

Hebrews Chapter Three (vv.7-19)

Chapters Three and Four concern God's House (3.1-6) and God's Rest (3.7-4.13). Hebrews 4.14 resumes the theme of the Priesthood of the Lord Jesus (3.1). 3.1-6 have compared and contrasted the Lord Jesus and Moses. In terms of comparison, both were **faithful** (3.2). This positive example is set in contrast to the negative example of the disobedience and **unfaithfulness** of God's people in the wilderness. This will form the writer's second parenthesis and **warning** to the readers (after 2.1-4) extending from 3.7-4.13. In our section 3.7-11 is a **quotation** from Psalm 95.7-11 which is then **expounded** in 3.12-19 and **applied** in 4.1-13.

The warning concerns 'the sin' of unbelief (vv.12-13). It is of great importance to remember that the readers of this epistle were not all **genuine** believers. Thus the apostle is **not** suggesting that salvation can be lost. He asks the readers to consider whether they have **faith or not** rather than whether their faith is **weak or strong**. Was it genuine faith? The warning is developed using the example and parallels of a past generation of Israelites on the way to Canaan.

*Flanigan (with Rudge edits): This former generation had been delivered from Egypt and given the promise of Canaan. They had a divinely appointed leader. Jehovah was graciously and miraculously providing for them along the way. But the way to Canaan led through desert and wilderness conditions. This was not always acceptable to the people and so they murmured and rebelled. They complained against Moses and the Lord. In the end, unbelief deprived them of the land to which they were professedly travelling. The appeal of Psalm 95 to the nation in the Psalmist's day was to remember the failings of the fathers and **not** be like them or do as they did. The Psalm exhorts us to rejoice, sing, be thankful and worship and obey. The parallels are clear. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. We have crossed the Red Sea and left Egypt behind. We are bound for a better country. Christ is our Manna and our Rock, our meat and drink in the wilderness through which our path lies to the heavenly rest promised to us. Let us, today, in our day, hear His voice, heed the warnings and in simple trust believe His word whatever the difficulties of the way.*

7 ¶ Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, **8** Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: **9** ~~When~~ (where) your fathers tempted me, (by) proving me, and saw my works forty years.

'Wherefore' links back to the warning of v.6 and forward to the exhortation of v.12 ('take heed'). The verses in between quote from Psalm 95.7-11 and scripturally re-enforce the spiritual application about to be made. The Holy Spirit is here speaking, addressing the listeners through the living, powerful Word of God (cf. 4.12-13). The Psalm may have been penned by David in 1000BC, but it still has great power and relevance today! 'Today' is repeated three times in this section (3.7, 13, 15) pointing towards the urgency of God's message. Today was the opportunity for these readers to hear and heed the word of God and make sure of their profession (2 Peter 1.10) before the judgment fell (AD70).

In the Bible, the 'heart' controls the mind and body. **Thoughts** and **actions** (i.e. *doing*) flow from the heart. The wilderness generation hardened their hearts, that is, they 'stubbornly' and 'obstinately' refused to believe and obey God (v.8). This spirit was demonstrated particularly at Meribah ('provocation' or 'rebellion', Numbers 20) and Massah ('temptation' or 'testing', Exodus 17). These two similar events were at either end of the wilderness wanderings and were therefore **forty** years apart. The hearts of the people never changed. The whole wilderness period was characterised by **rebellion** and the **testing** ('thorough trial', v.9) of their faithful and loving God. It all came from **hardened** (v.8, 15), **wayward** (v.10) and **evil** (v.12) hearts. This was the state of the people even though they had seen God's glorious miracles for forty years. They had seen the plagues, Passover, Red Sea, Manna, quails, water from the rock etc. This was pure unbelief.

10 Wherefore I was grieved with ~~that~~ (this) generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have ~~not~~ ~~known~~ ignored my ways. **11** So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)

Psalm 95.10 and 3.17 link God's 'grief' (rather than His works) with the forty years (v.9). The word 'grieved' signifies to be 'displeased' and 'indignant'. God was 'offended' at the actions of Israel. 'This generation' was a particular **kind** that was evil (Numbers 14.27, Deuteronomy 1.34-35) and characterised by 'always erring in their heart (singular)' and 'ignoring God's ways'. That is, they repeatedly and perpetually wandered from the right moral and spiritual pathway set by God. It was not that they didn't understand God's ways, but rather they did 'not approve' of them, 'would not' and 'refused' to know them, preferring their own way of living. Consequently, God righteously promised they would not enter His 'rest' (Numbers 14.23).

The word 'rest' is made up of two Greek words which mean 'a permanent cessation of activity'. The particular reference here is to **Canaan**; the land flowing with milk and honey, a permanent and tranquil abode promised to Israel. What a

contrast to the slavery of Egypt! Unfortunately, this evil generation never knew this rest. Indeed, even a new generation led into the land by Joshua never knew the full enjoyment of rest in this land. There was constant conflict from without and failure from within. The reign of Solomon foreshadowed the full enjoyment of this rest which shall be fulfilled in the millennium. *Note. The Greek word for 'rest' in Matthew 11.28-29 has the idea of 'lifting up' burdens from the shoulders of those who were labouring under the Mosaic Law – rest from **sin**. In Hebrews the writer is concerned with the 'laying down' of the works of the law and adopting the principle of faith instead – rest from **self**. For believers today, there remains **God's rest** (4.1). This is something which we shall enter into the full experience of in heaven, when God rests.*

12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. **13** But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of (the) sin. Now the Apostle cuts to the conscience. What happened to that evil generation in the wilderness could very well happen to them! Did they not see the parallels? Forty years they witnessed God's mighty works in the wilderness and it was **now** nearing forty years since the commencement of the Lord's ministry! Furthermore, the evil generation of the wilderness foreshadowed the evil generation that then was and had crucified the Lord (cf. Matthew 12.34, 38-39, 41-42). Both of these generations were among the most highly privileged in Israel's history. Both had seen the greatest signs and wonders (2.4). Both resisted the Holy Spirit. One had been judged (v.11) and the other was about to be scattered amongst the nations (AD70).

So, they were to 'take heed' that their hearts were right. The writer is making an individual appeal to every professing believer to search their hearts. Some professors amongst them had the same, corrupting 'evil heart of unbelief' the end of which resulted in 'departing from the living God'. This is **not** backsliding, but **apostasy**, literally, 'standing off' from the living God; someone who **renounced** their faith in the NT High Priest and went back to the OT high priest and sacrifices. Note the use of the same word in Luke 8.13 with regard to the seed sown on rocky ground. When the time of testing and **persecution** came, they 'fell away' and showed that they were never saved. (The) sin (i.e. unbelief leading to apostasy) is 'cunning' and will slowly but surely harden the heart. To guard against this the believers were to daily 'encourage' one another. This would involve warning, reproof, exhortation and comfort from the Word of God. How needful is this amongst God's people today!

14 For we are ~~made~~ (become) partakers of (with) Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; **15** While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. **16** ~~For some, when they had heard, did provoke~~ Who were they who heard and rebelled? ~~howbeit not~~ (Were it not) **all** that came out of Egypt by Moses? **17** But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? **18** And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? Those who exercise **genuine faith** in Christ have become (and presently are) 'companions' or 'sharers' with Him (v.14). We have become united to Him as His companions (1.9), brethren (2.11), children (2.14) and house (3.6). We also share a common inheritance and salvation in Him (3.1). However, the proof of **genuine faith** is endurance (v.14, cf. v.6). Faith is salvation's root but endurance is salvation's fruit. Again the call comes to therefore heed the word of God 'today' (cf. v.7). The wilderness generation **all heard** the good news that God would bring them into Canaan (v.16, 4.2, Ex. 3.8, 13.5) BUT they did not hear it (!!) as **not** all believed and therefore obeyed (v.18, 4.2, cf. Numbers 14 at **Kadesh Barnea**).

The word of God comes to us today in many ways. Are we listening? Some of us do not listen **audibly**, few of us listen **attentively**, still fewer listen **actively (obediently)**. Do we believe the word of God? Do we practice what we are taught? It calls us to service, communion, fellowship, separation etc. While it is today we should heed His word and voice and obey. This will guard our hearts from hardening.

Disobedience to the Word of God comes from a heart of unbelief. **Do we have this attitude?** Despite their best efforts (Numbers 14.39-45) God's people never arrived at the goal (v.19). What has God intended for us? Disobedience to the word of God will result in never attaining what God has planned for your life and mine.