

# Hebrews 3:18-19 Commentary

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CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

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The Epistle to the Hebrews				
<b>INSTRUCTION</b> Hebrews 1-10:18			<b>EXHORTATION</b> Hebrews 10:19-13:25	
Superior Person of Christ Hebrews 1:1-4:13	Superior Priest in Christ Hebrews 4:14-10:18		Superior Life In Christ Hebrews 10:19-13:25	
BETTER THAN PERSON Hebrews 1:1-4:13	BETTER PRIESTHOOD Heb 4:14-7:28	BETTER COVENANT Heb 8:1-13	BETTER SACRIFICE Heb 9:1-10:18	BETTER LIFE
MAJESTY OF CHRIST	MINISTRY OF CHRIST		MINISTERS FOR CHRIST	
DOCTRINE			DUTY	
DATE WRITTEN: ca. 64-68AD				

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)  
 (See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

Hebrews 3:18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** tisin de omosen (3SAAI) me eiseleusesthai (FMN) eis ten katapausin autou ei me tois apeithesasin (AAPMPD)

**Amplified:** And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who disobeyed [who had not listened to His word and who refused to be compliant or be persuaded]? ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

**NET:** And to whom did he swear they would never enter into his rest, except those who were disobedient? ([NET Bible](#))

**NLT:** And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn't it the people who disobeyed him? ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** And to whom did God swear that they should never enter his rest? Was it not these very men who refused to trust him? ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** And to whom did He swear that they should not enter into His rest but to those who were nonpersuasible? (Eerdmans)

**Young's Literal:** And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

**AND TO WHOM DID HE SWEAR THAT THEY SHOULD NOT ENTER HIS REST: tisin de omosen (3SAAI) me eiseleusesthai (FMN) eis ten katapausin autou:**

- He 3:11

## GOD'S REFUSAL OF REST

The writer of Hebrews recalls the oaths by God in the OT:

Numbers 14:30 **'Surely you shall not come into the land** in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

**Comment:** Why Caleb? See his "secret" in Nu 14:24. May God grant us grace to imitate Caleb's faith (obedience) (Heb 6:11-12-[note](#))

Deuteronomy 1:34; 35 Then the LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry and **took an oath**, saying, 'Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers,

**Swear** (3660) (**omnuo**) means to affirm the truth of a statement by calling on a divine being to execute sanctions against a person if the statement in question is not true (in the case of a deity taking an oath, his divine being is regarded as validating the statement). In this case God's Own Divine being is regarded as validating the statement.

**Omnuo** is repeated in this middle section of Hebrews...

**Hebrews 3:11** (note) As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'

**Hebrews 3:18** (note) And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

**Hebrews 4:3** (note) For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

**Hebrews 6:13** (note) For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

**Hebrews 6:16** (note) For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as

confirmation is an end of every dispute.

**Hebrews 7:21** (note) (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "The Lord has sworn And will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever' ")

This verb **omnuo** is used in the Septuagint (LXX) of God swearing to keep His covenant to bring Israel into the land (Dt 1:8, 35, 2:14, 4:21, 31, 6:10, 18, 23, 7:8, 12, 13, 8:1, 18, etc > 30x in Deut.)

See discussion of **Rest in Hebrews 4**

**Rest** (2663) (**katapausis** [word study] from **katá** = intensifies meaning, "down" ~ permanency + **paúo** = make to cease) means to desist from one activity, give oneself to wholly new enterprise but has no reference whatsoever to sleep or slumber.

English **rest** and Greek **katapausis** have similar meanings. The basic idea = ceasing from work or from any kind of action--stop doing what you are doing. Action, labor, or exertion is over. Applied to God's **rest** = no more self-effort as far as salvation is concerned. End of trying to please God by feeble, fleshly works (End of rebelling against His clearly revealed will like {Israel did in wilderness). God's perfect rest = rest in grace of His indwelling, transforming power

That wonderful place where we desist from our futile fleshly efforts to please God and submit willingly and wholly to His Spirit's control/filling, finding our adoption and acceptance in the Beloved (Ep 1:6-note).

#### **BUT TO THOSE WHO WERE DISOBEDIENT: tois apeithesasin (AAPMPD):**

- Numbers 14:11; 20:12; Deut 1:26-32; 9:23; Ps 106:24, 25, 26

Numbers 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?"

**Comment:** Note that signs do not guarantee we will believe God. It is an issue of our heart, which is stubborn and rebellious by (fallen) nature. But as shown in the the verse below, none of God's people are immune to the sin of unbelief!

Numbers 20:12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

This passage on rest and disobedience begs the question - **Are you restless?** Perhaps it might be because you have been disobedient to God and need to confess and repent. Psalm 139:23-24 would be a good prayer to pray to Him.

In Hebrews 3:17 the writer uses the verb "**sinned**" which parallels the verbs were **disobedient** (He 3:18) and **unbelief** (He 3:19). **Sinned** speaks of the action which results in the divine retribution. **Disobedient** and **unbelief** speak of the "root" that leads to the rotten fruit of commission of sins.

As **Spurgeon** said "Obedience is the hallmark of faith. Believing and obeying always run side by side. Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God; and he that trusts God, obeys God."

**Adrian Rogers** adds that "**Unbelief** is what locked the doors of the Promised Land to the children of Israel. For all the grumbling, bad attitudes, and discontentment that characterized their demeanor after leaving Egypt, it was their unbelief that kept them at a distance from God's promised reward. (Heb 3:19-[note](#) and note that in Heb 3:18-[note](#) *unbelief* in this context equated with *disobedience*!) Jesus, too, allowed the people's unbelief to tie His hands on His ministry visit to His hometown. The Bible clearly says, "He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:58). The sovereign God has limited Himself to work according to the faith and belief of the people of God. When you go to the grocery store, you use dollars to pay for your purchases. But when it comes to the Christian life, you receive from God by faith. As I said before, faith is heaven's medium of exchange. It is by far the greatest asset we have. **Unbelief**, on the other hand, is our greatest stumbling block in life. **Unbelief** is the chief wickedness. Unbelief is the mother sin, the father sin, the parent sin. It is the sin of all sins. **Unbelief** caused Eve to sin against God in the Garden of Eden. She failed to believe the Word of God (**Ed**: And as in Heb 3:18-19, she disobeyed God)." (What Every Christian Ought to Know Day by Day)

**To those who were disobedient... were not able to enter because of unbelief** - The martyr **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** said that "Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes."

**A W Tozer** a "modern prophet" of sorts well stated that "The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are opposite sides of the same coin."

**F F Bruce** - Those who, having covenanted to obey him, proved repeatedly disobedient, and showed themselves to be "a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness" (Deut. 32:20).

**Alexander Maclaren** comments on the relationship between disobedience and unbelief writing that...

Important lessons are given by this alternation of the two ideas of faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Disobedience is the root of unbelief. Unbelief is the mother of further disobedience.

Faith is voluntary submission within a person's own power. If faith is not exercised, the true cause lies deeper than all intellectual reasons. It lies in the moral aversion of human will and in the pride of independence, which says, "who is Lord over us? Why should we have to depend on Jesus Christ?" As faith is obedience and submission, so faith breeds obedience, but unbelief leads on to higher-handed rebellion.

With dreadful reciprocity of influence, the less one trusts, the more he disobeys; the more he disobeys, the less he trusts...

Trust brings rest because it sweeps away, as the north wind does the banded clouds on the horizon, all the deepest causes of unrest.

**A W Pink** writes that "Having reminded the Hebrews in the previous verse (Heb 3:17) that sin was the cause of Israel's destruction of old, he now specifies the character of that sin, **Unbelief**. The order is terribly significant: they **harkened not** to God's voice; in consequence, their **hearts were hardened**; **unbelief** was the result; **destruction**, the issue. How unspeakably solemn! The Greek word here rendered "**believed not**" may, with equal propriety, be rendered "**obeyed not**"; it is so translated in Ro 2:8; Ro 10:21. It amounts to the same thing, differing only according to the angle of view-point: looked at from the mind or heart, it is "**unbelief**"; looked at from the will, it is "**disobedience**." In either case it is **the sure consequence of refusal to heed God's voice**. ([Hebrews 3:13-19 Christ Superior to Moses](#))

**Wuest** notes that **disobedient** is the Greek verb "apeitheo which means, "not to allow one's self to be persuaded, not to comply with, to refuse or withhold belief, to be disobedient." The word pisteuo which is the usual word translated "believe" is not used here. The word used is more descriptive of the character of the generation that refused to enter Canaan. They were of that non-persuadable type that will not listen to reason, stiff-necked, obstinate.

**Disobedient** (544) (**apeitheo** [word study] from **a** = without + **peitho** = persuade) literally describes one who refuses to be persuaded and who **disbelieves** willfully and perversely. The idea is that there is a refusal to hear the voice of God accompanied by a stiff-necked, hard-hearted, obstinate refusal to act in response to God's clarion commands. As someone has said "*Disobedience is not merely a lack of obedience; rather it is a refusal to obey.*"

**Apeitheo** means not to allow oneself to be persuaded; not to comply with and to refuse or withhold belief (in the truth, but elsewhere in Christ, in the gospel)

**Apeitheo** speaks of a stubborn, stiff-necked attitude. It speaks of disbelief manifesting itself in disobedience. It is opposed to [pisteuo](#), the verb translated "believe".

In studying **apeitheo** it is important to understand that the stem **peith-** (pith-, poith-) has the basic meaning of trust (cf. Latin fido, fides). **Trust** can refer to a statement, so that it has the meaning of put faith in, to let oneself be convinced, or to a demand, so that it gets the meaning of obey, be persuaded. The active meaning of the verb stem peith- then is to convince and persuade and is especially characteristic of Greek thought. In secular Greek it is interesting to note that "Peitho" (art of persuading) was even regarded as a goddess! (see [Brown, Colin, Editor. New International Dictionary of NT Theology. 1986. Zondervan](#))

**Marvin Vincent** in discussing **apeitheo** in John 3:36 writes that "**Disbelief** is regarded in its active manifestation, **disobedience**. The verb **peitho** means to persuade, to cause belief, to induce one to do something by persuading, and so runs into the meaning of to obey, properly as the result of persuasion... Obedience, however, includes faith. (**Ed Note**: See discussion of phrase "**obedience of faith**" at Ro 1:5-note)." (Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament Vol. 2, Page 1-109)

From the above comments, it should not surprise you to discover that in the New Testament the word group translated **disobey, disobedience, etc** (apeitheo and related words) does not stand in contrast with obedience but in contrast with faith!

**Disobedience** equates with **unbelief** in the next verse (Hebrews 3:19) and vice versa.

They were of that non-persuadable type that will not listen to reason, stiff-necked, obstinate. (See these parallel Scriptures: Nu 14:30,

31, 32, 33, 34, 35: note who gets to go in and in Nu 14:33 "unfaithfulness". Nu 14:11, 20:12, Dt 9:23; Ps 106:24,25)

But surely most of those who came out of Egypt were not lost? See what God says about the behavior of His beloved in Ezekiel 23:8 "She did not forsake her harlotries from the time in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her, and they handled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust on her."

**Barnes** writes that "That did not confide in God. Deut 1:32: "Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God." In consequence of this want of faith, God solemnly swore unto them that they should not enter into the promised land. Deut 1:34,35: "And the Lord heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and swore saying, Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swore to give unto your fathers," (save Caleb, etc.) The distinct reason, therefore, assigned by—Moses, why they did not enter the promised land, was a want of faith; and this accords directly with the design of the apostle here. He is exhorting those whom he addresses to beware of an **evil heart of unbelief**, Hebrews 3:12. He says that it was such a heart that excluded the Hebrews from the promised land. The same thing, says he, must exclude you from heaven—the promised home of the believer; and if that firm confidence in God and His promises which He requires is wanting, you will be excluded from the world of eternal rest.

In **Romans** Paul writes "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? (See **note** Romans 6:16)

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**Disobedience and Unbelief** - Important lessons are given by this alternation of the two ideas of faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Disobedience is the root of unbelief. Unbelief is the mother of further disobedience. Faith is voluntary submission within a person's own power. If faith is not exercised, the true cause lies deeper than all intellectual reasons. It lies in the moral aversion of human will and in the pride of independence, which says, "who is Lord over us? Why should we have to depend on Jesus Christ?" As faith is obedience and submission, so faith breeds obedience, but unbelief leads on to higher-handed rebellion. With dreadful reciprocity of influence, the less one trusts, the more he disobeys; the more he disobeys, the less he trusts. (Alexander Maclaren)

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**Harmless Little Sins - Little Acts of Disobedience** - What happened to the great city of Ephesus? Often mentioned in the New Testament, it was one of the cultural and commercial centers of its day. Located at the mouth of the Cayster River, it was noted for its bustling harbors, its broad avenues, its gymnasiums, its baths, its huge amphitheater, and especially its magnificent Temple of Diana. What happened to bring about its gradual decline until its harbor was no longer crowded with ships and the city was no longer a flourishing metropolis? Was it smitten by plagues, destroyed by enemies, or demolished by earthquakes? No, silt was the reason for its downfall—silent and nonviolent silt. Over the years, fine sedimentary particles slowly filled up the harbor, separating the city from the economic life of the sea traders.

**Little evil practices, little acts of disobedience may seem harmless.** But let the silt of sin gradually accumulate, and we will find ourselves far from God. Life will become a spiritual ruin. In the book of Hebrews we are warned of the danger of "the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13). James said that the attractive pleasures of sin are really a mask covering death (James 1:15).

God forbid that we let the silt of sin accumulate in our lives!

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.

Little sins add up to big trouble.

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**Hebrews 3:19** So we [see](#) that they were not [able](#) to [enter](#) because of [unbelief](#) ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** kai blepomen (1PPAI) hoti ouk edunethesan (3PAPI) eiselthein (AAN) di apistian

**Amplified:** So we see that they were not able to enter [into His rest], because of their unwillingness to adhere to and trust in and rely on God [unbelief had shut them out]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

**NET:** So we see that they could not enter because of unbelief. ([NET Bible](#))

**NLT:** So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest. [NLT - Tyndale House](#)

**Phillips:** Yes, it is all too plain that it was refusal to trust God that prevented these men from entering his rest. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. (Eerdmans)

**Young's Literal:** And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

**AND SO WE SEE THAT THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO ENTER BECAUSE OF UNBELIEF: kai blepomen (1PPAI) hoti ouk edunethesan (3PAPI) eiselthein (AAN) di apistian:**

- Mark 16:16; John 3:18,36; 2 Thessalonians 2:12; 1 John 5:10; Jude 1:5

## UNBELIEF EQUATES WITH DISOBEDIENCE

**We see (991) (blepo)** is in the **present tense**, indicating that this picture is continually before the writer's (and our) eyes (as it rightly should be for it serves as a powerful warning sign to those who would tip toe on the edges of the pure waters of faith leading to eternal rest in Christ.)

**Not (ou)** - absolute negation! **No** faith, **no** entrance! It could not be stated more clearly and succinctly! Because they had no faith, they grieved the Spirit and thus had no inherent power (see this verb [dunamai](#)) within themselves to enter into the rest of God. They resisted God's supernatural power and thus missed God's supernatural rest (cp Acts 7:51-note, cp Isaiah 63:10)

**Disobedience** in Hebrews 3:18 parallels **unbelief** in Hebrews 3:19. Instead of focusing on Israel's repeated rebellion, backbiting, complaining, grumbling, murmuring, and defiance which fill the Old Testament record of Israel's wilderness experience, the writer hones down on the source of these sins - the problem was deep down, for underneath all the rotten fruit, was the root of refusal to believe God.

**Simon J. Kistemaker** writes that "**Unbelief** is the root of the sin of provoking God. Unbelief robs God of his glory ([JOHN OWEN](#)) and robs the unbeliever of the privilege of God's blessings. Because of unbelief, rebellious man is denied entrance into the rest that God provides for the members of his household. ([Baker New Testament Commentary - Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews](#))

**Unbelief (570) (apistia** from **a** = without + **pistós** = believing, faithful) means literally not believing = faithlessness, distrust, lack of belief. It describes an unwillingness to commit oneself to another or respond positively to the other's words or actions.

**Apistia** is found 11 times in the NAS - Matt 13:58; Mark 6:6; 9:24; 16:14; Rom 3:3; 4:20; 11:20, 23; 1 Tim 1:13; Heb 3:12, 19 and is not found in the non-apocryphal Septuagint (LXX).

Here are some representative uses...

And He did not do many miracles there (His hometown, Nazareth) because of their **unbelief**. (Mt 13:58)

Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, "I do believe; help my **unbelief**." (Mark 9:24)

And afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their **unbelief** and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. (Mark 16:14)

yet, with respect to the promise of God (he would have a male heir), he (Abraham) did not waver in **unbelief**, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, (see **note** Romans 4:20)

Quite right, they (Jewish branches were broken off, and the Gentiles were grafted in) were broken off for their **unbelief** (Gentiles were grafted in because of the unbelief of Israel and not because the Gentiles had any merit or claim on God), but you (Gentiles) stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear (Standing before God is based on faith, so feelings of superiority are out of place) (see **note** Romans 11:20)... And they (Jews) also, if they do not continue in their **unbelief**, will be grafted in; for God is able (key phrase = He is able = He has grafted wild branches -- Gentiles -- into the cultivated olive, He is able to graft Jews in) to graft them in again. (see **note** Romans 11:23)

Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, **unbelieving** heart, in falling away from the living God. (Hebrews 3:12)

And so we seen here in Hebrews 3:19 that their **disobedience** was a consequence of their unbelief or lack of faith. At the root of all sin is unbelief. Lack of faith in God's Word is never purely an intellectual thing. At its most basic level it is the love of sin that comes from all men being born in Adam and with his sin nature (Ro 5:12, Ps 51:5).

In sum, **disobedience** equates with **unbelief** and vice versa.

**James Smith** makes an interesting point regarding the **underlying spiritual dynamics of unbelief** - In doubting the Word of God, the Spirit of God is resisted, for the Word is His sword. If the Holy Ghost is to have full possession of the Canaan land of the heart, to make a clear riddance of every evil beast (lust), and all that would pollute the holy mount, then the promises of God must be believed or the Spirit will be resisted. (Handfuls of Purpose)

**John Butler** - The condition for partaking of Christ is faith. The prohibiting of the unbelieving Israelites from the promised land is a picture of the prohibiting of unbelievers from heaven. Faith is the key to salvation (heaven). Unbelief keeps man from the greatest of blessings. ([Analytical Bible Expositor -Hebrews to Revelation](#))

Although some like **Zane Hodges** (The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor - see [The Unusual Teachings of Zane Hodges](#) - George Zeller) and **Thomas Constable** ([Expository Notes](#)) contend these **habitually sinning** Israelites were genuinely saved, I strongly disagree. As an aside one needs to be very cautious when reading expositions by **Zane Hodges** who in my humble opinion appears to portray a "type" of belief that makes me very uncomfortable when I read passages like Mt 7:21-23.

On the other hand, I tend to agree with conservative commentators such as **Ray Stedman** who writes "The rhetorical questions of Heb 3:16–18 show how an **outward facade of belief** can be maintained while the **heart is still unrepentant**, and **therefore unredeemed**. It is possible to participate in and benefit from the great miracles of God, as the Israelites did who came out of Egypt with Moses (Heb 3:16). Yet, despite such evidence, **the heart can remain unchanged for a lifetime**. God sees that inner hardness and warns continually against it until he is forced to judge it (He 3:17). Note the growing stages of unbelief: general rebellion (He 3:16); sin, punished by physical death (He 3:17); and disobedience (Gk "being unpersuadable"—He 3:18). The cause of this recalcitrance lies deeper than a wrong attitude or wrong behavior; it lies in a **disobedient will**. Therefore, the loss of promised blessing is traceable only and solely to long-continued unbelief (He 3:19). This word (apistian, "disbelief") is the platform upon which the writer's more positive explanation of rest is founded. He gives us the other side of disbelief in chapter 4. ([Hebrews 3:12-19 Don't Miss Your Opportunity](#)) (Bolding added)

**Spurgeon notes** on Heb 3:14-19 - Continuance in faith is necessary to salvation, and only those who persevere to the end are indeed saved. Want of true faith causes the religion of many to be short-lived. Those who are not sustained by faith soon weary of holiness and provoke the Lord....Sinning and not believing seem to go together. The 17th verse asks the same question as the 18th, but the answer is different. "With them that had sinned" says the 17th verse (Heb 3:17), "to them that believed not" says the 18th verse. Want of faith brings want of holiness, and when we abide in the faith we abide in obedience....It was not the sons of Anak that kept them out, it was not the waste howling wilderness; it was nothing but their own unbelief....It is those who believe not who have God's curse. If you do not rest upon Christ as your salvation, you, too, shall hear God swear that you shall not enter into his rest.

**Leon Morris** in the **Expositor's Bible Commentary** agrees with **Stedman** noting that "Sin is self-defeating and prevents people from entering God's rest. This is not an arbitrary penalty imposed by a despotic God. It is the inevitable outcome of "unbelief." The warning to the people of the writer's day is clear. To slip back from their **Christian profession** into unbelief would be fatal." (SEE [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#)) (Bolding added OR BORROW [Expositor's Bible Commentary page 954](#)) (**Ed**: In other words a **profession** of faith in Christ is not the same as a **possession** of faith in Christ. The difference has eternal significance/consequences!)

The well known, highly respected expositor **John MacArthur** also agrees with Stedman writing "Many say, "I can't believe. I have a pragmatic, empirical mind that has to see the facts, weigh all the evidence." But everyone lives by faith. We live by faith when we go into a restaurant and eat the food without questioning its safety. When driving down the highway, we are not in constant fear that around the next bend the road will lead us into a river where there is no bridge. We trust the people who made the highways and the people who have traveled over them before us. We live by faith almost constantly. If we can put our faith in the highway department and the people who prepare our food, we surely can put our faith in the God of the universe. Not to trust in Him is fatal." ([MacArthur, John: Hebrews. Moody Press](#) )

**Matthew Henry** offers a similar conclusion on this section writing that "(1.) Though the majority of hearers provoked God by unbelief, yet some there were who believed the report. (2.) Though the hearing of the word be the ordinary means of salvation, yet, if it be not hearkened to, it will expose men more to the anger of God. (3.) **God will have a remnant that shall be obedient to His**

**voice**, and he will take care of such and make mention of them with honor. (4.) If these should fall in a common calamity, yet they shall partake of eternal salvation, **while disobedient hearers perish for ever.**" (Bolding added)

**David Guzik** - Israel's great failure was to persevere in faith. After crossing much of the wilderness trusting in God, and after seeing so many reasons to trust in Him, they end up falling short - because they did not persevere in faith in God and His promise. Jesus reminded us in the parable of the soils with the seeds cast on stony ground and among thorns: it isn't enough to make a good beginning, real belief perseveres to the end. If we have made a good start, praise God; but how we finish is even more important than how we start. ([Hebrews 3 Commentary](#))

**Adam Clarke** - It was no decree of God that prevented them, it was no want of necessary strength to enable them, it was through no deficiency of Divine counsel to instruct them; all these they had in abundance: but they chose to sin, and would not believe. Unbelief produced disobedience, and disobedience produced hardness of heart and blindness of mind; and all these drew down the judgments of God, and wrath came upon them to the uttermost.

**C H Spurgeon** - (from [An Earnest Warning Against Unbelief](#)) The great promise that was given to Israel was Canaan, that choice land that God had of old allotted to them. "When the Most High apportioned the nations, at his dividing up of the sons of humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples, according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut 32:8). He made Palestine to be the center of worship, the joy of all lands, the seat of His oracle, and the place of His abode. In the wilderness, the tribes were journeying toward this country, and it was a very short distance from Egypt, so that they might almost at once have taken possession of the land, and yet it cost them forty years' traveling. If you trace their journeyings, you will see that they ran a perpetual zigzag, backward and forward, to the right and to the left. Sometimes they were actually journeying away from the promised rest, plunging into the deeps of the howling wilderness—and all, we are told, because of their unbelief. It was not the sons of Anak that kept them out. It was not the waste howling wilderness. It was nothing but their own unbelief. Canaan is a type to us of the great and goodly things of the covenant of grace that belong to believers. But if we have no faith, we cannot possess a single covenant blessing. Today, in the proclamation of the gospel, the demand is made of faith in God. If there is no faith, no matter how rich the gospel, how full its provisions, and how precious the portion which God has prepared, none of us can ever enter into the enjoyment of them.

**We are all of us called upon to "watch out."** True religion is not a thing that can be acquired by carelessness or neglect; we must take heed, or we shall never be found in the narrow way. You may go to hell heedlessly, but you cannot so go to heaven. Many stumble into the bottomless pit with their eyes shut, but no man ever yet entered into heaven by a leap in the dark. "Watch out, brothers." If ever there was a matter that needed all your thought, all your prudence, and all your care, it is the matter of your soul's salvation. If you do trifle with anything, let it be with your wealth, or with your health, but certainly not with your eternal interests. I recommend all men to take heed to everything that has to do with this life, as well as with that which is to come, for in the little the great may lie concealed, and the neglect of our estate may end in mischief to our immortal spirit. Certainly, the neglect of the body might lead to great injury to the soul, but if ever neglect deserves condemnation, it is when it concerns our higher nature. If we do not carefully see to it, that which is our greatest glory may become our most tremendous curse. The watchword for everyone of us is, "watch out." You are an old Christian, but "watch out." You are a minister of the gospel, and there are many who look up to you with veneration, but "watch out." You have learned the doctrines of grace, and you know them well; there is little that any human being can teach you, for you have been well instructed in the things of the kingdom. But still, "watch out." Even if you were so near to heaven's gate that you could hear the song within, I would still whisper in your ear, "Watch out." Horses fall most often at the bottom of the hill when we think that we need not hold them up any longer, and there is no condition in life that is more dangerous than that feeling of perfect security that precludes watchfulness and care. He who is quite sure of his strength to resist temptation may be also equally certain of his weakness in the hour of trial. God grant us grace, whatever sort of "brothers" we may be, to listen to the admonition of the apostle: "Watch out."

**The Israelites were a highly favored people, yet they could not enter because of unbelief.** To these Israelites great things had been revealed, for, during their sojourn in the wilderness, they had been scholars in a gracious school. To what other people did God ever speak as He spoke to them? To whom did He give the tablets of divine command, written with His own mysterious pen? Where else did He dwell between the cherubim, and shine forth with glorious majesty? Where else did He reveal himself in type and shadow, by priest and sacrifice and altar?

We too have enjoyed a clear revelation. We have heard the gospel more plainly than the Israelites ever did. The Bible has more light in it than Moses could impart. The preaching of the gospel, where it is done affectionately and earnestly, and by the help of the Spirit of God, is a greater means of grace to the soul than all the sacred rites of the tabernacle. Shall it be with us as with them? "They were not able to enter because of unbelief." Shall we labor under the same disability?

To me it is especially appalling that a man should perish through willfully rejecting the divine salvation. A drowning man throwing away the life preserver; a poisoned man pouring the antidote upon the floor; a wounded man tearing open his wounds—any one of

these is a sad sight, but what shall we say of a soul putting from it the Redeemer, and choosing its own destruction? Be warned, and forbear from eternal suicide. There is still the way of salvation: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). To believe is to trust. You have to trust in a living Person, in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died as the Substitute for those who trust Him, and lives to see that those whom He bought with blood are also redeemed from their sins by power, and brought home to heaven. Trust Jesus Christ. Have done with yourself as your confidence, and commit your soul to the keeping of the faithful Redeemer.

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**James Smith - SHUT OUT THROUGH UNBELIEF.** "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19).

The children of Israel were overthrown in the wilderness because they believed not His Word and hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord (Ps. 106:24-26). As unbelief hinders the sinner from entering into the salvation of God which is in Christ Jesus, so does it hinder many of God's own people from entering into the fullness of the blessing—a life satisfied in God and victorious in His Name. They could not enter in because of unbelief.

**I. It was not Because they did not Know God's Will.** They knew that it was the will of God that they should go in and possess the land, yet they perished outside. He is not willing that any should perish. Although many know this, yet they remain outside the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. They know that Christ died for all, yet they tarry and murmur in the wilderness of unbelief.

**II. It was not for Want of Evidences of God's Power.** They had been eye-witnesses of many wonders that He wrought—the plagues of Egypt, the Red Sea, the manna from Heaven, etc. Surely in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, and within the domain of the human soul and the Divine Book there are abundant proofs of the presence and power of God to fulfil all the promises He hath made. The invisible things may be understood, or rendered intelligible, by the things which are visible, so that they are without excuse (Ro 1:20).

**III. It was not for Want of Seeing the Fruits of the Land.** The grapes and pomegranates of the good land were shown them (Nu 13:26). Fruits that could never grow in the wilderness were laid before their eyes. Yet they failed because of unbelief. Unbelievers to-day are not without the same powerful evidence. The fruits of the Canaan-life—love to enemies, joy in the Holy Ghost, peace with God, and the peace of God—these are fruits that cannot grow on nature's barren soil. The fruit of the Spirit in the Christian's life is a revelation to those outside "the good and pleasant land" of its reality and richness. These fruits can be seen almost anywhere, and as they are not the products of the natural life, they are evidences of Christ's power to save, sanctify, and satisfy.

**IV. It was not for Want of a Desire for Something Better.** They were not satisfied with their present wilderness lot; they felt deeply their need of a better and more enduring portion; they longed intensely for something more than they had. Yet they entered not in because of unbelief. Their name is legion who are in the same condition spiritually. Conscious of their need for a better and more satisfying life, yet refusing to believe God's Word concerning His Son. This "good land" of promise is offered them, yet they cannot enter in because of unbelief. The evil heart of unbelief always seeks its good in departing from the living God (Heb 3:12). The heart's need can only be fully met by a faith that enters into the promise of God and rests there. "Believe, and thou shalt see." (Handfuls of Purpose)

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**Philip Edgcumbe Hughes** comments that...

The juxtaposition of **unbelief** and **disobedience** indicates the close connection between the two. As Westcott says, "*unbelief passed into action.*" (**Ed:** I would slightly alter that as "unbelief passed into inaction"! ) And this is always the case. It is what happened when man first fell from God; it was repeated in the wilderness; and the same disastrous sequence was now threatening the community to whom this letter was sent. The **rest** from which Adam and Eve were excluded was that of fellowship with God in Eden; the **rest** forfeited by the rebellious Israelites was that of the promised land; and the **rest** denied to apostates from the Christian faith is that of the eternal Sabbath of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 2:6; 22:1ff).

Furthermore, it was their own unbelief which rendered the people unable to enjoy God's rest. They disqualified themselves. Their incapacitation was self-induced. How could it be otherwise when the whole basis of the promised rest is that of trust and security in God?

#### **Unbelief engenders unrest.**

The unbeliever excludes himself from **rest** (cf. Rev. 22:15); and if this was true of the "**rest**" of Canaan, how much more is it true of the "**rest**" of eternity! In the moral structure of the renewed creation there cannot possibly be a place for unbelief or for the unrest which flows from it. True **rest** is the enjoyment by the creature of perfect harmony with his Creator, and it can therefore only be **rest** in God. As such, it is totally incompatible with **unbelief and disobedience toward God**. Hence the inability of the rebellious Israelites to enter into God's rest. (SEE [A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews - Page 154](#))

"The apostle does not single out the sin of making and worshipping the golden calf; he does not bring before us the flagrant transgressions into which they fell at Beth-peor. Many much more striking and to our mind more fearful sins could have been pointed out, but God thinks the one sin greater than all is unbelief. We are saved by faith; we are lost through unbelief. The heart is purified by faith; the heart is hardened by unbelief. Faith brings us nigh to God; unbelief is departure from God" (Saphir). There is no sin so great but it may be pardoned, if the sinner believe; but "he that believeth not shall be damned."

The application of the whole of this passage to the case of the sorely-trying and wavering Hebrews was most pertinent and solemn. Twice over the apostle reminded them (He 3:9, He 3:17) that the unbelief of their fathers had been continued for "forty years." Almost that very interval had now elapsed since the Son had died, risen again, and ascended to heaven. In Scripture, forty is the number of probation. The season of Israel's testing was almost over; in A.D. 70 their final dispersion would occur. And God changeth not. He who had been provoked of old by Israel's hardness of heart, would destroy again those who persisted in their unbelief. Then let them beware, and heed the solemn warning, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." May God grant us hearts to heed the same admonitory warning.

### Steven Cole on Hebrews 3:16-19 -

The author comes back to the story of Israel in the wilderness, quoting again from Psalm 95: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." Then he brings this story home to his readers by asking three sets of two rhetorical questions each (the KJV mistranslates Heb 3:16). The first question in each set is answered by the second question. He wants his readers to see that their situation parallels exactly that of Israel in the wilderness. In Heb 3:19 he sums up his point, tying it back to the idea of unbelief in Heb 3:12.

The first question and answer show that this story applies to all **professing** believers. **Who provoked God when they heard His voice?** (Heb 3:16) The same group that Moses had led out of Egypt. While there was a truly saved **remnant** in that company (**Ed**: For example, Moses was in this company and he certainly was genuinely saved as he appeared with Jesus in the Transfiguration!), **most** of them grumbled, disbelieved God, and died in the wilderness. The author is saying to all **professing** Christians, "This applies to you!" Even if we are true believers, John Owen's comment is apropos: "The best of saints have need to be cautioned against the worst of evils" (Hebrews: The Epistle of Warning [Kregel], p. 53).

The second question and answer show that **professing** believers who persist in sin should expect God's anger, not His rest. If we are not true believers, our sin in the face of knowledge will incur God's final judgment. If we are true believers, our sin will bring on His strong discipline. Either way, you don't want to go there!

The third question and answer show that those who incurred God's judgment in the wilderness were not only **unbelieving**; they were **disobedient**. As we've seen, you cannot separate the two. **Unbelief that is unchecked quickly moves into disobedience. Often unbelief is a smokescreen used to hide disobedience. Unbelief is more socially acceptable than sin, so we posture ourselves as struggling with intellectual issues. But beneath the surface, we know that if God's Word is true, then we need to turn from our sins, and we don't want to do that.** The disobedient who failed to enter God's rest were one and the same with the unbelieving.

His final summary (Heb 3:19) also shows that unbelief renders us not only **unwilling**, but also **unable** to appropriate God's blessings. Either faith opens the blessings of God's eternal rest to you, or unbelief bars you from them. To persevere in faith, we need to personalize the story of Israel in the wilderness. We need to avoid their awful sin of unbelief that rendered them unable to enter God's promised rest.

**Conclusion** - I had a neighbor in California who could be described as an all-out macho man. His face and tattooed arms were tanned from working on a road crew and from riding his motorcycle in the California sun. He had a quick temper. I once heard him from over 100 yards away cussing out the snowplow driver for plowing a berm in front of his driveway. He had copies of Penthouse magazine lying around his house. He never went to church.

One day I got an opportunity to share Christ with him. But he quickly held up his hand to silence me and then said, "Steve, I've got that all fixed up with the Man Upstairs." I'm always worried when someone refers to Almighty God as "the Man Upstairs." I said, "What do you mean?" He proceeded to tell me that when he was a teenager, he attended a large Baptist church in the Los Angeles area. The youth pastor had told him that if he

would accept Christ, he would be assured of going to heaven. He said, "I did that, and so you don't need to worry about me." Even though there was not a shred of evidence that he was persevering in the faith, and in spite of much evidence that he was not, he thought that because he had once believed, he had eternal life!

The author of Hebrews had a different view of things. He says that to enter God's rest, we must persevere in obedient faith. To persevere, we must avoid the great sin of unbelief; we must practice the great service of mutual encouragement; we must hold fast our great salvation in Christ; and, we must personalize the great story of Israel in the wilderness. Take care, brethren! ([Lesson 11- Persevering in Faith Hebrews 3:12-19](#))

[Albert Barnes...](#)

**So we see**, etc. We see, from the direct testimony of the Old Testament, that **unbelief** was the reason why they were excluded from the promised land. Let us learn, in view of the reasoning and exhortations here—

**(1.) The evil of unbelief.**

It excluded that whole generation, consisting of many hundred thousand souls, from the land of promise—the land to which they had looked with ardent hopes, and with warm desires. It will exclude countless millions from heaven. A want of confidence in God is the great source of evil in this world, and will be the cause of wretchedness to all eternity of unnumbered hosts. But surely that was not a small or unimportant thing which strewed the desert with the bones of that whole generation whom God had, in so remarkable a manner, rescued from Egyptian servitude. And that cannot be a small matter which will cause multitudes to sink down to infinite wretchedness and despair.

**(2.) Let us, who are professed Christians, be cautious against indulging unbelief in our hearts.**

Our difficulties all begin there. We lose confidence in God. We doubt his promises, his oaths, his threatenings. In dark and trying times we begin to have doubts about the wisdom of his dealings, and about his goodness. Unbelief once admitted into the heart is the beginning of many woes. When a man loses confidence in God, he is on a shoreless ocean that is full of whirlpools, and rocks, and quicksands, and where it is impossible to find a secure anchorage. There is nothing to which he may moor his driven bark; and he will never find safety or peace till he comes back to God.

**(3.) Let us live a life of faith.**

Let us so live that we may say with Paul, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." So living, we shall have peace. The mind will be at rest. Storms and tempests may blow, but we shall be secure. Others may be troubled in the vicissitudes of life, but our minds will be at peace.

**(4.) Let us live expecting the future "rest" that remains for us.**

Let us keep our eye fixed upon it. To us there is a rest promised, as there was to the Hebrews whom God had delivered from the land of oppression; and we may by faith attain to that, "rest," as they might have reached the land of Canaan.

**(5.) Let us persevere to the end.**

He that draws back must be lost. He that does not endure to the end of life, in the ways of religion, can never have been a Christian. There is nothing which will furnish certain evidence of religion, unless our piety is such as to lead us to persevere till death. The man who enters on the professed Christian life expecting to fall away, or who can look upon the possibility of falling away without concern, has never known anything of the nature of true religion, he cannot be a Christian. He may have had raptures and visions; he may be a loud professor, and a noisy and zealous partisan, but he has no evidence that he has ever known anything about religion. That religion which is not connected with a firm and determined purpose, by the grace of God, to persevere to the end of life, is no true religion; and a man who expects to fall away and go back again to the world, or who can look at such an idea without alarm, should regard it as a settled matter that he has no true knowledge of God.

**(6.) No man should delay the work of salvation to a future time.**

**To-day** is the accepted time; to-day the only time of which we have any security. God speaks to-day, and to-day his voice should be heard. No man on any subject should defer till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day. He who defers religion till a future time neglects his own best interest; violates most solemn obligations; and endangers his immortal soul. What security can any one have that he will live to see another day? What

evidence has he that he will be any more disposed to attend to his salvation than than he is now? What evidence can he have that he will not provoke God by this course, and bring condemnation on his soul? Of all delusions, that is the most wonderful by which dying men are led to defer attention to the concerns of the soul to a future period of life. Nowhere has Satan such advantage as in keeping this delusion before the mind; and if in respect to anything the voice of warning and alarm should be lifted loud and long, it is in reference to this. Oh, why will not men be wise to-day? Why will they not embrace the offer of salvation now? Why will they not at once make sure of eternal happiness? And why, amidst the changes and trials of this life, will they not so secure the everlasting inheritance as to feel that that is safe—that there is one thing at least that cannot be shaken and disturbed by commercial embarrassment and distress; one thing secure, though friends and kindred are torn away from them; one thing safe when their own health fads, and they lie down on the bed where they will bid adieu to all earthly comforts, and from which they will never rise.

I like the way **Adolph Saphir** ends this section...

Exhort one another daily; encourage, help one another by counsel, by example, by sympathy, by brotherly aid, by united prayer and praise. Walking together in peace and harmony, keep before your eyes and hearts the end of the journey. Let us hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, let us keep our first faith, our first love, our first hope (1 Tim. 5:12; Rev. 2:4; Heb. 3:6), that which was given unto us when the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant (1 Tim. 1:14), even when we were made partakers of Christ.\* In humility and fear, in self-abasement and self-distrust, let us during our wilderness journey cry out of the depths, and yet rejoice and be at peace; for we are in Christ, and the Lord for whom we wait is our light and our salvation. ([Hebrews 3:7-19 Unbelief in the Wilderness](#))

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**Jerry Bridges - Obedience** to the revealed will of God is often just as much a step of faith as claiming a promise from God. In fact, one of the more intriguing thoughts from the book of Hebrews is the way the writer appears to use obedience and faith interchangeably. He spoke of the Old Testament Hebrews who would never enter God's rest because they disobeyed (Heb 3:18). Yet they were not able to enter because of their unbelief (Heb 3:19). This interchange of unbelief and disobedience also occurs later in the book (Heb 4:2, 6).

The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 were said to be "still living by faith when they died" (11:13, NIV). But the element of obedience—responding to the will of God—was just as prominent in their lives as was claiming the promises of God. They obeyed by faith. And since obedience is the pathway to holiness—a holy life being essentially an obedient life—we may say that no one will become holy apart from a life of faith.

Faith enables us to claim the promises of God, but it also enables us to obey the commands of God. Faith enables us to obey when obedience is costly or seems unreasonable to the natural mind.

The path of obedience in the pursuit of holiness is often contrary to human reason. If we don't have conviction in the necessity of obeying the revealed will of God as well as confidence in the promises of God, we'll never persevere in this difficult pursuit. We must have conviction that seeking holiness is God's will for us—regardless of how arduous and painful the seeking may be. And we must be confident that the pursuit of holiness results in God's approval and blessing, even when circumstances make it appear otherwise. (BORROW [Holiness Day by Day: Transformational Thoughts for Your Spiritual Journey](#) - DR WIERSBE'S QUOTE IS TAKEN FOR HIS EXCELLENT BOOK WHICH I HIGHLY RECOMMEND - BORROW [The Pursuit of Holiness](#))

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### **Vance Havner has words of warning regarding unbelief - According to Your Faith**

Because of unbelief:

Israel was set aside nationally (Rom. 11:20).

The generation that came out of Egypt failed to reach the Promised Land (Heb. 3:19).

Christ could do no mighty works in Nazareth (Matt. 13:58).

Christians and churches are powerless before a demonized world (Matt. 17:20).

O Ye of Little Faith

Faith and care (Matt. 6:30).

Faith and fear (Matt. 8:26).

Faith and doubt (Matt. 14:31).

Faith and spiritual stupidity (Matt. 16:8).

"...Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

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Scripture: Read Hebrews 3:12-19

"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb. 3:12-13).

## HEART PROBLEMS

*The heart of every problem is a problem in the heart.*

The heart of every problem is a problem in the heart. The people of Israel (except Moses, Joshua, and Caleb) erred in their hearts, which means that their hearts wandered from God and His Word. They also had evil hearts of unbelief; they did not believe that God would give them victory in Canaan. They had seen God perform great signs in Egypt, yet they doubted He was adequate for the challenge of Canaan.

When a person has an erring heart and a disbelieving heart, the result will also be a hard heart. This is a heart that is insensitive to the Word and work of God. So hard was the heart of Israel that the people even wanted to return to Egypt! Imagine wanting to exchange their freedom under God for slavery in Egypt! Of course, all this history spoke to the hearts of the readers of this letter, because they were in danger of "going back" themselves.

Believers who doubt God's Word and rebel against Him do not miss heaven, but they do miss out on the blessing of their inheritance today, and they must suffer the chastening of God.

### Applying God's Truth:

1. When was the last time your heart was "hardened by sin's deceitfulness"?
2. What are some blessings we stand to lose if we don't deal with hard-heartedness?
3. We are commanded to "encourage one another daily." How do you think this helps alleviate forming a "hard heart" toward God? Whom have you encouraged today? (BORROW [Pause for Power: A Year in the Word, PAGE 206](#))

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**D L Moody** - So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.—Hebrews 3:19.

WHEN the Israelites first came out of Egypt God would have led them right up into the land of Canaan if it had not been for their accursed unbelief. But they desired something besides God's word; so they were turned back, and had to wander in the desert for forty years. I believe there are thousands of God's children wandering in the wilderness still. The Lord has delivered them from the hand of the Egyptian, and would at once take them through the wilderness right into the Promised Land, if they were only willing to follow Christ. Christ has been down here, and has made the rough places smooth, and the dark places light, and the crooked places straight. If we will only be led by Him right into the land of promise, all will be peace, and joy, and rest.

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## David Wilkerson - THE EXCEEDING DANGER OF UNBELIEF

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.... And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12, 18–19).

Hebrews warns the New Testament Church: "Take heed to Israel's example. If you do not, you may fall as they did. You will descend into evil unbelief, and it will turn your life into one long wilderness."

God told this unbelieving generation pointedly, from the leaders to the Levites on down, that His hand would be against them. From then on, they would know distress and leanness of soul. They would not see His glory. Instead, they would become focused on their own problems and consumed by their own lusts.

The same thing happens with all unbelieving people. They end up consumed with their own welfare, with no vision, no sense of God's presence and no prayer life. They no longer care about their neighbors or a lost world. Instead, the entire focus of their lives is on their problems, their troubles, their illnesses. They go from one crisis to another, shut up in their own pain, their days filled with confusion, strife, envy and division.

Without faith, it is simply impossible to please God. After God walled up the waters of the Red Sea and let the Israelites walk through safely, they danced and rejoiced. Yet just three days later these same Israelites grumbled against God, questioning His very presence in their midst. For 38 years Moses watched as one by one every Israelite in that unbelieving generation died—their lives

wasted.

Likewise today, some Christians are content to merely exist until they die, risking nothing to believe God. They refuse to believe His Word, and are just living to die. Beloved, take the warning of Hebrews to heart: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

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### Hebrews 3:1–19 Unbelief

Nineveh is remembered as the wicked city that repented in response to Jonah's prophecy (which he delivered grudgingly, to say the least). In that chapter of their history, the Lord relented from His judgment—but, as Nahum prophesied, the city of Nineveh ultimately fell to Babylon a century later after forsaking their short-lived obedience to God's Word. The Exodus of God's chosen people out of Egypt, led by Moses, has a similar place in our memories as a positive example of God's deliverance that ended with disastrous results for many of the people involved. Yes, Moses was the leader of a stirring, miraculous example of God's mercy. **Because of the rebellious unbelief of the people, however, Moses and the adults he led out of Egypt died on the outskirts of the Promised Land. They failed to enter God's rest because they failed to believe.**

The author of Hebrews pointed out to his audience that one of the greatest events in Israel's history, led by one of its greatest heroes of faith, was desperately incomplete. We'll find several similar examples throughout our study, and they appear in stark contrast with the complete and perfect work of Jesus. **And if that historical unbelief is something we tend to gloss over in our memories, we need to familiarize ourselves with God's perspective on the matter lest we duplicate the same mistake in our own lives.**

**Unbelief** angers God, particularly in those to whom He has shown time and again that He is faithful, powerful, and gracious. Upon reading this, believers might wonder if past confessions of faith were genuine or if future blessings are indeed secure. But the key point of this passage is the subtle phrasing in Heb 3:13-note: "as long as it is called 'Today.'" That is the decision pressed upon us by the writer. What are we to do today? Encourage each other in the faith. We know that the penalty for unbelief and rebellion is severe. Even more, we know God can help us stay true to Him today. We must not let our faith become another story of incomplete success. Christ completes us!

**Apply the Word** - Did you notice the prescribed frequency for encouraging our brothers and sisters in faith? It's not weekly or occasionally. We should encourage each other daily. If you are finding persevering in the faith to be difficult, do not attempt to get through it alone. And don't let your fellow believers fall into the same trap either. Take some time today and every day to encourage someone you know to focus their thoughts on Jesus. It will help them immensely, and they will return the favor

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### Hebrews 3:7-19 Let Go!

Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. —Hebrews 3:15

Read: Hebrews 3:7-19 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 16-17; James 3

A 14-year-old North Carolina boy refused to stop playing his Nintendo Game Boy during school hours. The principal was called in and he still refused to stop. When the school liaison officer tried to search him, the teen kicked and punched him. The police were summoned, yet the boy adamantly resisted. Only after the officers gave him two shocks from a Taser gun were they able to remove the toy from him. He was uninjured, but one officer was bitten by the boy.

How can someone be so obstinate! Consider Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to let God's people go despite numerous plagues (Exodus 5-9). Only after the seventh plague did Pharaoh begin to relent (Exodus 9:27-28+).

Pharaoh was foolish to harden his heart against God. Yet look at who hardened their hearts in the wilderness. Hebrews 3:15-16 says, "If you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?" Even those who had seen God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt rebelled against Him!

Today, let us ponder whether God is speaking to us. Could it be that we are clinging to some "toy" and refusing to let Him be Lord of our lives? (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Dear Lord, help us when we don't know what to do.

Help us most of all when we know what to do but don't want to do it.

May it never be said that we cling tightly to what displeases You. Amen.

God must rule our hearts if our feet are to walk His way.

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Hebrews 3:7-19

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. - Hebrews 3:7-8

## TODAY IN THE WORD

What one national park worker calls ""a false sense of security"" continues to lead visitors of national parks to ignore warnings and to take dangerous chances. Despite clear warnings, for example, people still try to pose with the bears, to get too close to other wild animals, or to enter waters that are not safe for swimming. This park worker suggests that perhaps the word ""park"" itself helps to lull people into feeling safe when they are actually in a potentially dangerous environment.

It seems to be part of our human nature to ignore warning signs. The recipients of the letter to the Hebrews had a very clear warning posted before them of the tragic consequences of allowing their hearts to be hardened through unbelief. But the writer was afraid these believers were about to crash through the warning sign and commit the same error that a previous generation of God's people had committed.

These verses are part of an ongoing series of warnings directed at a group of people who were wavering in their commitment to Christ. They were reminded that the generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt under Moses never reached God's promised rest in Canaan, although it was waiting to be claimed.

The problem was the people's hardness of heart, which led them to test God, to doubt His provision, and to rebel against His will for them. These Israelites provoked God to anger, and He ""declared on oath"" (v. 11) that their bones would bleach in the desert until the entire generation died out (v. 17).

We also need to take this warning to heart. Unbelief always displeases God. The solution to this problem is to keep our hearts tender toward Him, something believers need to help one another do every day (v. 13).

The urgency of doing this today is obvious from the fact that sin is very deceitful. If we ignore it, sin will harden our spirits as surely as cement hardens once it has been poured. We need the same kind of faithfulness the writer of Hebrews urged his readers to maintain (v. 14).

Just to make sure the point wasn't missed, the writer returned to the example of Moses' unbelieving generation (vv. 15- 19). It's a warning we can't hear too often. God honors faith, whereas unbelief invites His judgment.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This very day is one of the ""todays"" that the author of Hebrews urges us to take advantage of as we encourage one another.

Through today's study, we have attempted to encourage you to walk faithfully with Christ. Do you know someone you can encourage in his or her walk? It might be a family member or a friend who is experiencing doubt or a trial. Ask God to lead you to someone who needs an encouraging word this week.