

# Pentwater Bible Church

*Hebrews Message 7*

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The Jews in the Wilderness by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1526 – 1594)

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## THE HARDENED HEART

### Hebrews 3:7-9

<sup>7</sup> Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, <sup>8</sup> harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: <sup>9</sup> when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years (ASV, 1901).

The apostle begins this section of Scripture with a direct reference from Psalm 95:8-11 regarding the “hardening of hearts”, which reads:

### Psalm 95:7–11

<sup>7</sup>For he is our God, And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To-day, oh that ye would hear his voice! <sup>8</sup>Harden not your heart, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness; <sup>9</sup>When your fathers tempted me, Proved me, and saw my work. <sup>10</sup>Forty years long was I grieved with that generation, And said, It is a people that do err in their heart, And they have not known my ways: <sup>11</sup>Wherefore I swear in my wrath, That they should not enter into my rest (ASV, 1901).

Here in the book of Hebrews, Paul is speaking to the first century Jews, and we know this because he says “To Day” in verse 7, and this is a reference to applying the Psalm 95 to their situation. In verse 8, the seriousness of to “*harden not your hearts*” cannot be over emphasized because it is meant to provoke God, especially through unbelief. To “harden” one’s heart is to not listen to God through His Spirit. God spoke to the ancient Israelites while they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, and continued to speak to those that became the new generation that entered and stayed in Canaan. In the wilderness, the Jews suffered a time that is remembered as a tragic defeat because they provoked God through unbelief. As a result, He caused nearly all of them to perish in the wilderness (desert). with the exception of two men, Joshua and Caleb.

They chose to worship an inferior belief instead of the genuine worship of the Lord God by engaging in idol worship they learned from the Egyptians, even though Aaron, Moses’s brother, warned them against this abomination (I Samuel 2:27-28). ,They did not do as God had desired, and some examples of this include:

- Ignoring God’s command to not leave any manna lying on the ground overnight (Exodus 16:20).
- Quarreling with Moses, and testing the Lord at Rephidim about the lack of drinking water (Exodus 17:1-7).
- Building and worshipping a Golden Calf, including pagan sexual practices while Moses was meeting with the Lord at Mount Sinai (Exodus chapter 32).

Israel deserved punishment from God, but it did not come immediately. Before they left Egypt they were spared because God maintained grace and mercy for the sake of His name. He did not want His name to be polluted in front of the heathen Egyptians even when they refused to respond

to God's calling, and continued these abominable Egyptian practices. At that time, the Lord had been ready to pour out His wrath upon them in judgment to satisfy of His anger towards them and their idolatry. God had been preparing them to be a distinct separate elect nation for His purposes. God's system provided for an integration of physical and spiritual laws to provide a pleasant and meaningful life for the Jews.

However, the second generation of Jews that did go into the Promised Land, and settled there, again rejected God and His Laws in favor of sin with the adjacent pagan nations. God commanded them not to do what their parents did to defile themselves with the idols worship (Ezekiel 20:18–20). He urged them to follow the Law He provided to them at Mount Sinai. He wanted them to sanctify, or make holy, the sabbaths as signs of the covenant relationship between the Lord and themselves. By following these instructions, the second generation would come to know by personal experience that Jehovah was their God. As they would worship Him and keep His Laws, He would reveal more of Himself to them through blessings. This group was to be just a rebellious as the first by worshipping idols while they offered sacrifices and offerings to the Lord at the same time (Amos 5:25-27)!

Just as God spoke to the previous generations to prevent them from following into idolatry, and “hardening” their hearts, the apostle now spoke to first century Jews through this book of Hebrews. This is a message that serves us today as well. God tells all of us that we should soften our hearts, listen to Him as He directs our way through this world, and not to provoke or tempt Him, especially through unbelief. The “hardening of the heart” is an expression describing putting up a barrier within us to prevent any information entering contrary to what we have decided to do. Regardless of what is true and appropriate, the “hardened” heart will not listen or heed any warnings. Our inherited sin enables this hardness of the heart. Our wills become like a stone, and destitute of spiritual life. We become stubborn and inflexible, and in many instances no admonitions can be made to change that. Only God can by His powerful grace, if we let Him in to do His work in us.

God's people are also liable to acquire a “hardness” after salvation, and should guard against. It begins by allowing thoughts of sin into our hearts and minds, and of course actually acting on those thought of sins. If not stopped immediately, we begin to justify it in our lives, and become hardened against all corrections that are offered. It also can start by neglecting personal and public worship, avoiding continual fellowship with unbelievers, and excusing small sins in our personal thought life and behavior. This is what Moses had to deal with during the forty years of wilderness wandering when the Children of Israel came out of Egypt.

This part of the scripture also builds on the fact that Jesus is greater than Moses. The admonition is quite clear: do not be disobedient to Jesus and His work for you as your ancestors did to Moses. Paul uses the word “*To Day*” in verse 7 to mean do it now! Do not wait! You do not have forever to be obedient to God.

In verses 8 and 9, Paul again references Moses, who wrote that the Children of Israel provoked God a total of ten times (Numbers 14:22-23). However, it was at Kadesh Barnea that the provocation of all provocations came about. When the Israelites were camped in the wilderness at Kadesh Barnea, the Lord tried to bring them into the Promised Land, but they were so frightened by the report of giants in the land that neither Moses, nor Caleb and Joshua could get

them to exercise enough faith to enter and conquer the land (Deuteronomy 9:22–23). Again, and again they refused the grace of the Lord. God exercised His wrath against His people for continued disobedience, and as a result of their provocation at Kadesh Barnea, they were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land and receive their “Canaan rest”. “Canaan rest” is a concept brought out in several Old Testament passages (Deuteronomy 1:34–36; 129–10; Joshua 23:1). It emphasized the peace that God provides us when we subject ourselves to God through our minds, our wills, and our hearts. The Promised Land is not equated with Heaven in the Old or New Testaments by any of the authors that the Lord used to bring forth His Word. The Promised Land was to be a cessation of struggle with the enemy, and an entering into the “rest” from that. The Nation Israel was redeemed from the persecution they experienced in Egypt, but in the wilderness lost out on all of God’s blessings because of their disobedience. The Jews should have gone into the Promised Land before they did.

The Lord Jesus gives us the same command to subject ourselves to Him with the same degree of obedience:

Matthew 22:37

*<sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the first and great commandment (KJV).*

If the audience Paul was addressing are genuine born-again believers, but were seeking to return to the Mosaic Law, their sins will result in a loss of rewards at the Bema Seat judgment. If they have not been born-again, then their loss will be eternal salvation.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR OWN HEARTS

Hebrews 3:12–15

*<sup>12</sup> Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, <sup>14</sup> For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; <sup>15</sup> whilst it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation (KJV).*

Now the apostle issues another warning to the first century Jewish believers, to “Take heed”. He is actually saying to them that they must be aware of having “an evil heart of unbelief”. He is saying pay attention to what has happened to the ancient Israelites, and do not think it cannot happen to them too. If the Jewish folks reading this book of Hebrews were disbelieving the Gospel, then they would be eternally separated from God as the text says in verse 12 as “departing from the living God.” If they were believers who had been actually born again of the Spirit, then their sanctification would cease at the time of their departure into sin. Their sanctification would remain stopped until they confessed their sin, and restored their relationship to the living God. One of the ways to prevent this is to hold each other accountable, or as verse 13 says to “exhort one another

*daily*". Both individual and corporate accountability is intended within this admonition as the apostle says in verse 14, "*For we are made partakers of Christ*". We are loved by Him and chosen in Him from before the foundation of the world. Paul uses the pronoun "we", and this means the teachers, the elders, and the members of a local assembly. We must all hold each other accountable because we can so easily drift into sin (Hebrews 12:1). The first century Jews had the temptation to return to the ineffective and defunct Levitical system, and the apostle is warning them to hold fast until the end of their lives. They, and believers today, must encourage one another to identify with Jesus Christ.

Our descent into sin is usually not one massive step, but rather a progressive of small steps of departure from Christ. The downward progressive "hardening of the heart" ultimately results in outright antagonism to the truth of the gospel, and then viewing sin as "not so bad after all" (Acts 19:9). It is a valuable lesson for us to recognize the incremental steps of a person descending into sin. A good example is found Genesis 13, and 19, which describes Lot descending into sin. He chose to live in the city of Sodom, and it was the beginning of his downfall. Lot actually went through five progressive steps into a fully sinful life:

- He looked toward Sodom (materialistic lust). (Genesis 13:10)
- He chose the area of Sodom (enticement). (Genesis 13:11)
- He pitched his tent near Sodom (moving closer to the sin). (Genesis 13:12)
- He moved into Sodom (entering the sin). (Genesis 19)
- He sat at the Gate of Sodom meaning full citizenship and a town elder (sin is fully developed to the point of death). (Genesis 19:1)

James also describes these steps in a similar manner:

*James 1: 12–16*

*"<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. <sup>13</sup>Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: <sup>14</sup>But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. <sup>15</sup>Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. <sup>16</sup>Do not err, my beloved brethren."* (KJV)

We must not let the world, Satan or anybody else lead us into sin. We must all realize that we do not know how much time we have on this earth before we leave it, and we do not know what tomorrow will bring. We must not "harden" our hearts, but continue to hold each other accountable by staying close to other believers, engaging in Bible study, attending church, exhorting and building each other up in our faith in the one who provided our salvation, Jesus Christ.

NOT ALL THAT SAY "LORD, LORD" WILL GO IN

Hebrews 3:16–19

<sup>16</sup> For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. <sup>17</sup> But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief (KJV).

While many people they “say” they have professed a genuine faith in the Lord Jesus, they have not really done so. Any Christian fellowship consists of both genuine believers and unbelievers. This is referred to as the “visible church”. The “invisible church”, on the other hand consists of only genuine, born-again believers. Certainly, the early church had born-again believers, and those who claimed to be (but were never actually regenerated), and those who were believers but were falling away through doubt, persecution, and personal sin from a hardening of their hearts. In verses 16-18 Paul addresses them all by reminding them of the example of the ancient Jews who died out in the forty years of wandering. Since they would not listen to the Lord, and follow His commandments, He turned them over to a series of laws that they desired to follow, not the ones God asked them to follow. He gave them over to their own temptation so they could soak in the fruits of their sins.

By God withdrawing from them they, they made their own laws, which required them to follow the abominations they were practicing with the Canaanites including the murder of their first born described as “*caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb*” in Ezekiel 20:2. All these practices are satanic and come from him and his demons. So, just as in Corinth where the apostle Paul turned a person over to Satan in I Corinthians 5:5, God is allowing those who chose this behavior to experience the consequences of their sin without the direct intervention or protection of God. God’s Laws will protect us if we know the Bible and follow its doctrines. By intentionally departing from His laws, we are purposely distancing ourselves from God. When we refuse God’s protection we lose Him. Because He is holy and pure, He cannot be in the presence of sin, and He withdraws. When He withdraws, it does not leave a vacuum. It is immediately filled with Satan and his evil practices. In God says the same thing the first chapter of Romans:

Romans 1:28-32

<sup>28</sup> And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not [fitting] <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, <sup>30</sup> backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: <sup>32</sup> who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (KJV).