

HEBREWS
Hold Fast to Your Faith
By Ron Harvey

Text: Hebrews 3:7-19

INTRODUCTION

Hebrews is a very exciting book. Now we have learned that it is a book about the excellence of Christ. And it proves over and over that Christianity is the light at the end of that long tunnel of Judaism. Now all along this tunnel were signs pointing to Christ. There were priests that pointed to Him. There was an altar that pointed to Him. There was a lamb without blemish that pointed to Him.

Now Judaism was the only true religion before Christ, but in every respect it pointed toward that coming Savior.

Did you know that the Old Testament was really about Christ?

Jesus said,

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me.

John 5:46

Example: When Philip came upon the Ethiopian eunuch, this man was reading in the Old Testament Scriptures. And he happened to be reading from Isaiah where it said, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth." (Acts 8:32) And this poor man from Ethiopia had no idea what that meant. And in God's wondrous providence, along came Philip. And it says,

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Acts 8:35

You see, the Old Testament is like a laser beam in its focus. And that beam shines in a straight line and if you follow that line to its end, you will find Jesus Christ.

One day, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus. And they were trying to interpret what the crucifixion of Jesus was all about. Everyone was talking about it. The whole countryside was in an uproar about this man Jesus. What did it all mean? And as they were walking along, Jesus appeared to them and he opened up the Old Testament and explained it to them. Here is what it says in Luke 24:27:

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:27

If you are like me, when you read the Old Testament, sometimes you kind of scratch your head and ask yourself, "What does all this mean?" And what do all these historical events mean? And the answer is that these things testified of Jesus.

Look at Hebrews 3:5.

And Moses was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony.

You see, all these things that were done by Moses and all these historical events concerning Moses and Israel were for the purpose of a testimony. It was a witness or an example. It was a picture or as our verse here says – a testimony. And a testimony of what? Of those things which would be spoken after.

These events surrounding Moses were for an illustration of those things which were coming later.

Now that seems to refer back to Hebrews 1:1, 2 where it says,

God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.

And so, the things which Moses did were for a testimony of those things which were spoken after.

The same idea is found in I Corinthians 10:11.

Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

We often refer to these things as types and the Bible calls them shadows. But they are types of Christ and Christianity. And Hebrews teaches us that Christ and Christianity is better than all of those types. Christ and Christianity is better because it is the end to which all those types pointed. Christ was their ultimate meaning. They wrote of local matters but Christ was the bigger picture.

So, Hebrews is about the superiority of Christ. But if it stopped there, the study of Hebrews would be just an intellectual exercise. If we just studied the great attributes of Christ without a personal application, then much of the value of the book would be lost. The great question is, since Christ is the sum and substance of the entire Old Testament, and since he is superior to Judaism and all other forms of religion, what is our duty as professing Christians?

This book of Hebrews is a book about Christ. But it is also a book of warning. And it warns us that there is a great danger of those that profess Christ. And that danger is that they will turn away from their profession and prove that they are none of His.

Now before we talk about this warning against falling away, I want first of all to encourage you with words of assurance from the Scriptures.

Now the visible church is made up of all those who have made a profession of faith in Christ and they have been baptized and joined a local assembly. And they may be alive in Christ or they may be mere professors of Christ. And time will tell because those who have been made alive will persevere to the end. How do we know they will persevere? We know, because the Scriptures tell us that God will keep them. Now we call that preservation. God saves them by his power and God keeps them by his power. And this is eternal security indeed. We trust not in our own strength but in the promise of God that he will keep us.

I hope if you are a Christian, that you take great comfort that God will keep you. Though you are weak and stumbling in your faith, He is strong and sure. Though you know in yourself there is the possibility and even the probability that you would fall away from Him, you know that He will keep you to the end.

Now when God keeps us, he works in us. It says in Ephesians 2:10 that,

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

God has made us alive. He has given us a new nature. He indwells us with his Spirit. He has ordained that we should walk in good works. And therefore it is a settled matter. What God has ordained no man can undo.

And not only do we have the decree of God underlying our good works, but we have the very promise of God that says, "I will keep you." (Jude 24)

Jesus said,

"And this is the Father's will which hat sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

John 6:39

So we have the decree of God that says, "I ordain my people unto good works. And we have the promise of God that he will keep us. And we trust in the power of God to keep us. And we know that if he has saved us, then He will not fail us, but he will keep us in the faith. This is security indeed – that salvation is a work of God and he will not fail in his work.

Now all of that is salvation from the divine perspective. But all of that always translates into changes that are made in us. And they are permanent changes. And we will always believe in Him and serve Him because our new nature cannot fall away from Him.

There is a natural consequence to being made alive and saved by God. That is, we are changed and we are a new creature.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are past away; behold, all things are become new.

II Cor.5:17

Now the natural result of God's saving us and of his preservation of us is that we will persevere. Preservation is our security from God's perspective. Perseverance is our security from our perspective.

There is a fundamental principle which prevails in every case and that is, If God saves you then you will persevere. It is true in every case. You will never ultimately and permanently fall away. It is impossible because it is God by his power that keeps you persevering.

Now never misunderstand, it is quite necessary to persevere to the end. You must continue in your faith of Christ. It is your duty and it is your destiny by God's decree to continue. And it is by his power that you will continue.

He that endures to the end shall be saved. And this is prerequisite to entering heaven. You must come to Christ and you must continue with him to the end. And so you will if he has saved you.

But there are those who have attached themselves to Christ and to his church in some way. Perhaps they have confessed him with their mouth. Perhaps they have joined with one of his assemblies. Perhaps they have been baptized. And yet, they have not been made alive at all. There is no new nature. There is no indwelling Spirit. There is no real heart attachment to Christ.

And the unfailing principle here is that unless they come to Christ in saving faith they will ultimately fall away. The faith that they now proclaim is nothing but lip service and when there are trials and troubles they will fall away. When Christianity becomes inconvenient, they will leave Christ. When the cares of the world come calling, they will leave.

This was the nature of the early church. Some of these Jewish Christians were now suffering great persecution for leaving Judaism and adopting Christianity. And some of them were leaving Christ and the church and returning to that outdated religion called Judaism. And this is the

warning of Hebrews. If you leave Christ, you have fallen into apostasy and there is no hope for you. You have proven that you are not saved at all.

And if you turn away from Christ, where else do you look for salvation? If you abandon your confidence in Him, then what hope is there for you?

This, to a large degree, is the message of Hebrews. It is a very solemn warning to hold on tight to Christ and never let Him go.

But Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Hebrews 3:6

For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.

Hebrews 3:14

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

Hebrews 4:14

Let us hold fast the profession of our hope without wavering;

Hebrews 10:23

Do you start to get the feel for what Hebrews is all about? It is a grand exhortation to hold fast to our profession because Christ is worth holding onto.

Now that brings us to our text for this morning which employs an Old Testament historical event for our instruction. We are to consider what happened to Israel in the wilderness so that the same does not happen to us.

Now let's read Hebrews 3:7-11.

Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said,

They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.

And I would have you notice first that,

The Scriptures claim to be divinely written.

Now verses 7 through 11 are a quote from Psalm 95. Psalm 95 was written by David around 1000 BC some 400 years after Moses led Israel out of Egypt. Look at Psalm 95:7-11. David wrote these words. Yet, the writer of Hebrews says, "The Holy Ghost says."

So you will notice that the Scriptures claim to be divinely inspired. David penned the words, but he penned them as he was born along by the Holy Spirit so that he wrote the very words of God.

But you also notice something else here about the Word of God. It is unchangeable and timeless. Notice that Hebrews 3:7 says, "the Holy Ghost saith." The Holy Spirit inspired the words in David's day and spoke to the people then. But he spoke them again through Paul's pen to these Hebrew Christians in Paul's day. And now, he is speaking them again for us some 2000 years later as we study his Word together.

This phrase, "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith" should make us come to this book (the Bible) with absolute awe and deepest reverence. These words in this great book are the very words of God himself. They are absolutely inerrant. They are without contradiction. They are infallible. They must be studied with great care and diligence. And yet, we come to this book asking, "Lord, who is able to understand these things?" The thoughts contained in this book are higher than the thoughts of man. And the Lord says, "My ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts." The vast knowledge and wisdom of this book cannot be gathered in by mere reasoning but it is gathered in by childlike faith.

Most Men Will Not Listen

Now even though this is the very Word of God, the writer says in verse 7, "If ye will hear his voice."

Example: Sometimes a father would like to sit his son down and

warn him about all the pitfalls in life, wouldn't he? But many times, children won't listen and they must learn life's lessons the hard way.

And this is the way men are when it comes to God's instruction. This is a sad commentary on the state of the human heart. Though God lovingly condescends to speak to man, few there are that will hear him. In case you haven't noticed, there is a dullness to the ears of man when it comes to the voice of God. They have tuned him out with a sinful neglect of his Word. Though he has spoken mighty words and though he has spoken gracious words and though he has spoken words of redemption, there is a dullness in the ears of man.

And so the writer says,

Today, if ye will hear his voice.

It is not a foregone conclusion that men will hear Him. Although he speaks with both a booming voice and a clear voice, the human heart is always apt to close the ears to him. We are always apt to sinfully forget his Word and to neglect it. And then, we are apt to set our faces against it obstinately because we prefer our sin.

So, he says, "*If ye will hear his voice.*"

So, here in this passage, it is the Holy Spirit that speaks these words to us. The question is, will we hear it.

Unbelieving Israel Serves As Our Example

Now in the next few verses we are pointed to Israel as an example for us. And it says,

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness. When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

Now this passage talks about the provocation. And it is most likely referring to the entire wilderness period during which the people continually faced temptations and challenges to their faith. If you will remember, when God brought them out of Egypt, they came to the Red Sea and it looked

like there was no escape and the people berated Moses and said, “Have you brought us here to die?” (Ex.14:11) But God miraculously delivered them.

And then three days later they were out of water. And the waters of Marah were bitter and they couldn’t drink. And the people murmured against Moses. And God delivered them by making the waters sweet. (Ex.15:25)

Then after about a month and a half, they got hungry and there wasn’t enough to eat in the wilderness. And they murmured against Moses. (Ex.16:2) And God miraculously gave them manna from heaven. (Ex.16)

Now you would think after all these great deliverances that they would have unshakable faith. But not so.

Later they journeyed to Rephidim and again there was no water to drink. And they murmured and complained and failed to trust God. And God told Moses to strike the rock and water came out of the rock. (Ex.17)

When Moses went up into the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments from God, the people were impatient for his return and they made a golden calf and they forsook God and worshipped this idol.

When the spies were sent out to scout out the promised land, they came back with a bad report. “There are giants in the land,” they said. And the people rose up in unbelief and they said, “Let’s return to Egypt.”

Look at Numbers 14.

And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

Numbers 14:11

But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see

the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it.

Numbers 14:21-23

All of this served to provoke the Lord and it made him very angry with the people. And so, it is called the provocation. Every time there was a hardship the people had the same response: They panicked, they questioned God and then they turned on Moses.

Now of course, the proper response would have been to trust God in all hardships. They had seen his miracles. They had seen his great deliverance and they should have trusted Him. Instead, they panicked in unbelief each time. And, they turned against God and they turned on Moses.

Now the question is, “What was the problem with this stiff-necked people?” And the answer is that their heart was not right.

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. (v.7)

You see, this was the great problem. They had an evil heart.

They do always err in their heart. (v.10)

Oh, they made a profession of faith in God and they even bowed to worship at times when they saw his great miracles. But they always fell back into unbelief.

Now think about this. When did they go wrong? When was it when they left the Lord? Was it just before they were to enter into the land? No, it was before that.

Was it when they built the golden calf? No, before that.

Was it when they murmured against God for water and bread? No, before that.

Was it when they came to the Red Sea and panicked thinking they were going to die? No, it was even before that.

Even when Moses was bringing plagues on Egypt, the people murmured against God because Pharaoh increased their burden.

So you see, this was an unbelieving people from the very beginning. At times they believed for a moment when they saw the miracles, but it was an unrepentant belief and they soon fell away into apostasy when the next trial occurred.

And look what God says about them in verse 10:

They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.

And all of this the writer of Hebrews calls the provocation.

They continued to provoke God with their unbelief.

God Swore That They Would Not Enter Into Rest

And look what God did concerning them:

So I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. (v.11)

Now it says that God swore. He made an oath and he swore that they would not enter into the land.

God determined it and he sealed it with a vow that they would not enter into the land. And this is what God does with all unbelievers.

Now some people think that they can come to God at their leisure, that they can believe any time they get ready. And perhaps that is what the Israelites thought in the wilderness. We'll just watch for a while and see if we want to trust God. There is no hurry. There is no compelling reason to submit to Him right now. We have plenty of time. We will just watch and see.

Oh, no. This is a great error. We may only come to Him when he bids us come. He may open the door unto us for a time and he invites us to trust Him. But then, without notice, he may shut that door and there will be no more invitation.

This is what He did to this provoking people of Israel. He shut the door and he swore in his wrath, "They shall not enter into my rest."

And every one of these unbelievers died in the wilderness in the next 38 years. And look what it says about them in verse 17.

Whose carcasses fell in the wilderness.

This is a way of saying that they were utterly rejected and despised because of their unbelief. They were not even bodies – they were mere carcasses, like the remains of animals.

We saw last week that you are a Christian principally because you are a partaker of a heavenly calling. (v.1) Did you know that no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him? You can't come on your terms and you cannot come at your time. You must come on his terms and at his time. And if anyone waits one more day, he may swear in his wrath that you will not enter into his rest, then you will not enter in.

All of these unbelievers, died in the wilderness and they never entered into the land because their hearts were evil and they would not trust God.

I want you to see that their principal sin was unbelief.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. (v.12)

And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? (v.18)

Se we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (v.19)

I want to make sure that we all understand that there is only one thing that we can do to please God and that is to believe Him. There is only one way to lay hold of salvation and that is to believe. Oh yea, these Israelites committed a lot of heinous acts when they were in the wilderness. I Cor. 10 tells us that they committed idolatry, they committed fornication and other gross acts of sin. But all of this stemmed from a wicked heart of unbelief.

Our Responsibility In Light of This Example

I. Hold Fast. (v.6)

Here is our great duty as a believer. It is to hold fast. There will be storms in life. There will likely be great trials which will tempt us to fall away. And the writer says, "Hold fast."

What are we going to do when sickness comes upon us – when we go to the doctor and he tells us we have cancer? Are we going to curse God and leave the faith or will we hold on to Him?

Now every time some trial came along to the Israelites in the wilderness they would panic. And they panicked because they didn't believe in God.

But when trials come upon believers our duty is to hold fast to our trust in God. Do we believe that God is in control? Do we believe that He is able to help in time of need? Are we willing to accept our circumstances if necessary as being the will of God for us?

But through it all, the very worst thing that we could do is to fall away from Christ – to turn our backs on Him. Trials will drive unbelievers away, but they will pull believers closer to Him.

If you have been a Christian for many years, I am sure there have been times in your life when your faith was tested. There have been times of declension in your life when perhaps you almost fell away. But I see you are here this morning worshipping Him. And it appears that you are holding fast.

And that is our duty. If Christ has saved us and we are truly believers in Him, then our duty is to hold fast.

II. Our duty is also to take heed. (v.12)

A. Consider those that went before us - how they departed from the living God. (v.12) They professed to have believing hearts. They professed to know God. However, they demonstrated that they did

not believe and they did not know Him. And their carcasses fell in the wilderness.

But take heed also means,

B. Consider your heart.

Take stock of yourself. Make sure that you are trusting Him and that you are not provoking Him to anger by your unbelief. And if you are going through trials, hold fast to Christ and to your faith and you will be delivered in the end.