

⁷ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice,"* Hebrews 3:7 This verse was the beginning of the weekly call to worship in the synagogues of the Jews of the first century. "Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." Since the recipients of the letter had a Jewish background, the verse the author chose to make his point was sure to catch their attention like siren warning. We would do well to start every Scripture reading with that passage from Psalm 95, reminding us to carefully hear and heed the Word of the Lord.

This portion, like the previous one, begins with "therefore." After considering the faithfulness of Jesus, the One more glorious than Moses, who is the builder of the house of God made up of living stones, the author tells us we are that house *if* we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Therefore, because the proof that we are the house of God is not our obedience to the Laws of Moses but the work of Jesus, and because the evidence of our salvation is seen in our enduring to the end, we are asked to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The author then quotes from Psalm 95:7b -11. It is a recollection of when Israel quarreled with Moses and tested God. They were without water for some time and began to ask Moses if God was really among them or not. They had seen the plagues in Egypt. The pillar of cloud led them on their way and protected them from the sun. They had seen the waters of the Red Sea part until they crossed and then come together again drowning Egypt's army. They had danced on the far shores of the Red Sea a victory dance of praise to God for delivering from slavery (Exodus 15:1). After all that, they had the audacity to ask if God was really among them (Exodus 17:7).

The readers of this letter were in a similar situation. They had heard from the first generation Christians all that Jesus had done and said. They knew their leaders had given their lives for their faith in Jesus. They had experienced their own spiritual exodus into freedom in Christ, and yet they were wondering if it might be more advantageous to set Jesus aside and blend back into Judaism to avoid being persecuted.

An earlier portion of the psalm the author quotes exhorts the people to praise and submit to God (Psalm 95:6), but ends with this warning quoted in our text. The author of our passage is doing the same thing the psalmist did. He is encouraging them to praise and submit to Jesus and then warning them from the bad example of their forefathers. He is exhorting us to hear God's voice in the psalm and in our hearts.

In the words, "as the Holy Spirit says," he is telling them that the psalm was inspired by the Holy Spirit. He may also be saying that this was what the Holy Spirit was currently saying to them. The Holy Spirit speaks through the Word of God throughout time and to every circumstance. That is why we should pay the more careful attention to the warning: ⁸ *do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the*

Commented [PW1]: Exodus 15:1 (ESV)

¹ Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

Commented [PW2]: Exodus 17:7 (ESV)

⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Commented [PW3]: Psalm 95:6 (ESV)

⁶ Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

wilderness, ⁹ where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.

Hebrews 3:8-9 "If you hear His voice." The Holy Spirit speaks to hearts through the Word, but we must be willing to hear His voice (John 10:3). Some people are not yet willing to listen (Proverbs 1:24). Some who hear are not willing to obey. They are like those in the wilderness who tested God. They have had ample evidence of God working in their lives. They know the truth, but they harden their hearts and demand that God act in the way they desire and on their timetable. If He doesn't, they will reject their confidence in God. It is giving God ultimatums. It is playing god. Some people only want a god on their terms. They don't want anyone telling them what to do, or what is right or wrong.

To harden a heart means it was softer at one time. They were at least willing to hear. But because they don't like what they hear they harden their hearts. It's the natural response of fallen man. After all, man fell because he wanted to be his own god. Even after our own spiritual exodus, we can reject what we hear and end up with contempt for God and a life lived in rebellion.

The testing mentioned here is not of the people, though they were tested by the lack of water. It is referring to the people testing God to see if He will meet their demand (Isaiah 45:11). **God tests us to strengthen us and make our faith more certain. People test God because they want to have their own way.** I'm sorry to say that I've done it. I bet you have too at some time in your life. I remember as a young teen when my mother collapsed one day, I told God that I would serve Him if He would save my mother from dying. "I'll do whatever you want God, if You will just _____," and you fill in the blank. The psalm that is being quoted tells us to submit to God because He is worthy, not because He can fulfill our wishes.

The murmuring demands of Israel were repeated again and again over the forty years. They never learned to go to Moses and join him in a prayer of faith asking God, who had miraculously provided many times before, to provide once again. They never learned to wait for God to act (Psalm 37:7). In fact, it was a repeat of this very scenario when Moses sinned against God, striking the rock twice, and taking credit for the water, that caused Moses to be kept from entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20:11-12).

¹⁰ *Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.'* Hebrews 3:10 Provoked became the name of the location where this event took place. It was named Test and Provoke, Meribah and Massah. The generation of believers before the present recipients of the letter had been faithful. Would this new generation be faithful, or would they test and provoke God? Each generation stands on its own before God. You can't rely on your parents' faith. Each of us must have our own relationship with Jesus.

The thing that provokes God is the continual going astray in the hearts of men. When we set our hearts on the temporal, time and time again, we provoke God. After being

Commented [PW4]: John 10:3 (ESV)

³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Commented [PW5]: Proverbs 1:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,

Commented [PW6]: Isaiah 45:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: "Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands?"

Commented [PW7]: Psalm 37:7 (ESV)

⁷ Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Commented [PW8]: Numbers 20:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.

¹² And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them."

taught the lesson of how harmful it is to us, we can turn right back and do it all over again. This world will never satisfy us! We are meant for more. Fix your heart on Jesus (Hebrews 3:1). If you don't, you will always be provoking Him with your love for the things He made. He made them for you, but not so that you could place more importance on those things than you do on Him.

Commented [PW9]: Hebrews 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

My wife recently shared with a guest to the church who was considering going into missions She was attracted to a man who was not a believer. The woman got a clear message from the Holy Spirit that God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5). Don't provoke Him. If you insist on going your way instead of the Lord's way, you will find that He will give you what you insist on but will send leanness to your soul (Psalm 106:15). Thankfully she understood what the Lord was telling her. God is jealous for you too. You don't want to have to learn the hard way that He won't tolerate other gods.

Commented [PW10]: Exodus 20:5 (ESV)

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

Commented [PW11]: Psalm 106:15 (KJV)

¹⁵ And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

The Israelites watched Moses commune with God as he went to the tent of meeting regularly (Exodus 33:8). They saw the pillar of cloud over the tent. They experienced God's solution to every hardship they faced, yet they never learned the ways of the LORD. They never set their hearts on Him alone (Exodus 20:3). Their often repeated solution was, "Let's elect a new leader to take us back to Egypt."

Commented [PW12]: Exodus 33:8 (ESV)

⁸ Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent.

Commented [PW13]: Exodus 20:3 (ESV)

³ "You shall have no other gods before me.

¹¹ As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.' Hebrews 3:11 God gave in to their demands. They said they would rather die in the wilderness (Numbers 14:2). God said, "Okay, since you insist, you will." That generation perished in the wilderness, never entering the Promised Land of rest or daily spiritual rest. Jesus invites us to come to Him. He is our Promised Land. He is the rest our souls seek (Matthew 11:28-30).

Commented [PW14]: Numbers 14:2 (ESV)

² And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!"

Would the recipients of this letter be as hardhearted as that generation of their ancestors? Would they rather die in the wilderness of Judaism that had missed their Messiah? Certainly there would be no rest for their souls if they chose that path. Had they known the ways of God or were they going through the motions?

Commented [PW15]: Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12 Now the author warns them that they had better take care that they not go down the same ways as those of their forefathers (1Peter 1:18-19). Going back into Judaism was not just a different way to worship, it would mean they had an evil, unbelieving heart. It would mean they were falling away from the living God. That would mean they were not a part of the house Jesus was building, not holding fast their confidence.

Commented [PW16]: 1 Peter 1:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,

¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

This is as serious a warning as could be given. Blending in with some group that does not accept Jesus as the only Lord and Savior to fit in with our current culture is no different from the temptation these Hebrew believers were facing. The result would be the same. Only an unbelieving heart that is hardened to the Word of God could make that choice. The result is the same too. It is evidence that the person is not material for

the house Jesus is building for Himself. Is that too harsh? Or is it just the truth? Would it be right to pretend it were not so when in fact it is? We have a tendency to not want to disturb people. The author didn't mind disturbing this church he was writing to with the truth of what they were considering. He wanted them to see clearly the choice they were making. If you are considering this type of compromise, of setting Jesus aside so that you can fit in, know this choice you are making has eternal consequences.

¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13 So what should we do about it? How do we avoid having our hearts go astray? How can we know the ways of the Lord and enter His rest? The author says we are to exhort one another every day as long as we are in this period that the psalmist called, "today." This is one theme of the letter. Exhort one another (Hebrews 10:24). Share the lessons you are learning. Ask others what God is showing them. Worship together. Encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25). **The pull of the world is strong, persistent, and deceitful. We need to be just as persistent in helping and encouraging one another in the faith.** The life of faith is a life of spiritual battles. We need our fellow soldiers to cover our backs and we need to cover theirs as well. Praise the Lord and pass the spiritual ammunition (the Word of God). It's a war!

The deceitfulness of sin is the enemy's tool to harden us. Sin promises more than it can deliver and always costs more than you think. It is a lie. It tells us we will be fulfilled, satisfied. It promises to be the answer to the sadness, rejection, or boredom we feel. Instead it drives us to destruction. While promising freedom, it will enslave. As strange as it sounds, the only real freedom is being submitted to Jesus who died for us (John 8:32). He longs to see His work in us completed. He alone is worthy of our whole focus. He alone can provide true joy of the heart both now and forever (Psalm 16:11).

¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Hebrews 3:14 The author returns to the warning of verse 6. *^{6b} And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.* Hebrews 3:6b Either we have come to share in Christ holding on to our original confidence to the end, or we become hardened in our hearts and rebel against God. On the surface it may look like some people have found a middle ground, but there really is none. To pretend you are clinging to your original confidence while denying it with your life on a habitual basis is a sign that you are in rebellion.

As I mentioned last week, this is not meant for you to doubt your salvation. Read last week's message on the assurance of salvation. It is meant to challenge us to consider our relationship with Christ. If you are considering walking away from being identified with Him, it could be that you never really knew Him. I often hear people say, "I used to be a Christian." My first thought is that if they really were ever a Christian, they

Commented [PW17]: Hebrews 10:24 (ESV)

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

Commented [PW18]: Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)

²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Commented [PW19]: John 8:32 (ESV)

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Commented [PW20]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

would never be able to say that they used to believe, since a sign of true faith is perseverance (John 10:28-29).

¹⁵ As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." Hebrews 3:15 This is a repetition of the verse that we began with. It is to remind the reader to consider again Israel in the wilderness, dying without entering the Promised Land because they refused to learn the lessons that God was faithfully teaching them year after year for forty long years. Are you learning the life lessons God is faithfully teaching you? I know He has been faithful to bring back this lesson to me again and again because I am so slow to really lay hold of it. The temporal will capture our attention and distract us from Christ if we let it. It will take over our emotions, thought life, and desires if we let it go on. But those desires are nothing compared to the eternal steadfast love of our Savior who died for us (Exodus 34:6-7).

Our passage closes with three questions and answers. *¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?* Hebrews 3:16-18 Who heard and still rebelled? With whom was God provoked for forty years? Who did God say would not enter His rest? It was the people Moses led out of Egypt. Those who sinned and died in the wilderness. Those who were disobedient. If the readers didn't get the clear connection with the psalm, their ancestors' history, and their own circumstance, these questions and answers made it clear. They could be led out of spiritual slavery and still provoke God and not enter His rest.

The author then draws his conclusion. *¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.* Hebrews 3:19 If we refuse to believe that God's way is the right way. If we look to ourselves or to the world's answers and acceptance, provoking God, we, too, will not enter the rest God has for us. The only way to enter in is by placing our total faith and trust in Jesus alone. I will have a special message next week on how we enter into God's rest on a daily basis.

Persevere brothers and sisters. No matter what you face in this world, God will see you through if you will trust in Him. Don't run to this world's distractions! They won't satisfy your spiritual hunger. They won't even deliver what they promise. Jesus is more than enough for your spiritual hunger. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He is all we need. If the passion you had when you first came to Christ is a distant memory, you need to fan it into a flame again (2 Timothy 1:6). Consider Jesus and His great love for you. Take time in the Word and prayer. Let us commit to encourage and exhort one another while it is called today, lest any of us be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. By the grace of God may we finish well and see that our fellow believers do as well.

Commented [PW21]: John 10:28-29 (ESV)

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Commented [PW22]: Exodus 34:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Commented [PW23]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Commented [PW24]: 2 Timothy 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,

Questions

- 1 What is the "therefore" there for?
- 2 What is the author's analogy?
- 3 What was the danger before them?
- 4 What did the Jews fail to learn?
- 5 Do we Masah and Meribah?
- 6 What are the ways of the LORD?
- 7 What is the rest we seek?
- 8 What is the root problem?
- 9 How can we help others avoid it?
- 10 What verse is repeated? Why?