

Hebrews 3B (2014)

- At the beginning of chapter 3, the writer introduced three ideas or concepts intends to use over the next two chapters in making a larger point
 - First, he introduced the concept of the wilderness wanderings of Israel
 - Specifically, the writer references Moses, who he calls a servant in God's house
 - We know Moses lead God's chosen people out of Egypt
 - Moses gave them God's covenant of Law
 - And though Moses was supposed to lead them into the promised land,
 - Instead he wandered with them in a wilderness for 40 years
 - Secondly, the writer introduces the concept of Christ's superiority to Moses
 - Just as Christ is superior to angels, so is Christ a superior leader of God's people
 - As the writer explains in later chapters, Christ delivers a greater covenant
 - And He brings a greater salvation
 - Lastly, the writer introduces the concept of perseverance or steadfastness as a test of our confession of faith
 - The writer uses a picture of a house to describe the collection of God's people
 - He says that we are qualified to be part of God's house if we have held fast our confession until the end
 - The word end refers to the end of our lives
 - Last time, we noted that this holding fast is not the means to salvation
 - It's not to say that salvation comes from the work of holding on

- Rather the writer is giving us the definition of salvation
- True believers are those who hold fast their confession until the end
- So why is the writer raising these subjects of Israel and Moses in the desert and of perseverance in our confession?
 - To understand, we need to read the next part of Chapter 3

Heb. 3:7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,

Heb. 3:8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME,
AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,

Heb. 3:9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me,
AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.

Heb. 3:10 “THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION,
AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART,
AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS’;

Heb. 3:11 AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’”

- The writer quotes from Psalms 95:7-11
 - In that psalm we find a retelling of the story of Numbers 13 & 14
 - The writer is invoking a powerful reminder for his readers
 - He’s referring to the rebellion of Israel in the desert, a sad point in Israel’s history
 - As the psalmist recounts, the generation of Israel tested the Lord a total of ten times during their travels in the desert
 - Israel tested the Lord’s patience by repeatedly questioning the Lord’s faithfulness and goodness
 - They accused Him of leading them into the desert only to kill them with thirst or hunger
 - They complained about the manna
 - They worshipped a golden calf
 - They rebelled against Moses’ leadership

- Repeatedly they tested the Lord's patience, almost daring Him to act against them
- At the end of those ten times of testing, the Lord's patience came to an end
 - The final act of testing came when the Lord brought Israel to the brink of entering the promised land in Canaan
 - Rather than believe the good reports of Joshua and Caleb, the people chose to believe the lies of the other spies
 - They didn't believe God's promise that the land would be a blessing, a place of milk and honey
 - Instead, they chose to believe the lies spoken through the disobedient spies
 - In a real sense, they sided with the father of lies rather than the Father of lights
- That was the moment when the last straw broke the camel's back

[Num. 14:11](#) The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?"

[Num. 14:12](#) "I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."

[Num. 14:13](#) But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst,

[Num. 14:14](#) and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.

[Num. 14:15](#) "Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say,

[Num. 14:16](#) 'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.'

[Num. 14:17](#) "But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared,

[Num. 14:18](#) 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.'

[Num. 14:19](#) "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

[Num. 14:20](#) So the LORD said, “ I have pardoned them according to your word;
[Num. 14:21](#) but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD.
[Num. 14:22](#) “Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice,
[Num. 14:23](#) shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.

- Clearly, the Lord was disgusted with Israel’s mistrust and disobedience
 - This is the moment the psalmist was speaking about in Psalm 95
 - And this is the moment the writer in Hebrews is thinking about as he brings a warning to the the church of his day
 - We can see the what concerned the writer as we look at the details of Psalm 95
 - First, the psalmist says, “If you hear the Lord’s voice today, then respond in the right way - don’t harden your hearts to God
 - The psalmist was speaking about what happened to the generation who wandered in the desert
 - Collectively, they heard the Lord’s voice
 - They saw His wonders and miraculous works
 - They heard his voice as the sound of thunder
 - They saw the smoke and cloud
 - And nevertheless, most of them rebelled repeatedly
 - They heard the Lord in a physical sense, but they didn’t hear in a spiritual sense
 - Their hearts remained hardened and unreceptive to the word of God
 - They didn’t not accept the promises of God
 - Time and time again, most of that generation demonstrated a lack of faith
 - Notice in v.10 he says they went astray in their heart

- As the psalmist points out, that generation saw incredible things, and they shared incredible experiences, but these displays were unable to turn their hearts
 - Back in the psalm 95, the word astray is translated “erred”
 - In Hebrew the word is *taah*, which means deceived or seduced
 - They were deceived in their heart and seduced by the enemy’s lies
 - And then the Lord says they do not know My ways
 - To not know God’s ways means to lack a saving knowledge of God
 - To not know Him truly
 - Finally, God says in v.10 that He was angry with that generation, but in the psalm the word is even stronger
 - It says the Lord loathed that generation
 - To loath is an intense feeling of disgust and rejection
 - God never expresses loathing for His children; He only loathes those who deny Him
 - We see confirmation in Numbers 14:11 when God asked how long with this generation not believe in me?
- From all the facts in Psalm 95 and Numbers, we’re forced to conclude that generation of Israel were men and women who did not place their faith and trust in the Lord Who rescued them
 - They knew him in a fleshly sense, for they witnessed great displays
 - But they lacked a true heart
 - They couldn’t act in faith in response to His promises
 - They could only follow Him in a superficial, fleshly sense
 - Which is not truly following Him at all
 - That generation followed Moses to gain something they wanted
 - Whether freedom from slavery, or rescue from the Egyptian army or to seek a pleasant home in a prosperous land

- Whatever it was they sought, they weren't attracted to the spiritual blessings that come by faith alone
 - And so they acted disobediently in moments that required a faith in God's promises, in things unseen
 - So the psalmist and the writer of Hebrews point to their bad example as a call to Christians not to repeat that mistake
- Why did the writer think the church was in jeopardy of following after the example of Israel in the desert?
 - The writer must have had reason to believe that some in the church were following Christ in the same way that the Israelites followed Moses
 - The Israelites saw Moses merely as an earthly deliverer
 - A man who granted them escape from Egypt
 - A man who promised them an easy life on earth
 - But Moses was much more
 - He was the intercessor God provided
 - He delivered a covenant that bound the nation to the Lord
 - And the blessings he offered were first and foremost spiritual
 - And they depended upon faith
 - The writer is worried that some in the church were following Christ in a similar, superficial manner
 - If the church was following Christ merely because they hoped He would give them earthly benefits, then it meant they didn't know Him truly
 - And like their forefathers, they risk being condemned in the end
 - The writer has already emphasized that Christ is the builder of the house, while Moses was merely a caretaker
 - And therefore, Christ is worthy of much more honor than was Moses
 - So if Israel was condemned for a failure to show faith in following Moses, what awaits a person who will not demonstrate faith in Christ?

- Now we see the reason the writer has raised these issues
 - He's concerned that some in the early church had joined themselves to the body of Christ in an illegitimate way
 - They were like those of whom Christ spoke when he said that we must enter only by the door

John 10:1 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.

John 10:7 So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

John 10:9 “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

- Only by trusting in the word of the Lord may be saved
- But some in the church were apart of the group by affiliation but not by a personal relationship with Christ
- They had no relationship with the Lord, and in the future, they were susceptible to falling away from Christ
- At the first hint of persecution or trial or storms, they give up hope and fall away
 - Just as the Israelites who began grumbling at Moses and the Lord at the first hint of difficulty, there will be some in our congregations who step back from their faith at the first sign of trouble
 - They show they are not Christ's because they fail to hold fast their assurance firm until the end
 - Many false teachers and their megachurches preaching happiness and prosperity will empty quickly once persecution breaks out against the Church, the Bible says will happen one day
 - Under trying circumstances, there will be little reason for these posers to continue affiliating with the Church if affiliation only brings negative attention

- The sad and ever-present reality is that not all who participate with us in our congregations truly know the Lord
 - Not all have eyes to see and ears to hear
 - And in these last days, the Bible says the problem of false confessors will reach epidemic proportions
 - We will experience a great apostasy in the last days church, Paul says

1Tim. 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 1Tim. 4:2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

- Back in chapter 2 the writer issued his first warning, about those who drift away after the hearing the truth
 - They heard, but they didn't believe it and they didn't stick around
 - Like a boat untethered to the shore, they slowly drift out of sight
 - Because they did not accept the truth, they never built their house on the rock of Jesus Christ
 - They are like the seed in Luke 8 thrown on hard packed soil
 - It sits there for a time, but soon the enemy comes to take it away and it never penetrates the soil
 - So often we see this in our families and our friends and among the occasional person who hangs around the church but soon disappears
 - So the first warning was to not to pass by the truth, but pay closer attention to it
 - Now the writer's second warning is reaching past mere attention to the message and is asking for a heartfelt acceptance of its truth
 - He's speaking to the one who has stuck around without embracing the truth of Christianity
 - They have joined themselves to the congregation for the wrong reasons, without the faith God requires

- They want something from their Christian affiliation, like the Israelites who wanted escape from slavery and a chance to prosper
- They perceive an earthly benefit in Christianity, but have no appreciation for the spiritual significance of Christ
- To this group, the writer issues his second warning

Heb. 3:12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

Heb. 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Heb. 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

Heb. 3:15 while it is said,

**"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."**

- The writer addresses his audience as brethren, which causes some to ask could he be speaking to believers in this warning?
 - If so, then we would have to interpret everything he says in this chapter and the next from the perspective of a believer falling way
 - Certainly, there is a form of unbelief that is possible for the Christian
 - It would be unbelief in that sense of living in disobedience to our faith in Christ
 - Acting like an unbeliever though we know the truth
- So how do I know that the writer isn't speaking to believers in this case?
 - Chiefly, because the writer's consequences for unbelief are not consistent with the promises given to believers
 - The consequences for a disobedient believer are very different than for an unbeliever
 - And when we get into chapter 4, we'll see clearly that the writer is concerned about a consequence only an unbeliever can experience

- So we enter this discussion with an understanding that the writer is concerned about unbelievers among the faithful
- Nevertheless, we can find a message for the believer in this warning
 - While we cannot fall away from our salvation, we can fall away in obedience
 - And sin has a hardening effect on our hearts even as believers
 - If we live in sin without repenting we may find ourselves sucked into a life of sin that brings shame to Christ
 - The writer will address that concern later in the letter
 - But for now, this second warning is focused on the false confessor
- In v.12 the writer tells his readers that an evil, unbelieving heart will fall away from the living God
 - Eventually, those with unbelieving hearts will reveal themselves
 - They will fall away from their affiliation with Christ
 - Just as those who had unbelieving hearts in Israel eventually made themselves known through their disobedience in the desert
 - The truth is usually revealed in times of testing, in moments when faith is required to take the next step forward
 - In the desert, it happened when food or water was scarce, when enemies approached or the promise of a beautiful land seemed to good to believe
 - So it will be for the unbelievers in our midst
 - As persecution begins or personal trials ensue, their faith is tested anew
 - That's when they discover that Christianity doesn't bring them their best life now, so they lose heart and hope
 - When a heart isn't true, those moments of testing will reveal a person's unbelief

- Notice the unique construction of this particular warning
 - This warning is unique among the five in this letter
 - It concerns the unbeliever in the group, but the call to action is directed at the believers
 - The writer asks the believers to take care that there would be no posers among them
 - He doesn't call upon the unbeliever to fix his own heart
 - For this isn't possible
 - No one raises himself to new life
 - He calls on the believers to help the one who is incomplete
 - Christ is the Author and Perfector of our faith, but the Lord has chosen to deliver salvation through the efforts of men who preach the Gospel
 - Which is why the writer places the call of action in the lap of the believers in the church
 - They are called to solve this problem
- So how does the church respond to the writer's instructions?
 - In v.14 he says the church must encourage one another, day after day
 - We get a better sense of what kind of encouragement he means when he repeats the psalmist call to do so "as long as it is still called today"
 - In the psalm, the word "today" refers to the window of opportunity in each person's life in which we can respond to the call of the Lord
 - The psalmist called for his readers to hear the voice of the Lord and respond in obedience "today"
 - In other words, believe in the Lord without delay
 - So the encouragement the writer wants repeated in the church is the call know the Lord before time runs out
 - We are to preach the Gospel in the church consistently knowing that some among us may not have embraced the truth yet

- So we call upon them to believe while an opportunity remains
 - We can encourage each other to know the Lord without necessarily offering an altar call or other special moment in the service
 - Encouraging each other means preaching the word consistently
 - It means ensuring that the Gospel is always front and center in our understanding of what it means to be Christian
 - Reiterating that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone
 - Never substituting some other message like prosperity, healing, social justice, environmental justice, community, or whatever becomes vogue in a future day
 - In the end, faithful preaching of the word of Christ will bring ears to hear and hearts to change
 - For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ
 - And at the very least, it will help strengthen believers in the faith
 - Reminding us that we've been saved by God's grace to perform good works that glorify the Father
 - So that we may know we are counted a child of God
- And how do we know those who are children of God?
 - The writer repeats his earlier definition in v.14
 - Those who have truly become partakers of Christ are those who hold fast their assurance firm until the end
 - The assurance he mentions is a confidence in the sufficiency of Christ's promises
 - It's the opposite of what the Israelites demonstrated in the desert, questioning the Lord's promises and faithfulness
 - True Christians hold their assurance to the end, for as long as today is called today
 - In other words, we hold fast in these days as we wait for the fulfillment of God's promises
 - We hold fast until we see Him face to face

- These are the days we're called to live by faith
- Trusting in the promises of God
- And a Christian lives in that assurance until they reach the end of their days
- When you encourage someone to persevere in their faith, you're reminding them of the goodness of God and His faithfulness to His promises
 - And by that encouragement you are reinforcing their witness and their opportunity to please the Lord
 - Along the way, you may run into someone who doesn't seem to respond in the same way to your encouragement
 - The your friend in the church, your Christian neighbor
 - To that person, your encouragement may be the day of salvation
 - Preaching the Gospel isn't about special moments when you select a person, steel yourself for a difficult conversation, and then launch into a Gospel presentation
 - Instead, see it as a continual conversation all day long
 - Speak the Gospel to everyone all the time, and along the way you'll inevitably share it with an unbeliever
 - Whether in the church or in line at the supermarket