

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: **STUDIES IN HEBREWS**

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Text: **Heb. 3:7-4:10**

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ADMONITION AGAINST DISOBEDIENCE

This is the second warning. As mentioned last week, the Epistle to the Hebrews is devoted to the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Having just presented Christ as superior over Moses (3:1-6), the writer now demonstrates by comparison the tragic results that followed the recipients of the revelation that Moses gave to Israel, in order to admonish his readers, who were in a greater danger, because of the greater revelation which they had received from One who is greater than Moses. Kistemaker notes, "The author of Hebrews knows from Scripture that a falling away from God finds its origin, development, and impetus in unbelief. Unbelief – Characterized by mistrust and unreliability – first comes to expression in disobedience, which in turn results in apostasy. The signs of apostasy are hardening of the heart and an inability to repent (Heb. 3:13; 4:1; 6:6; 10:25-27; 12:15). The following series of contrasts can be made:

Unbelief – faith

Disobedience – hearing obediently

Neglect – steadfastness

Apostasy – entrance to life

Hardening – salvation

The heart of someone who turns away from God is described as sinful, which means evil or wicked. God does not take the sin of unbelief lightly, for he knows that its origin lies in man's evil heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). Furthermore, the author of Hebrews indicates that it is possible to find persons with sinful, unbelieving hearts in the fellowship of the Christian church."¹

I. **THE EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL** (vv. 7-11)

Psalm 95 is the O.T. text the writer uses to illustrate his point. The Psalm invites God's people to worship (vv. 1-6)... and WARNS against disobedience by citing the historic examples of the children of Israel in the wilderness (vv. 7-11).

A. **THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF UNBELIEF** (3:7-11, 16-19)

1. Israel at Rephidim (Ex. 17:1-7)

In spite of the fact that they had experienced the deliverance through the Red Sea, the bitter waters of Marah had been healed, and their food wants provided for, they still doubted the presence of God among them (v.7): The provision of water from the smitten rock, which Paul says was Christ (I Cor. 10:1-3), is a type of the death of Christ. "There could be no water till Christ had died. The water from the cleft of the rock is the type of the Holy Spirit, who was given as the result of the finished work of Christ."²

2. Israel at Kadesh-Barnes (Num. 13:1-14:45)

This important crisis occurred in the second year of their wilderness journey – (cf. Ex. 3:8).

a. The Majority, minority reports the same (13:27-28, 30).

b. The sin was not flagrant immorality, but UNBELIEF (14:11, 23, 40).

3. Israel at Kadesh (Num. 20:1-13) – Provocation in the 40th year.

NOTE: PROVOKED (Heb. *KIMEREVOH*, Gk. *PARAPIKRASMOI*, to embitter, exasperate, agitate)
HARDEN (Heb. *KASHAH*, to be harsh, as in the case of Pharaoh, it marked his restlessness, impatience,

petulance and irritability, of which his course was characterized, while he was resisting the urgent appeals, not only of Moses, but also of his own people.³ Gk. *SKLERUNO*, is properly an epithet applied to that which through lack of moisture is hard and dry, and, thus, rough and disagreeable to touch; or more than this, warped and intractable. ... It is then transferred to the region of ethics in which it chiefly moves, expressing their roughness, harshness, and intractability in the moral nature of a man. (cf. I Sam. 25:3 LXX)⁴

B. THE ADMONITION AGAINST APOSTASY (3:12-15)

The Hebrews are now warned by direct address (v. 7, logical connection with v.12) against what F.F. Bruce has called the “irretrievable sin”⁵ (cf. v.12), EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF, IN DEPARTING (Gk. *APOSTENAI*, to stand off from, to step aside from) FROM THE LIVING GOD.

Notice that the writer states that to depart from Christ, in any way, is to depart from the living God:

NOTE: What is meant by the term LIVING GOD? John Brown remarks, “The expression LIVING is intended to convey the idea of power. ‘DEAD’ is often equivalent to powerless; LIVING, to powerful. This is remarkably the case in two passages in this Epistle: ‘The word of God is quick (LIVING) and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of the soul and spirit.’ ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the LIVING God...he (who) departs from Him ‘with whom is the fountain of life’, and who alone can make him happy; he departs from Him who *can* execute all the threatenings which He has denounced against those who forsake Him.”⁶ It would seem that the word “ability” could be used to describe LIVING; by that I mean that God, unlike man who is ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ (Eph. 2:1-3), has all the ability to do that which He has said He will do.

QUESTION: Why is this the “irretrievable sin”? Why is this the one damning sin that exasperates God?

- (1). It cancels the promises of God. (v. 11, 19; Isa. 7:9)
- (2). It separates one from the Promises. (v. 12)
- (3). It voids the sacrifice of Christ. (v. 14)

NOTE: The six appeals that the writer urges on his readers.

- (1). Consider (3:1)
- (2). Hear His voice (v. 7)
- (3). Harden not your hearts (v. 8)
- (4). Take heed (v. 12)
- (5). Exhort (v. 13)
- (6). Hold fast (v. 14)

The writer concludes his illustration (v. 19) by saying AND SO WE SEE (Gk. *BLEPOMEN*, to look at, regard, consider). What do we see? The tragic *results* of unbelief.

C. THE ADMONITION AGAINST FAILURE TO ENTER REST (4:1-10)

Perhaps no portion of the Epistle is more confusing to people than this one. The chief difficulty is interpreting what is meant by REST. The Bible presents *three* kinds of rest:

- (1). The past rest of *salvation* (Matt. 11:28)
- (2). The present rest of *sanctification*, rest from the activity of the self-life (Heb. 11:29; Rom. 7:1-25)
- (3). The future rest of the *eternal state*. This is the sense here (cf. v. 9, Gk. *SABBATISMOS*), It is *God’s rest*, of which the seventh day and the entrance into the promise land were types.

1. THE ADMONITION ITSELF (v. 1)

Notice the expression ANY ONE OF YOU (cf. 3:12). We have a promise; unbelief may lead some to loss of it. The writer was not sure about all of the Hebrews. Jn. 3:14 the writer assures his readers that they really have “come (and continue) to share in Christ.” The perfect tense of the verb *GEGONAMEN* underscores what they became and still are.

2. THE EXPLANATION OF IT (vv. 2-8)

The rest, which has been available from creation, was missed by Israel with Joshua. But it was still available in David’s day and TODAY.

NOTE: What is this rest of God? If you don’t understand this rest of ch. 3 and 4, you will never grasp the meaning of Hebrews. Two things are clear about this rest.

- (1). It is God’s rest into which we enter.
- (2). It is a future rest, not present (cf. v. 3; ENTER, Gk. *EISERCHOMETHA*, is a present futuristic). The rest of God is the Kingdom of God, which we as believers in Jesus Christ have right and title to the moment we believe, and into which we shall enter in the future. The entire Epistle demands that we understand this as a future rest (cf. 2:5; 4:9; 9:28; 10:36-37; 13:14).

3. THE SUMMATION (vv. 9-10)

The Kingdom rest, typified by God's Sabbath rest *remains over* from past time (Gk. *APOLEIPETAI*) The conclusion drawn from the argument which precedes is that there remains a rest, now described as a Sabbath rest, for those who genuinely are the people of God. The expression "Sabbath rest" links the concept of the promised rest still more closely with the account of creation in which the seventh or Sabbath day was the day on which God rested from his labors.⁷

CONCLUSION: What is the nature of the sin that confronted the Hebrews? Apostasy – but what kind? They were in danger of returning to the old cultic structure of Judaism and to its works-righteousness. In other words, as O'Brien points out, "This sin is Trinitarian in its scope, for it involves a persistent and culpable refusal to obey the voice of the living God who speaks in his Son and warns from heaven (Heb. 1:1-4; Heb, 12:25). It treats Jesus with utter contempt by crucifying him again, subjecting him to public disgrace (Heb. 6:6), and rejecting his new covenant sacrifice by which the work of atonement was completed (Heb. 10:29). And it arrogantly insults God's gracious Spirit through whom Christ offered himself to God and who applies the definitive forgiveness of sins to believers (Heb. 10:29). The fact that it is willful, persistent, and committed in view of the knowledge of the truth rules out the possibility that it is due to ignorance (Heb. 10:26). Unlike other sins, offenses, and weaknesses of believers referred to in Hebrews that have been wonderfully atoned for through Jesus' new covenant sacrifice and high priestly ministry, there is no provision for the sin of apostasy. For those who utterly reject God's gracious plan of saving people and bringing them to glory "there remains no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26). In the light of this, the special character of the sin of apostasy must be understood clearly and not confused with other sins and weaknesses of Christians, as has often been the case throughout church history. Since this offense constitutes a total renunciation of everything that is distinctively Christian and which the person has previously professed, it is not the sin of the outsider or the one who is on the edge of church life."⁸ The kind of disobedience that is foremost in our author's mind is captured by Luther in his *Tabletalk*. "Idolatry is all manner of seeming holiness and worshipping, let these counterfeit spiritualities shine outwardly as glorious and fair as they may; in a word, all manner of devotion in those that we would serve God without Christ the Mediator, his Word and command. In popedom it was held a work of the greatest sanctity for the monks to sit in their cells and meditate of God, [solitude] and of his wonderful works; to be kindled with zeal, kneeling on their knees, praying, and having their imaginary contemplations of celestial objects [meditation], with such supposed devotion, that they wept for joy. In these their conceits, they banished all desires and thoughts of women, and what else is temporal and evanescent. They seemed to meditate only of God, and of his wonderful works. Yet all these seeming holy actions of devotion, which the wit and wisdom of man holds to be angelical sanctity, are nothing else but works of the flesh. All manner of religion, where people serve God without his Word and command, is simply idolatry, and the more holy and spiritual such a religion seems, the more hurtful and venomous it is; for it leads people away from the faith of Christ, and makes them rely and depend upon their own strength, works, and righteousness."⁹

Endnotes

¹ Simon Kistemaker, *The New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Baker, 1984) p. 93

² A.C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible I* (Moody, 1970) p. 148

³ Robert Girdlestone, *Synonyms of The Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1974) p. 67

⁴ Richard Trench, *Synonyms of The New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1973) p.47

⁵ F.F. Bruce *Peake's Commentary On The Bible* (Cokesbury, 1962) p. 1011

⁶ John Brown, *An Exposition of The Epistle to The Hebrews* (The Banner of Truth, 1961) p. 178

⁷ Philip E. Hughes, *Commentary on The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1974) p. 161

⁸ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to The Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 2010) cf.

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/01/09/warning-passages-ahead>

⁹ Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, This can be found at: <http://toddpruitt.blogspot.com/2012/01/counterfeit-spiritualities.html>