



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Do Not Harden Your Hearts

Hebrews 3:7-12

March 15, 2009

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,
 ‘Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
 on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹where your fathers put me to the test
 and saw my works for forty years.
¹⁰Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;
 they have not known my ways.’
¹¹As I swore in my wrath,
 ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall
 away from the living God.

- ❖ On January 27, 1945, Allied Soviet troops entered the German deathcamp of Auschwitz and delivered approximately 7,000 prisoners remaining in the camp. During World War II, the German SS camp killed nearly one million Jews in Auschwitz alone (approximately 74,000 Poles, 21,000 Gypsies, and 15,000 Soviets also lost their lives in the notorious concentration camp).
- ❖ Yet, Auschwitz is only one of many captivities the Jews have faced in their existence.
- ❖ In fact, few people groups have been more persecuted than the Jews. From Assyria, to Babylon, to modern day persecutions like the Holocaust and Russian ghettos and pogroms, the Jews are no strangers to hardship.
- ❖ Yet, one of the most famous captivities and deliverances of the Jews was through the great deliverer Moses – as He led them out of Egypt in the Passover.
- ❖ However, like all aspects of the Old Testament, the Egyptian deliverance points to our greatest deliverance – from the bondage of sin through the work of Jesus Christ.

“The New Testament bears witness, in a number of places, to a primitive and widespread Christian interpretation of the redemptive work of Christ in terms of a new Exodus.” F.F. Bruce

- In fact, consider the following truths:
 - The death of Jesus Christ, in **Luke 9:31**, is called an “exodus.”
 - Jesus Christ is the perfect Passover slain for His people (**1 Corinthians 5:7**).
 - He is the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (**1 Peter 1:19**).
 - In **1 Corinthians 10:1**, Paul refers to the passing through the Red Sea as a baptism.
 - In **1 Corinthians 10:3**, Paul states that Israel ate and drank of the same spiritual food – which points to our nourishment in Christ.
 - In **1 Corinthians 10:4**, Paul states that it is Christ who IS the Living Rock, who was their guide and drink in the wilderness.
 - Also, Canaan represents our heavenly home to which we all are traveling.
 - Even Jude states, in **Jude 5**, that “Jesus...saved a people out of the land of Egypt...”

- Here, in Hebrews 3:7-12, the author quotes from **Psalm 95:7-11**.
 - In the original context, the Psalm may be broken into two parts: (1) Psalm 95:1-7a, which is a call to worship God; and (2) Psalm 95:7b-11, which warns against disobedience.
 - In the second part of Psalm 95, which is the focus here, the Psalmist references Israel’s disobedience in the wilderness as an example of disobedience.

- The author of Hebrews opens, saying, in **Verse 7**, “Therefore as the Holy Spirit says...”
 - Here, the author of Hebrews expresses, in no uncertain terms, that the Old Testament is divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit.
 - This is consistent with the New Testament testimony, as well:

2 Peter 1:21: “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

- Then, the author begins to quote from **Psalm 95**, saying, “Today, if you hear his voice...”
 - In the original context, the “Today” was likely during the reign of King David.
 - However, the writer of Hebrews was certainly appropriating the Psalm to his first-century readers.
 - Similarly, the text also applies to us today, demonstrating that **God still speaks to us today, through His Scriptures.**
 - The Bible is just as relevant to us TODAY as it was in the first century or the 10th Century, B.C.

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- Then, the author of Hebrews writes, “...do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness...”
 - In the original Psalm, the Psalmist states, “...do not harden your hearts, as at **Meribah**, as on the day at **Massah** in the wilderness...”
 - These two incidences, at Meribah and Massah, were classic cases of Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness.
 - In fact **Meribah corresponds to rebellion**; whereas, **Massah corresponds to testing**.
 - The Greek word for “rebellion”, occurring only here, is *parapikrasmos*, which comes from the root *pikros*, meaning “bitter.”
 - This seems to be a direct reference, then, to Meribah, where the water was “bitter.”
 - Consider **Exodus 17**:

“¹ All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?’ ...
⁷And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling [Meribah] of the people of Israel, and because they tested [Massah] the LORD by saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’”

- ❑ What is incredible about the rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness is that they had experienced God’s incredible grace, accompanied by undeniable miracles; yet, they still rebelled.
- ❑ In Exodus 7-12, they had witnessed the ten plagues, which brought Egypt and Pharaoh to their knees.
- ❑ They had experienced the Exodus, in Exodus 12.
- ❑ God led them to the Red Sea by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13).
- ❑ God then parted the Red Sea and swallowed up Pharaoh’s army behind them.
- ❑ Yet, despite these unbelievable miracles, the people immediately complained after crossing the Red Sea.

“¹They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³and the people of Israel said to them, ‘Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’”

- ❑ People often say, “If only God would give me a sign – a sign I could see - ,then, I would be ok...I would believe...I would obey.”
 - Yet, the Scriptures prove such thinking to be completely false.
 - It would be difficult to imagine a tangible miracle as incredible as the Exodus; yet, almost immediately following the Exodus, the people of God are grumbling.
 - Furthermore, God also referred to them as being “stiff-necked” (Exodus 32:9; 33:3-5), in that they would not bow their heads to Him. Yet, ironically, they would bow before idols!
- ❑ The other **great Rebellion** recorded in the Torah is found in **Numbers 14**.
 - In Numbers 13, God had sent out twelve spies (one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel) from Kadesh-barnea to scout out Canaan in preparation of the people taking possession of it.
 - Yet, the spies return terrified, saying, “We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey...However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large... We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are” (**Numbers 13:27-31**).

- However, Joshua and Caleb urged the people of Israel to obey the LORD and take possession of the Land, trusting in His power to deliver them. Joshua states, in **Numbers 14:8-9**, “Do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land...the LORD is with us; do not fear them.”
- In fact, the people cried out in **Numbers 1:1-4**:

“¹Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. ²And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, ‘Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ ⁴And they said to one another, ‘Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.’”

- The people even sought to stone Caleb and Joshua for urging obedience to the LORD’s command to take possession of the land.
- Yet, because of the rebellion of the people, God swore that they would not enter into His rest, that is, the Land of Canaan:

“²¹But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, ²² none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, ²³ shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it.”

- Also, **Deuteronomy 2:14** states that the people of Israel would wander in the vicinity of Kadesh-barnea for 38 years “until the entire generation, that is, the men of war, had perished from the camp, as Yahweh had sworn to them.”
- That is, they would not enter “the rest and the inheritance, which Yahweh your God gives you” (**Deuteronomy 12:9**).

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□ The author of Hebrews follows his reference to Psalm 95, stating, “Take care, brothers, let there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” **Hebrews 3:12**

- We are just like the Israelites being released from bondage in Egypt. However, our bondage was sin, and our deliverer, Christ. We, too, are bound for the Promised Land (our eternal Home and Rest) by crossing over the River Jordan, which is death. Yet, we have not yet entered into our Rest. We are like the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. We are living life in a period of testing...in the wilderness.
- It is also significant that the writer of Hebrews is writing about **40 years after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – an event that is called “an exodus.”**

- Donald Guthrie writes:

“It has been suggested that the writer of this epistle may have read into the ‘forty years’ the period which had elapsed since the crucifixion of Jesus, during which the Jewish people generally had continued to reject him.”

- Consequently, the Hebrews writer may have had a particular purpose for the “forty years” reference, with respect to his first-century Jewish audience.
- That is, it would have been as if he were saying, “Do not rebel as your forefathers did in the wilderness.”

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- Consider, though, how we rebel today?

- When times are difficult, how do we react? How are we when trials come our way? Do we, like the Israelites, grumble, even blaming God?
- A.W. Pink writes:

“Testings reveal the state of our hearts – a crisis neither makes nor mars a man, but it does *manifest* him. While all is smooth sailing we appear to be getting along nicely. But are we? Are our minds stayed upon the Lord, or are we, instead, complacently resting in His temporal mercies? When the storm breaks, it is not so much that we fail under it, as that our habitual lack of leaning upon God, of daily walking in dependency upon Him, is made evident.”

- Jonathan Edwards concurs, writing, “Trials...have a tendency to distinguish between true religion and false, and to cause the difference between them evidently to appear.”
- Yet, do we demonstrate a lack of trust in God and His sufficiency in Christ?
- Do we grumble and complain, as if God *owes us something*?
- Consider the words of the Apostle Paul as well, “Do all things without grumbling or questioning” (Philippians 2:14).

- It is amazing, as well, how we, like the Israelites of old, not only grumble against God, and rebel against Him, but we also **put Him to the test**.

- So often, even in the Church, when we are not satisfied with the sufficiency of Christ alone, we decide in our mind that we want or even “need” something from God.
- And rather than asking, and waiting, we claim that “God has spoken to me” or that “God is leading me” or that I am “stepping out in faith.”

- We do this with not only our seeking after material possessions, but in our decisions as well.
- For example, families and churches will go into tremendous amounts of debt, claiming “God is leading me to by this building” and that “we are stepping out in faith.” Yet, this is most certainly putting God to the test and failing to trust in His present provision.
- Furthermore, like the Israelites, we fail to recognize the incredible miracle of our own Exodus and the truth that we are but sojourners in the wilderness, waiting for the day that we, too, will enter into the Promised Land.
 - Consequently, when we realize what God has already done for us, and what He will do, our hearts should be filled with gratefulness and joy.
 - So rarely, do we realize how great our lives are with Christ as our Guide and Savior.
 - Yet, again, far too often we grumble and complain.
 - Douglas Wilson explains, “Complaint is the flag of ingratitude, and it waves above the center of unbelieving hearts – ‘when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful’ (Romans 1:21).”
 - Also, ponder the words of the Apostle Paul, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).
 - Ultimately, our complaining is a symptom of a deadly disease that is rooted in an ignorance of the nature of God.

Even more, our complaining reveals that we desire the blessings of God more than God Himself.

- **Isaiah 1:3** states, “³The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”
- Also, consider the words of Jesus in **John 17:3**: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

“Salvation is not a matter of knowing God’s blessings – after all, many people who do not know God know his blessings – but it is a matter of knowing Him, and understanding His character and His ways, and more and more trusting Him in all things... If you want the gifts while having no real interest in the Giver, then you will not persevere through the trials of this life, when circumstances turn against you and God’s blessings are seen only with eyes of faith.”

Richard Phillips

- ❑ **Yet, we also must consider the context of the Book of Hebrews, that Jesus is Superior to all creation – to include Moses. So if God punished the nation of Israel in the manner He did, for not obeying Moses, how much more will our judgment be if we reject Christ, who is infinitely superior to Moses.**

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- ❑ **Consequently, we must fix our eyes on Jesus, the Apostle and Great High Priest!**
 - Christ has gone before us in the wilderness.
 - In fact, He spent 40 days in the wilderness and resisted the temptation to put the “LORD our God to the test” (Matthew 4:7).
 - Further, since Christ suffered and was tempted (Hebrews 2:18), He is able to lead us and help us in our time of need.
 - So, when we know God, since we know Christ, and we fix our eyes on Him, our trials and difficulties are put into the proper perspective.
 - Donald Grey Barnhouse said it this way: “How wonderful that when we are blinded by tears, we can nevertheless see our God. In fact, our tears become crystal lenses through which He is magnified; and in the midst of suffering we realize the greatness of His power and the tenderness of His love.”
- ❑ Recall during one of the rebellions in the wilderness, in Numbers 21:4-9, “the LORD sent fiery serpents among the mpeople, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died” Numbers 21:6.
 - Then, God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent so that whoever lifted their eyes up to it would live.
 - And it was Jesus Christ, Himself, in John 3:14-15, who said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must he Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”
 - Consequently, may we **hear the words of the Holy Spirit and lift our eyes to the Son of Man, that we may have eternal life.**
 - And since Jesus Christ has gone before us *through* the wilderness, we now we shall reach the Promised Land and be with Him for eternity.

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- ❑ Yet, our obedience is contingent upon one truth: the ability to *hear* what the Holy Spirit has said. This not only consistent with this passage, but with Paul’s letter to the Romans: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”
- ❑ May we have ears to hear and hearts and minds to understand that we may have the faith to obey Christ as He leads us to the Promised Land!