

Hebrews 3:1-19: Is Unbelief Keeping You from God's Rest?

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I. Introduction

Life brings with it many trying and difficult times. The Lord says, "If you trust Me, I'll show you how to navigate through all of them. I'll lead you to safety and peace." But we think, "That's not going to work; it makes no sense." So we go our own way and it ends in disaster. Why do we do this?

II. Hebrews 3:1-19: How Unbelief Keeps You from God's Rest

3:1-6, having shown Jesus' superiority to angels, the author now shows Jesus' superiority to one of the other pillars of Judaism: Moses. The backstory to these first six verses (indicated by the phrase "faithful in all His house," Numbers 12:7) is a rebellion that occurred in Numbers 12, when Miriam and Aaron challenged Moses' authority and God rebuked them severely, including striking Miriam with leprosy. The author's point to his audience: there was disobedience, a departure from the living God, against His representative Moses, who was so special to God, will you walk away from the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is "worthy of more glory than Moses"?

The audience of Hebrews is not on the fence about Jesus Christ; they are believers, Christians, which is why he calls them "holy brethren." They have partaken "of the heavenly calling" (and Christ, 3:14); they've made a confession of faith in Christ. This is why they need to consider very carefully how they respond to Jesus. The titles Apostle and High Priest show what Jesus has in common with Moses and Aaron. In Jesus we have someone who represents God to us (Apostle) and us to God (High Priest). An apostle is someone who is sent; God sent Moses to establish a Covenant of Law with Israel and He sent Jesus (John 17:3) to establish a Covenant of grace with mankind (John 1:17). Jesus is also like Aaron in that He is a High Priest. Jesus and Moses were both faithful to God but there's a colossal difference: Moses was faithful in the house of Israel but as a servant in that house. Jesus "was faithful to Him who appointed Him" but as the Son who built all things, including the house of Israel (and the Israel of God and the Church, Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-22). Thus, "He who built the house has more honor than the house" or any servant in the house. Further, all the work that Moses did pointed to "those things which would be spoken afterward," i.e., to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:44-47).

The author closes these verses by admonishing his audience that they will be the Lord's house if they hold onto their confidence and hope in Christ firm to the end. The author is not threatening them with hell or telling them that they have to work for their salvation or something similar: that if you're a **true** believer, then you'll show the evidence that you truly believed in Jesus by holding firm to your hope in Christ to the end. Instead, he's saying that those who have **already** placed their hope in Jesus should not walk away from Him. If they do, there's a consequence as there was for Aaron and Miriam and the Exodus Generation, who he goes on to discuss next.

3:7-19, the author next quotes Psalm 95:7-11 as he warns his audience directly not to walk away from Jesus, but this time he uses the Exodus Generation as the example. The backstory to this is Numbers 13-14 where Israel refused to enter the Promise Land after hearing the report from the ten spies. They accused God of trying to kill them, chose a new leader to return to their Egyptian slavery (Nehemiah 9:17), and were about to kill Moses and Aaron when God intervened. This rebellion was so unique that it was called the rebellion in Psalm 95.

Israel had rebelled before and did after, but this was a giant turning point in Israel's history, a point of no return which God punished severely. Because they had an "evil heart of unbelief" and refused to believe that God would deliver them from the giants in the Land after all the miracles they saw Him do (Numbers 14:1-4, 10-11), God swore that they would not enter His rest. Thus, He forbade them from entering the Promise Land and for forty years they wandered the desert until every male 20 years old and above died in the wilderness, all except Caleb and Joshua. After they all died, a new generation, the Wilderness Generation, returned to the Promise Land and they did enter God's rest.

The author's point is simple. His audience faces a similar point of no return (rejecting Christ and going back to Judaism) and the same consequence: physical death. They must not harden their hearts towards Christ and walk away from Him through the sin of unbelief. Sin will deceive them if they refuse to believe in Jesus' power to protect them, to guide them, to rescue them. Instead, they must come alongside each other and encourage each other daily to follow Christ where He is leading them. Why? Because they have become "partakers of Christ," i.e., a permanent part of Him. They must not be like those who came out of Egypt, led by Moses, who sinned over and over for 40 years and wound up dead in the wilderness. They failed to enter God's rest because of disobedience, because of unbelief.

In 3:14, the author once again urges his audience to hold onto their faith in Christ steadfast to the end. Here again he's not telling them that they will go to hell unless they remain faithful to Christ until they die. In fact, God forgave the Exodus Generation of that horrible sin, when they crossed the point of no return (Numbers 14:20). But God still punished them with physical death (even Moses failed to enter the Land because of a sin he committed, Numbers 20:12; Deuteronomy 3:23-26). Thus, the author's point is the same: "Don't do to Jesus—who deserves much more respect and honor—what the Exodus Generation did to Moses. The consequence will be the same: death." Therefore, those who have believed in Jesus and become part of Him should keep believing in His power to save them otherwise life will be very difficult for them, they may even die as the Exodus Generation did when they refused to believe God.

What is God's rest and how does unbelief keep us from it? The Promise Land represented rest for Israel; God was finally going to make them dwell in safety, in peace by eradicating all their enemies. However, the Land was a place of joy and peace not because it was the Promise Land, but because God's presence was there. They were going to experience joy because they were going to be with the Lord their God (Deuteronomy 12:9-12). But when we fall for the sin of unbelief, sin deceives us and blinds us and what used to be bondage becomes a paradise and the consequences are devastating (Numbers 14; Nehemiah 9:17). Life does this to us. We face an impossible task and the Lord says, "Follow Me, I'll show you the way out." But we doubt and we think that Jesus' way will end in disaster, so we walk away from Him.

III. Conclusion

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.