation wander? (*40 years*)

Look at the charge that they go astray in their hearts. This is the accusation that they truly don't know God at all. They are the community of the covenant yet they have not fulfilled any of the conditions or terms of the covenant made with them at Mt. Sinai. Their inner state was not right with God. God is never passive or indifferent when it comes to sin. To neglect the opportunity to remain faithful to God is serious business. Their faithlessness was not a passing state for them but rather it was who they were for the entire 40 years.

[Tom G's comment on God's goodness: This shows the extreme mercy and goodness of our Lord in that the wilderness generation never softened their hearts - never chose to believe God and truly trust Him - and despite this God always took care of them and provided for them in abundance even while wandering in the desert. God's love is far above what we can imagine as these people deserved nothing from God due to their constant rebellion against Him and yet, even knowing their hearts - God continued to shower them with His love and mercy. My note on Tom G's note: This goes along with the thought from our last study in "The Perfect You" by Andrew Farley where he comments on **Romans 2:4** - "*Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*" God's amazing patient love to these people was intended to lead them to repentance but they never chose that path.]

Q: What was the consequence of the wilderness generation's rebellion and testing of God? (*v.11 - they would not enter God's rest*)

The force of the oath in v.11 could be translated "If they enter My rest, then My name isn't God!" As we know, the entire generation (other than Joshua and Caleb) died wandering in the wilderness and never entered the Promised Land.

Q: Are there any differences between the covenant made with the Israelites through Moses to the covenant we now live under? (*yes - grace opposed to Law. Ours in an unconditional covenant rather than one based upon conditional promises*)

This point is critical to make at this point in the passage. We live in a completely different (and as will be made very clear in later chapters) and totally superior covenant relationship to God than did the wilderness generation, or any Old Testament generation for that matter. This illustration and example that the author is giving is about to be explained in the next

section of the chapter. It's all too easy to take what was said in the Old Testament and apply it directly to the New Testament believer without taking into account the nature of the covenant we live under now and thus apply those differences when we seek to get to the real meaning of the passage.

If you were to sum up vv.7-11 you could say that the author is telling his listeners that Judaism is not the way to enter into God's rest. The voice of God speaking now should not be neglected.

B. The meaning of the example for us.

The author now makes the shift from the faithlessness of the wilderness generation to the faithfulness of those hearing this sermon.

### [Read Hebrews 3:12-19]

In v.12 the author immediately brings the hearers back from the Old Testament example to the here and now. "*Take care*" - this is present active imperative" - a command. "*See to it now*" is a way it could be taken or translated.

Q: Is the author accusing any of his hearers of having an "evil, unbelieving heart"? (*no*)

Q: Putting v.12 in context, who had the evil, unbelieving heart? (*the wilderness generation*)

Evil - this word describes essential character and means hurtful, degenerate, guilty, or calamitous.

Unbelieving - disbelief, faithlessness. This is a serious word as it discusses the condition of a one's faith. In Hebrews unbelief is not a lack of faith but a refusal to believe God.

This phrase stands in stark contrast to the faithfulness of Moses and Jesus.

Fall away - means to instigate rebellion, to withdraw or desert. It's not falling down as it is an internal or heart rebellion against another, God in this case.

In other words, the author is saying "*Don't harden your hearts like those people did.*" When they continually, habitually exhibited this sort of evil, unbelieving heart, they fell away (withdrew) from the living God. There are two critical points here:

1) The wilderness generation did not rebel against a doctrine but rather against a living God.

2) It is critical to understand that the author is describing the condition of the ancient Israelites and not the small Christian congregation. However, the force for the Christian congregation hearing this message is that they aren't threatening to turn away from a dead doctrine, like Judaism was, but rather to rebel against the living God. They might counter and say, "*Well, we aren't really falling away from God since the Jews serve the same God as the Christians.*" However to turn away from God's highest revelation of Himself (Jesus Christ) is to turn away from God. We are responsible to live our lives according to the highest revelation God has given us, which is always Jesus Christ. He's above the angels and Moses.

This is the first exhortation given to the believers in this portion of the chapter. He's saying, "Don't be like them! The evil and unbelieving heart that fell away from God are their characteristics, not yours (who are in Christ)." Another way to put v.12 is "*Are you saying that you're lost and that you have something in common with those people in the desert?!*"

Q: What is the second exhortation found in v.13? (*But encourage one another*)

Encourage means to "*draw near, to invite, to comfort, or give one's desire*"

Q: How often did the writer call for these believers to encourage one another? (*daily*)

Q: Why do you think they needed daily encouragement? (*they had daily troubles, doubts, and temptations - they don't give into the deceitfulness of sin and thus grow hardened*)

It is important to note that the word "hardened" here in v.13 is aorist, like in v.8 but this time it is passive. This means that the hardening is a result of some external force acting upon the heart. We know from the verse that it is sin which hardens the heart. Once the deceitfulness of sin takes off in a believer's life, their heart will begin to harden thus missing the experience of the Holy Spirit's indwelling in his life.

Q: Instead of imitating the wilderness generation's ways, what are some ways we can encourage one another today? (*all sorts of answers*)

Q: What does the author say is the real danger for the believers in v.13? (*being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*) (Hardened is the same word as in v.8 - becoming stubborn through sin)

This is something that the modern American Christian avoids and downplays. Commitment to the Christian community of one's local church is essential to receiving the encouragement necessary to avoid the hardening of one's heart. Christian fellowship is necessary to remain active and faithful to God. The word "daily" means that this should be habitual. You need to be encouraged daily and those others in your faith community need to be encouraged daily. Spiritual growth and resisting sin's deceitfulness is impossible without engaging other believers in our local church body.

When I was a boy, we went to Arizona and saw the Petrified Forest. It's a bunch of trees that turned to stone. The trees looked like statues of trees (those that weren't broken) yet they were rock hard. This is a good picture of the term hardened. It's something that was alive and soft but has become brittle and stone-like in nature. Sin does this to believers without daily encouragement from one another.

Q: What are some ways in which a believer might have their heart unhardened? (*a lot of possible answers but one is encouragement from others daily*)

We see that the author sees these people as saved in that they have become partakers of Christ. "Have become" is in the perfect tense meaning that their salvation was fully completed in the past time - there is nothing more that they need to do in order to be saved. This is important

to understand the condition that is coming up in this sentence. The stress of the author is on the privilege of being in Christ rather than on any work that they are doing for Christ.

“if we hold fast” - this is a condition of the third class that is identical in construction to the condition in v.6 we examined last week. It is called the “more probably future outcome” condition. So, a good English translation is to replace the “if” with “as you would expect”. Thus a reading would be *“For we have become partakers of Christ and as you would expect then we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”* As mentioned at the beginning of the verse with the perfect tense concerning their salvation, it is assured and final. There is no work that needs to be done. The author is assuming then they, as partakers in Christ, will hold fast because that’s what believers do. Since we are partners with Christ, we should not be tricked into rebellion against God.

The word “partaker” is a business term used of a firm business partnership based upon a solid guarantee between the two parties. It speaks of a partnership conceived upon binding terms of the partnership.

Q: What is the nature of our partnership with Christ? *(it is based upon a firm guarantee by Him of our complete salvation when we put our faith in Him, and other things...)*

Assurance is a compound word that means to set something under something else for support. We have assurance that this table top will remain in place because the legs of the table support it from below.

Q: What does the author mean by “the beginning of our assurance”? *(What are believers like when they first come to salvation? How confident and bold are they? This is how the wavering believers still need to be in their Christian walk. Do you remember some of the things these people endured when they came to know Christ? (insults, persecution, forfeiture of homes, etc.))*

Notice the similarities between the condition of v.6 and v.14.

Q: What is the believer to hold fast to? *(confidence - assurance)*

Q: How long is the believer to hold fast to these traits? *(until the end)*

Q: What do you think these two passages reveal to us about the genuine Christian life? *(many options but that there is a quality of durability or perseverance to the genuine Christian life. Oswald Chambers says that perseverance is not just gritting one’s teeth and hanging on but rather it is enduring with the full fruits of the Holy Spirit such as peace and joy with full confidence in the Lord - a boldness in Him and His plan.)*

Q: What is the believer exhorted to do in v.15? *(listen to the voice of God and not refuse to believe Him - or not harden one’s heart. The Holy Spirit indwelling the believer gives the believer the choice of how to respond to the Word of God.)*

**[Read Romans 12:1-2]**

Q: What does Paul urge Christians to do in these two verses? (*present their bodies to God as a living and holy sacrifice, don't be conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewing of one's mind*)

Q: What are ways God can use to renew our minds? (*the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church - the key is listening to God instead of the voices of the devil and this world*)

Now take the church as one way to hear God's voice. This goes in line with what the author has been saying about encouraging each other daily. If we remove the church from our lives consistently, then we miss out on one way God is speaking to us.

There are then three questions that the author asked, more like rhetorical questions, that are meant to stress one point: it was the people, those in the wilderness generation, who were in a position of privilege yet sinned grievously by refusing to listen to God. What's interesting is the way in which the author asks the questions and then answers them - they are from the Old Testament passages used previously in vv.7-11.

v.16 - "For who provoked Him when they had heard?" (Psalm 95:7-8)

v.16 response - "did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses" (Numbers 14:13,19,22)

v.17. - "with whom was He angry for forty years?" (Psalm 95:10)

v.17 response - "was it not with those who sinned..." (Numbers 14:10, 29, 32)

v. 18 - "to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest?" (Psalm 95: 11)

v.18 response - "to those who were disobedient" (Numbers 14:30, 33, 43)

Q: What was mentioned against the wilderness generation in v.16? (*they provoked God by rebellion and unbelief*)

Q: What was the offense mentioned against the wilderness generation in v.17? (*they sinned*)

Q: What was the just result of the wilderness generation's lack of faithfulness to God throughout their 40 years in the wilderness? (*they were barred entry into God's rest*)

The seriousness of the punishment for them was based on the 40 years (actually more) of personally witnessing the mercy and power and goodness of the Lord yet still refusing to believe Him when He spoke. What is interesting is that Israel attempted to repent when confronted with God's oath of not entering the Promised Land. They tried to enter it on their own (see Deuteronomy 1:41-44) and they got whipped badly. In truth, they weren't repentant at all but they were remorseful that they lost their opportunity to enter into the Promised Land. They found that they were unable to do so in their own strength. V.19 is the epilogue to the chapter. They couldn't enter God's rest because they refused to believe Him. Sin is self-defeating.

A historical note here: About two million Israelites died in the wilderness. Only Joshua, Caleb and the younger generation of Israelites (those 20 and younger) were allowed to enter the Promised Land. They had to wait until the older generation died out (and it was a big generation) before they had the opportunity to show faith in God and thus conquer the land promised to their fathers by God.

Q: For the believer, what do we lose when we refuse to believe God, when we fall into the deceitfulness of sin? (*We lose the assurance of our salvation - not our salvation.*)

Q: According to what we've seen in this chapter, what would be so bad about losing the assurance or confidence of one's salvation? (*it renders the believer powerless to live the Christian life but instead in constant turmoil and confusion. If you don't firmly know that you belong to Christ, then you won't be certain when He's speaking to you and you certainly won't be able to live boldly and confidently in the face of worldly temptations and trials.*)

Before ending the study, we need to take a peek at the believer's rest mentioned on v.18 & 19. The author uses these challenges of this chapter to encourage the believers to develop a deeper and more confident faith in Christ. We need to begin to discuss the idea of God's rest.

Q: How would you define "rest"?

Q: For you to be at rest, what conditions need to be in place? (*things need to be complete, finished, etc.*)

[Billy T's quote of **Romans 5:1** - "*Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"]

Q: For you to be at rest, what things need to NOT be present? (*fear, things that inspire fear, etc.*)

These are all things that describe God's rest which is His final rest promised to believers. This term is really only used on Hebrews though it is described in two places in the New Testament (and the one Old Testament Psalm it refers to).

**[Read Matthew 11:28-30]**

Q: According to Jesus what is needed to possess His rest? (*come to Him*)

**[Read Revelation 14:13]**

Q: What are those who die in the Lord resting from? (*their labors - their kingdom work is completed*)

As seen, this chapter deals with faithfulness to God. Take a moment and review the entire chapter.

Q: What are some principles of faithfulness we see in this chapter? (*keeping your mind on Jesus*)



*encourages faithfulness, Faithfulness is a choice based on choosing to believe and act upon what we have heard from God, sinfulness and unbelief can hinder faithfulness and both have consequences for the believer, faithfulness allows believers to confidently persevere until the end, faithfulness is communal - the stronger our community, the stronger our faith can become through daily encouragement, the believer's assurance of salvation depends upon his faithfulness to God, and others answers...)*

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?