

HEBREWS

Message 18

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Reading:

INTRO: Hebrews 3:1-6 is the doctrinal section to the second major warning given to these Jewish believers. The warning takes up the rest of chapter 3 and 4. There are six verses of teaching and 29 verses of warning.

From this we may learn what this stanza of a poem I read says:

Christian, walk carefully, danger is near!
On in your journey with trembling and fear;
Snares from without and temptations within
Seek to entice you once more into sin. —Anon.

Let me pick up in chapter 3:5-6 said:

5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward,

6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

The verb in the clause, "whose house we are" is a present tense. I interpret that to mean we continue to be Christ's house as long as we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. When these Jewish people became Christians, they had been on fire. Turn to Hebrews 10 for a moment. We'll begin in verse 32:

32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

After they became Christians, they endured great struggle and sufferings. What happened? Verses 33-35:

33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

35 *Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.*

Albert Barnes says, "...you were made a public spectacle, as if in a theatre; you were held up to public view, or exposed to public scorn when this was done..." End quote. How so? They were reproached and suffered tribulation. They were persecuted. This they suffered both for their own stands and because they stood with those who were treated like that as well. Their goods were plundered and they joyfully accepted that, knowing that they had an enduring possession for themselves in heaven. And the writer then again warns them, "Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward."

They had started well, but now the writer is very concerned about how they will end and that brings us into the second warning in this book.

2. The exhortation (3:7-4:16) **Warning passage 2**

a. The content of this exhortation (3:7-15)

1) As illustrated from the past (3:7-11)

As I outline the book, we always have a teaching section first, and then the exhortation or warning follows. As we have noted, there are five great warnings in this book. So let us read the first part of this exhortation or warning in verses 7b-11. This is a quote from Psalm 95. It says:

7 *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:
"Today, if you will hear His voice,*

8 *Do not harden your hearts as in the
rebellion, In the day of trial in the
wilderness,*

9 *Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,
And saw My works forty years.*

10 *Therefore I was angry with that
generation, And said, 'They always go
astray in their heart, And they have not
known My ways.'*

11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

Now, verses 7-11 are a quote from Psalm 95:7b-11.

Note verse 7 begins with the word "therefore." That is not part of the quote. So, we ask again, what is the therefore, there for? Look at verses 5-6 to see why:

5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward,

6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

We, the true believers, are the house of Christ, IF. If what? If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. Why does the writer say this? Because the Hebrews were in danger of dropping the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope!

Now consider the first words of verse 7:

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

Turn to Psalm 95. I want us to see here first that the Holy Spirit speaks. Our question is, how does He speak? Well note here He said, "Today, if you will hear His voice..." So, we ask, just where did He say that? We'll read verse 7:

7 For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice:

The Holy Spirit here spoke through King David. Turn to Revelation 1. We rightly

view the Bible as God's divinely inspired Word. It is inspired or God breathed by the Holy Spirit. Let me show you how God speaks to us. We begin in verse 1:

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

We hold that the book of Revelation is divinely inspired by God. This book reveals the future to us. Note in verse 1 who had this revelation first. It says, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him..." God had the words of the book of Revelation first. So, it is with all the words in the Bible. Then He gave it to Jesus Christ. God sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John. God gave it to an angel and the angel gave it to John, the writer of this book.

Verse 2, John then bore witness to the Word of God. How? He wrote it down. Now you have God's Word on paper. Then note in verse three, that from paper it goes to the reader or hearer of the Word. And in man, it then enters his heart or mind, and from there the Spirit of God speaks to man's heart.

Not all books came in exactly that way but all came through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And all came through holy men of God. And all were written down on paper. When we read or hear it, it enters our mind

and from there the Holy Spirit can work in our lives.

So, in our passage, the Holy Spirit says this: "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Now note that the Holy Spirit speaks of a certain day. It is "today". In chapter 4:8 God limits a certain day. What day is that? Today. It is the day we hear the voice of God. If there is something between us and our Saviour, we will hardly hear His voice on that thing He wants to speak to us about.

There is a hymn that says there is nothing between me and my Saviour. We might ask ourselves, is there something between me and my Saviour? The day I hear His voice, that is the day I need to respond. And if I don't, I am hardening my heart. We know the danger of the hardening of the arteries of the heart. Soon the blood flow is restricted, and then one day the heart crashes. Oh, to hear the voice of my Saviour. Oh, to take care of some ugly blot before it is too late.

Today. This is the day to act. How many times have I put something off. How many times have I kicked and fought and dug in my heels before I finally responded? Oh, for a soft heart, like the ground freshly plowed up and made soft. And how does the Lord plow up a hardened heart? Hebrews 4:12-13 tells us. It says:

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Now these Hebrews were discouraged. And when we are discouraged, then come excuses. We can't make it to church because of this or that. I need a break. I can't give time to reading God's Word to let Him speak to me. There is not enough time. I can't give myself to prayer because of... Do you know what happens when we do not make some spiritual exercise a priority? We make excuses and drop it. I want my time. These Hebrews were like that. And the Lord said, "Straighten out those crooked knees. Lift up those feeble hands." God the Holy Spirit inspired the Word and He speaks to us through the Word. So, 2 Peter 1:21 says that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Last, verse 7 says, "...if you will hear His voice." The "if" means God might speak to us but we, for one reason or another, might not hear Him. When I dabble in sin, I will have a hard time hearing Him. When there is something between me and my Saviour, I will have a hard time hearing Him. To hear Him means to obey Him. If we do not hear Him, we fail to obey Him.

Verse 8 now says:

8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness,

Note the words, "Do not harden your hearts." Notice first that it is we that harden our hearts. They do not grow hard of their own. We let things enter or keep things out that harden our hearts. Or we fail to obey the Lord and it hardens our hearts. We understand that when the Bible speaks of the heart, it speaks of the mind. Now let me ask you, how do we harden our minds? It happens like this; when God speaks to our heart and we have an inner rebuke and we do not respond, our hearts

grow harder. It is our disobedience or failure to exercise faith that causes our hearts to grow cold and hard.

Now there is a comparison here. The writer draws on an example from the OT. It is Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan. This was the day of trial. It was a forty-year day. As we travel through life, we are in the day of trial. Verse 9 says:

9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years.

Israel tested or tempted God over and over in those forty years. Turn to Exodus 15. Israel had been miraculously delivered out of Egypt and had miraculously crossed over the Red Sea and now they came to the first place. It was Marah. Marah means bitter. Let us just read a little of this. We begin in verse 23:

23 Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah.

24 And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

25 So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.

Have you ever come to Marah? Have you tasted bitter waters in life. Let bitterness enter, and no matter how nice we make ourselves look, it spreads its ugly green bile on others.

There is a cure, it is a tree; the tree of Calvary. And this tree can make bitter waters sweet. My wife and I have had the privilege of being in some smaller revivals. Many times, those who have been

bitter enemies become reconciled. Husbands and wives ready to divorce, have their marriage remade. Oh, when bitter waters become sweet, what relief it brings.

And we would say, surely, after this miracle at Marah, they will not complain again. But when we read the full account, we find they tested the Lord over and over until God was angry. And here, Israel had tested God and now He will test them. Notice the last part of verse 25 and verse 26:

25 ...There He made a statute and an ordinance for them. And there He tested them,

26 and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."

Verse 27:

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters.

Oh, sometimes in life we come to a pleasant place. And we too, like to camp there. But as life is, we cannot stay long in one place.

Exodus 16:1:

1 And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt.

2 Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

3 And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Well, God sent them Mana. Every day they had fresh mana. Here is bread from heaven. Surely, they will not complain again. This bread too, was a picture. It pictured the true bread, Jesus Christ (John 6).

Well, we could give account after account. Hebrews 3:9 says:

9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years.

The Israelis tested God. This word can mean to test or to tempt. They tried God over and over. The word translated to "try" here is *dokimazo*. It has the idea of testing something to see how genuine it is. Israel saw His works for 40 years, and at the next trial they complained again. They saw miracles with their own eyes and then failed to believe God.

How is it with us? Do we not come up against one trial after another? And do we sometimes fail to remember how God delivered us the last time, and now we think it is hopeless again.

We go to verse 10:

10 Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.'

The writer is still quoting from Psalm 95. Because Israel rebelled again and again, God became angry with them. When we teach unconditional love like it is done today, we cannot understand some of the OT. We think the God of the OT must have changed and He is different in our day. But God does not change. That is an attribute of His. Not only did He get angry, He swore in His wrath and said, "They shall not enter My rest."

So, look at verse 10 again. God said, "They always go astray in their mind. And they have not known My ways." Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart," that is the mind, "is deceitful above all things." There is nothing as deceitful as my mind. There is nothing as deceitful as your mind. We need to own up to this. Our mind can lead us far astray while we don't recognize it. That is not somebody else. That is me.

And then further, the writer says, "They have not known my ways." Israel saw miracle after miracle and they failed to learn the ways of God. Have you noticed that in God's ways He does not spare us from trials and difficulties? He gives us one new place to learn to trust Him after another. Does it not sometimes seem He pushes us onward relentlessly? Would we not like to be able to stop and enjoy a good stretch for a while, like the twelve wells and palm trees at Elim? Oh, to learn to trust God in every place we come to in life.

Turn to Psalm 77 to learn about God's ways. The generation that came out of Egypt never learned God's ways though they saw His ways for forty years. We begin in verse 1:

1 I cried out to God with my voice—To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me.

2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the

night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah

4 You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

5 I have considered the days of old, The years of ancient times.

6 I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, And my spirit makes diligent search.

7 Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more?

8 Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore?

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah

10 And I said, "This is my anguish; But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

When you reach my age and you have sought to walk closely with God, those verses describe many a place one has been. Then the Psalmist says something wonderful, verse 11:

11 I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.

12 I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds.

13 Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God?

Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary. Now the word translated "sanctuary" here is

"holiness" but it can mean the Holy Place, or the sanctuary. Both are true. God's way is in holiness. God's way is also in the sanctuary. Here we learn His ways.

Verse 14:

14 You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples.

15 You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

16 The waters saw You, O God; The waters saw You, they were afraid; The depths also trembled.

17 The clouds poured out water; The skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about.

18 The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook.

19 Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, And Your footsteps were not known.

Your way, O Lord, was in the sea. LE Maxwell says something like this; when someone passes over the sea, soon there is no trail left. Every Christian makes his own path. The Egyptians that followed Israel came to the Red Sea but they did not know the ways of God. They did not know His path. God had opened the Red Sea for His people. The waters saw God and in fear they trembled and opened a path. The great waters trembled before God and they stood up and let Israel pass through. And Egypt, with no fear, entered that same path, but they did not know the ways of God and when God's people had passed through, these waters rushed to fulfill the law of gravity, and Egypt was no more.

And verse 20 says:

20 You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

So, let me ask us this question: Why did God record Israel's wanderings in the wilderness? Listen to 1 Corinthians 10:1-6:

1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,

2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

3 all ate the same spiritual food,

4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

We have the whole Bible. We can read through the Bible in not too long a time, and learn from those of the past, and pass through our wilderness without falling into the same errors they fell into. Then if we keep reading through, we learn one new thing after another about the ways of God. We can learn the ways of God simply by studying His word and obeying Him.

We come then to verse 11:

11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' "

God had miraculously delivered Israel out of Egypt. He had miraculously brought them through the Red Sea. He had performed many miracles such as making the bitter waters sweet and giving them mana to eat and making their shoes last for years but Israel failed God.

So, God was angry. And He swore in His wrath, and what did He swear? Here it is: "They shall not enter My rest." And now we have come to a huge question: What is this rest?

Let me just make a little note here for some Bible student who may question this. In the Greek NT it says, "If they shall enter My rest." Let me quote from Albert Barnes. He says: "As in the original, *if they shall enter*. That is, they shall not enter. The word (HEBREW) *if* has this negative meaning in Hebrew, and this meaning is transferred to the Greek word *if*. Comp. 1Sa 3:17 2Sa 3:35 2Ki 6:31."

In studying Hebrews, a number of things are said in the way Hebrews would speak to Hebrews. When one studies the Greek of this book, one must remember that. When I read some things in our town written in English I say, "That was written by a Low German person." So, it is with the book of Hebrews. It was written by a Hebrew to Hebrews. If one did not know that, one would make a wrong translation of this passage.

We come now to a question, and it is a huge question. It is this: just what rest is it that they missed out on and what is meant by the word "rest" in the rest of this chapter and chapter 4? Later in the quote I just gave by Barnes he writes: "The particular rest referred to here was that of the land of Canaan, but which was undoubtedly regarded as emblematic of the "rest" in heaven. Into that rest God

solemnly said they should never enter. They had been rebellious. All the means of reclaiming them had failed. God had warned and entreated them; he had caused his mercies to pass before them, and had visited them with judgments in vain; and he now declares, that for all their rebellion they should be excluded from the promised land."

Here then is one view of what this rest means. Barnes views this entrance into rest as an emblematic picture of the Christian's entrance into heaven. Still others view it as the rest the soul finds in salvation. It is true that when we get saved, we find rest in Jesus. But that rest is rest with regard to our eternal destiny; it is not a rest from the trials and difficulties of life. As a matter of fact, in life, true faith can multiply our trials.

Some think it speaks of the rest of faith. I have heard it called the sabbath of the soul. This then takes place when the Christian enters a state of sanctification where one has learned to fully trust in Christ in all circumstances. That is the view I took in the past. I did not question that until I came to this passage. It does not seem to fit some of the verses regarding the word "rest" in the rest of chapters 3-4.

I will go out on a limb here. Each one can study this for themselves, but I think it most probable that the rest spoken of here is the rest of the long-awaited time when the Messiah will rule on earth. The Jews believed this would happen when the Messiah came. But when the Messiah came, they rejected Him, and the Church age entered and we are now waiting for the rapture which is followed only a few years later by the millennium.

I personally do not see how Canaan pictures heaven. Heaven is a sinless place, but Canaan was not. I think rather that it pictures the millennium. Canaan had enemies and sin in it. So, it seems to me that Canaan is not a picture of heaven. The millennium, on the other hand, does have enemies and sin in it. But in the midst of that the Lord Jesus rules the world and gives rest to His people.

That Canaan was the land of rest is clear from numerous Scriptures. Listen to Deuteronomy 3:18-20. This is during the wilderness experience:

18 *"Then I commanded you at that time, saying: 'The LORD your God has given you this land to possess. All you men of valor shall cross over armed before your brethren, the children of Israel.*

19 *'But your wives, your little ones, and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock) shall stay in your cities which I have given you,*

20 *'until the LORD has given rest to your brethren as to you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them beyond the Jordan. Then each of you may return to his possession which I have given you.'*

And again, Deuteronomy 12:10:

10 *"But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety,*

And one more, Deuteronomy 25:19:

19 *"Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the*

LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.

So, it is clear that the land of Canaan was to be Israel's land of rest.

In creation, the six days of creation were followed by the sabbath. The word "sabbath" means to rest. So, the seventh day was the sabbath, the day of rest. It is possible that this world will go through 6,000 years before the millennium takes place. If that will be so, then the seventh day would picture the 7th cycle of 1,000 years; and this is the millennium.

Now let me give some evidence in the context of chapters 1-2 that indicates that the Hebrews of this book were waiting for the time when Christ would rule on earth. That time, we know, is the millennium. Go back to chapter 2:5 for a moment, to see this. It says:

5 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.

Let me quote from my notes when we went through this passage. I said, "This verse has four of the most crucial words to help us understand chapters 1-2. These words are, "of which we speak." The writer tells us what he is speaking about in these two chapters and I am so very glad for those four words. If it was not for these words, we would have to guess why the writer stresses the superiority of the Son over angels. In this verse we learn that these two chapters have to do with the world to come, and that is what he is speaking about. William R. Newell says that *the world to come* is a pervasive thought in this book.

"This world to come is the kingdom the Jews had waited for through all the past centuries. We speak of it as the millennium. The length of that age is only revealed in the book of Revelation and it had not yet been written when Hebrews was being penned.

"So look at the word *world*. It is not the word *kosmos*, which is the usual word for *world*. It is the word *oikoumene*. Let me quote what I gave in chapter 1:6. I said: "Last, notice that it says, 'But when He again brings the firstborn into the world...' Note the word 'world.' It is not the regular word for world. It is *oikoumene*, not *kosmos*. This speaks of the inhabited earth."

"So, we are speaking of the world to come. It is beyond question to me that this refers to the coming kingdom of Christ, or the millennium as we refer to it. And in verse 5 we note that this coming world is not put in subjection to angels, a teaching the Hebrews were in danger of adopting.

"I want you to notice another word in this text, it is the word "subjection." Notice now that God will not put the world to come in subjection to angels. The implication is clear. It will be put in subjection to Jesus Christ. Now what will the millennium be like? Here it is: 'The inhabited area of mankind will be in subjection to Christ!' The inhabited world, and we could say, the inhabitants of this world will be in subjection to Christ!" End quote.

Now I am going out on a limb because I cannot find support from others that the rest Israel entered when they entered the promised land pictures the millennium. Deliverance from Egypt pictured salvation. The journey through the wilderness pictures

our journey to glory. Entrance into Canaan pictures our entrance into our rest.

If that is correct, and I would not be dogmatic, any believer who dies today enters his rest right there. When the rapture happens, those believers enter their rest then. But when the millennium begins, all those who have died in the past and those who live at the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ, enter their rest. This is the millennium.

Listen to Revelation 14:13. In this passage we are in the last half of the tribulation when Christians die by the droves. It says:

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

At death, these believers enter their rest. In a short time, they will be ruling in the millennium.

CONCL: So, we conclude. It is my conclusion from Hebrews 1-2 that the Hebrews were waiting for Christ to come set up His kingdom. This is what is meant in 2:5 when it speaks of the world to come, and the writer says that this is what he is speaking about in these two chapters.

Then in chapters 3-4 the writer gives warning. From my understanding the warning is this: We are only the dwelling place of Christ if we hold the confidence and rejoicing of our hope firm to the end. I think it most probable that in particular this hope refers to their desire for the long-promised kingdom to come. When that happens, they will be delivered from Rome's rule and all will be well. This is the hope of the millennium.

And now the writer is saying: The Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear the Lord's voice don't harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the hour of trial. That is what your forefathers did. They tested Me and tried Me over and over again and for this reason I was angry with them because they always went

astray and did not know My ways. So, I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest!'"

What is the warning to the Hebrews? If you will fail to hear His voice, just like your forefathers in the wilderness, you will not enter My rest either. If you test and try God long enough, you will not enter that promised kingdom.

So, Hebrews 2:1-3a said:

1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation,

The answer is, "We won't escape any more than they did." And now he is saying, "You are longing for the world to come. If you will insist on testing and trying God, you won't enter that kingdom." God will say to you, "You shall not enter My rest!"