

“Do Not Harden Your Hearts”

Hebrews 3:7-19

July 8, 2018

INTRO: What’s the biggest mistake you’ve ever made?

- Would good counsel have helped?
 - Probably not...
 - *We tend to trust self-counsel*

BIG IDEA: Don’t take God’s grace for granted!
(Many inside the church are outside the Church!)

PREVIEW: See the 5 “I’s” of Hebrews ch.3’s **WARNING!**

- *Introduction*
- *Illumination*
- *Inspiration*
- *Illustration*
- *Inspection*

T/S: As always, **context is critical** to our understanding

I. Introduction (v.1)

¹ Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

- *Therefore....* (ch.1-2)
- “*HOLY* brothers” & “*share heavenly calling*”
- “*consider Jesus!*” (apostle, priest, CHRIST!)

II. Illumination (vv.2-6)

See the **CHIASTIC ARCH** in **Heb 3:1-6**:

v.1 (REAL Church “*consider Jesus*”)

v.2a (Jesus is faithful!)

v.2b. (Moses is faithful)

v.3 (see *Builder & house*)

= Christ/Church/Creation!

v.4 (see *Builder & house/ALL*)

v.5 (Moses is faithful)

v.6a (Jesus is faithful)

v.6b (REAL Church... **IF** you hold on!)

¹ *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,*
² *who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.* ³ *For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.* ⁴ *(For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)* ⁵ *Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,* ⁶ *but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence & our boasting in our hope.*

- “oikos” = **7X** or **9X**... Consider **Jesus the Builder**
- **Are you building to code?** (per Builder & blueprint)
- **We are His house IF... we HOLD ON!**
 - Perseverance does not produce salvation...
 - Perseverance **PROVES** salvation!

III. Inspiration (v.7a)

⁷ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,*

- “Therefore” = *Since Jesus is our Builder...*
- Theology = “**ALL** Scripture is God breathed”
- **NOTE:** “says” = **present tense!**
- Don't miss Whose talking to you here...
- See **Hebrews 1:1-3... BEAUTIFUL**

*Every time we open the Bible,
the Holy Spirit speaks.*

VIDEO #1 (intro)

IV. Illustration (7b-11)

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

- It always comes back to the heart! - JDP
- Attitudes & actions are related...
- ***Our attitudes define our actions!*** - JDP
- NOTE: You can be abiding physically and astray spiritually!”

¹¹ As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

- *“Today if you hear... do not harden...” (3X)*
- *“in the Rebellion” = Numbers 13-14*
- **You don’t want to fail your father’s test!**
- See God’s works in His wrath...
- ***Abide brings blessing... astray brings wrath***

V. Inspection (12-19)

- *Initiative*
- *Inventory*
- *Instruction*
- *“IF”*
- *Inconsistencies*

TEXT:

A. *Take INITIATIVE personally*

¹² *Take care, brothers,*

B. *Take INVENTORY honestly*

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

VIDEO #2

C. Take **INSTRUCTION(s)** biblically

¹³ *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

- **Titus 2:1 & 2:15**
- *“exhort one another”*
- *“exhort... every-day”*
- *“today”* = as long as salvation is possible

*God's time for salvation is always **now**.*

ILLUSTRATION: D.L. Moody & Chicago fire

Unbiblical believing is biblical Unbelief! -JDP

D. Take **“IF”** (biblical “ifs”) seriously

- Listen to how direct & pointed this is...

¹⁴ *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

¹⁵ *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

16 *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled?
Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?*

17 *And with whom was he provoked for forty years?
Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell
in the wilderness?*

18 *And to whom did he swear that they would not
enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?*

- Don't think for a second you're above this...
- The point is... **WAKE UP to God's WARNING!**

Unbelief = damnable disobedience!

VIDEO #3

CLOSE: (v.19)

E. Take Inconsistencies eternally

19 *So we see that they were unable to enter because
of unbelief.*

- "So" = "therefore" = Summary Conclusion...
- "we see" = "holy brothers"
- "unable to enter" = REST

- REST = Promised Land
- REST = metaphor
 - God's Safety
 - God's Security
 - God's Salvation
- REST = Jesus the Christ

➤ Unbelief & disobedience are inseparable

Remember... *Take Inconsistencies eternally:*

The warning in these verses is sobering and serious... Just as he did with Israel, God will shut out from His rest those who rebel, walk in unfaithfulness, and presume on the grace of God. Like faithless Israel, those who presume on the grace of God will die on the wrong side of the Jordan. – Mohler

Let's Pray!

CONTEXT:

See the **CHIASTIC ARCH** in Heb 3:1-6:

v.1

v.2a

v.2b.

v.3 (see *Builder & house*)

= Christ/Church/Creation!

v.4 (see *Builder & house/ALL*)

v.5

v.6a

v.6b

The danger is not a misguided elevation of Moses; rather it is drifting away and the refusal to hear and obey God who has spoken with finality through his Son, Jesus ... (cf. 2:1-4).

Psalm 127:1a

“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders build in vain!”

TEXT:

Hebrews 3:7-19 (ESV)

⁷ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice,*

Therefore

- Connect the “therefore” trail back to Hebrews 1:1-4
- Connect the “therefore” back to Hebrews 3:1-6
- Reveal & Explain the Chiastic Arch of Hebrews 3:1-6
 - What does the arch emphasize?
 - How does that emphasis connect backwards?
 - How does that emphasis connect forwards?
 - Micro
 - Macro
 - Missional

as the Holy Spirit says

- NOTE: speaks to PERPETUAL SPEAKING...
- NOTE: the quote is attributed to God directly...
 - Author is saying: “These are NOT my words...”
 - I say to you: “Again, these are NOT MY words either...”
- NOTE: 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is being implied...
- NOTE: Per 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

- We have Matthew 28:18 being unpacked here...
- We have Hebrews 3:3-4 being unpacked here...
- NOTE: the forthcoming O.T. quote(s) are here attributed to the Holy Spirit of God:
 - See Hebrews 1:1-4 being reinforced
 - See our Christian worldview being reinforced
 - See our “One Oikos” (past, present, future) being reinforced

Today

- See & hear the Lord’s sense of URGENCY
- This is a present tense with a future impact!
- God spoke yesterday & speaks today (1:1ff)

“if you hear His voice”

- *“if”* opens the door to a number of issues:
 - *IF* you CAN hear
 - Begs the question “Who can hear?”
 - *IF* you know HOW to hear
 - Bible
 - Prayer
 - Other Christian’s sharing
 - Circumstances
 - *IF* you actually DO hear
- *“you”*

- NOT someone else's hearing
- See how personal God connects to us
- *"hear His voice"*
 - "hear"
 - Bible
 - Prayer
 - Believers
 - Circumstances
 - *"His"*
 - KNOW Him to know His voice...
 - His Word
 - His Will
 - His Ways
 - Devil comes disguised as an angel...
 - Beware late night pizza epiphanies...
 - He & His Word NEVER contradict
 - *"voice"*
 - Audibly?
 - Biblically?
 - Miraculously?
 - Personally?
 - Powerfully?

⁸ *do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,*

- Hear BOTH the warning AND the command here!
- *"Do not"* =
 - Command! Don't do _____!

- Reveals responsibility
 - Implies freedom of choice
 - Exhorts toward faithful obedience
 - Context = acknowledging difficulties
 - *“Do not!”* = “No matter what!”
- It is essential that we recapture the context here:
 - What does it mean to *“harden your hearts”*?
 - **What** does *“harden”* mean?
 - **How** do people *“harden their hearts?”*
 - **Who** *“hardens their heart?”*
 - **RESULTS/Consequences?**
 - What was *“as in the rebellion”*
 - Explain the full context
 - Explain the full meaning:
 - *“in the”*
 - There was something “big”
 - Many made it up...
 - NOTE: “Crowd vs. Church!”
 - *“rebellion”*
 - DISOBEDIENT opposition
 - Divisive disrupters
 - Deceiving Destroyers of oikos
 - *“on the day”*
 - NOTE: on going disobedience warrants God’s wrath
 - NOTE: “in the day” would be a season vs. on the day = a single event
 - *“day of testing”*
 - Who gave the test?
 - Who took the test?

- What was the test about?
- What was the test's objective?
- How did the test turn out?
- What did the test reveal?
- What did the test teach?
 - Them?
 - Us?
- What changed after the test?
- *"in the wilderness"*
 - Why include this clause?
 - Mere geographic context?
 - It offers contextual nuance?
 - Connecting "wilderness" & "test"?
 - v.9 reveals role of *"in the wilderness"*

⁹ *where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.*

- See that v.9 answers all of v.8's "test questions"
- NOTE: "Micro test" = man tests God
- NOTE: "Macro test" = God tests man!
- See Moses, the 10 spies, & Joshua/Caleb context:
 - Wilderness vs. Promised Land = context...
 - *"your fathers"* = connect/contrast the past
 - *"put Me to the test"* = outrageous baseline
 - (How do WE tend to put God to the test???)
 - Negotiations?
 - Compromises?
 - Rationalizations?

- Cheap Grace?
- Legalism?
- Blatant blasphemy
- “*and saw My works*”
 - This is a divinely “neutral” clause
 - “*and saw*” =
 - They were witness to...
 - They had first-person experience...
 - They knew better!
 - Reinforces RESPONSIBILITY!
 - “*My works*” = displays of:
 - Sovereignty
 - Creator God
 - Controlling God
 - Sustainer God
 - Saving God
 - Sanctifying God
 - Miracles
 - Providence
 - Provision
 - Protection
 - Power
- “*for 40 years*”
 - This is NOT a neutral clause!
 - Here we meet the just, holy & wrathful God!
 - This is the true God that defies ***cheap grace***
 - Don’t confuse His merciful-waiting for Messianic-weakness...

- God's blood-bought grace does NOT replace God's standards... No! God's grace empowers God's' standards!
- 40 years of wandering = light wrath! - JDP

¹⁰ *Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.'*

- *"Therefore"* = consequently... (via vv.7-9)
 - The v. reveals its own context
 - "Therefore" will be self defined below...
- *"I was provoked"*
 - NOTE: vv.7-9 "provoked" Almighty God!
 - See the personal characteristic(s) of God:
 - He has emotions
 - He is interactive with His creation
 - He cares
 - He has standards
 - See God's grace AND God's discipline!
- *"with that generation"* = your fathers w/ Moses...
- *"and said"* = SEE the God who SPEAKS!!!
 - *"they always"*
 - There was a consistent/always pattern
 - See the identification of "habitual sin"
 - *"go astray"*
 - NOTE: Astray is opposite of abide! - JDP
 - Distracted

- Drift
- Disobey
- Divide
- Destroy
- *“in their heart;”*
 - It always comes back to the heart! - JDP
 - Attitudes & actions are related...
 - ***Our attitudes define our actions!*** - JDP
 - NOTE: You can be abiding physically and astray spiritually!”
- *“they have not known”*
 - NOTE: it’s not that they “forgot”
 - NOTE: see the connection to Matt.7:21ff
 - “they have not known” = past tense...
 - No past understanding
 - No present understanding
 - SEE the need for His MIRACLE!
- *“My ways”*
 - SEE His ways as known “in the heart”
 - The fathers knew the letter of His ways
 - The fathers did not know His heart...
 - You can (and many do) know His ways without ever really KNOWING His ways. - JDP
- Hardened hearts anger our Holy God!
- Hardened hearts rationalize habitual sins (cf. “they always go astray”)
- Hardened hearts “always go astray”. (see Romans 1 & 1 John 2:19)

- Hardened hearts is an infectious disease.... (“that generation”)
 - Liars
 - Deceivers
 - False teachers
 - False gospels
 - False converts
 - Gossips
 - Grumblers
 - Divisive-distractors/distractions
 - Advocates/Champions of:
 - Superficiality
 - Compromise
 - Balance over Obedience
 - Cheap grace
 - Easy-believism
 - Self-righteous (“religious”)
 - Self-absorbed
 - Self-centered (

- They saw the miracles in Egypt
- They saw the life-preserving Passover Lamb
- They saw the Red Sea part
- They walked across the Red Sea floor
- They saw the Egyptian army swallowed up
- They saw manna fall from heaven
- They

¹¹ *As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."*

vv.7-11 = Contextualizing the warning via past examples:

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

- See the loving EXHORTATION
 - *"Take care brothers"*
- See the truthful WARNING
 - *"lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart..."*
- See the inevitable RESULTS
 - *"leading you to fall away from the living God"*
- See the potential for SPIRITUAL WARFARE
 - *"lest there be"* = potential
 - *"in any of you"* = self-deception

- *“evil... heart”* = evil hearts often “do good”
 - EVIL is the opposite of HOLY
 - EVIL is the signature of Satan
 - EVIL has NO PLACE in God’s oikos
- *“unbelieving heart”* = NOT a Christian
 - Unbelieving

13 *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

14 *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

15 *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

16 *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?*

17 *And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?*

18 *And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?*

19 *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

Hebrews 3:7-19

Main Idea: Israel failed to enter God's rest because they presumed on God's kindness and had their hearts hardened by sin. Therefore, exhort and encourage one another to hold firmly to your confession until the end so that an evil, unbelieving heart will not lead you away from faith in the living God.

I. Learning from a Bad Example (3:7-11)

A. The Holy Spirit says: Hebrews and inspiration

- B. The urgency of believing today
- C. Rebellion and rest: why Israel failed

II. **Exhorted to Endure (3:12-19)**

- A. An evil, unbelieving heart
- B. Holding firmly to faith

Years ago I attended a lecture that profoundly impacted me. The lecturer was Heiko Oberman, a prestigious history professor from the University of Arizona and one of the world's greatest scholars on the Reformation. Oberman was about seventy years old at the time; I was in my early twenties.

Halfway through the lecture, Oberman became unusually frustrated with the class. The group did not frustrate him because of misbehavior or lack of attention. The class frustrated him simply because we were young! "Young men will never understand Luther," he said, "because you go to bed every night confident you will wake up healthy in the morning. In Luther's day, people thought that every day could be their last. They had no antibiotics. They didn't have modern medicine. Sickness and death came swiftly." Oberman was right. To fully understand Luther, we needed to know he faced the reality of eternity each day—and so do we!

Closing his eyes at night terrified Luther because he was afraid he would wake up in hell. His angst grew out of his recognition of God's holiness and man's sinfulness. Only the imputation of Christ's righteousness found in the gospel delivered him from that fear.

The prospect of God's judgment is indeed terrifying. Only the gospel provides us the assurance we need that we can

have a right standing before a holy God. Yet as the author of Hebrews reminds us, the gospel not only delivers us from the penalty of sin but from the power of sin as well. Christians must persevere in the faith in order to reach the promised land. We must continue to hold firmly to the gospel, lest the holiness of God shut us out of his rest and Luther's nightmare become an endless reality for us. This is the message of the remainder of **Hebrews 3. The author exhorts God's people to endure.**

Learning from a Bad Example

Hebrews 3:7-11

In verses 7 through 11, **the author draws attention to the first generation Israelites and their rebellion against God in the wilderness.** God warned those Israelites to endure in their faith, but many of them failed. Instead of trusting in the One who rescued them from slavery, they provoked God and were shut out of the promised land.

Hebrews 3:7-11 admonishes us not to be like faithless Israel.

The Holy Spirit Says: Hebrews and Inspiration

The writer of Hebrews does something spectacular with the introductory clause in verse 7. He prefaces a quotation of the Psalms with the words, "as the Holy

Spirit says.” In doing so, **the author dramatically affirms the divine inspiration of Scripture.** The author highlights the Holy Spirit’s role in the formation of Scripture a little later in the book as well ([Heb 10:15](#)).

“As the Holy Spirit says” accomplishes two tasks.

First, it teaches us that God is the author of Scripture. It teaches us, “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” ([2 Pet 1:21](#)). When Scripture speaks, God speaks (Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 119). When we hear Scripture, read Scripture, study Scripture, or encounter Scripture in any way, we can be confident God is speaking to us.

Second, it affirms the living character of Scripture. **The author does not use the past tense. He does not say, “The Holy Spirit said.” He uses the present tense.**

*Every time we open the Bible,
the Holy Spirit speaks.*

Even though the biblical authors recorded these words long ago, they are still living words. The author of Hebrews explicitly argues this in the next chapter: *“For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword”* ([Heb 4:12](#)).

The Urgency of Believing Today

In the main argument of this text, the writer of Hebrews returns to the Psalms for support and to model how to read the Old Testament in light of Christ. **The verses quoted here are from Psalm 95:7-11. In stark contrast to Moses, the people of Israel in Moses's time were faithless to God. Thus, the author uses these verses from the Psalms to exhort us not to repeat the faithlessness of the Israelites. Psalm 95 warns God's people not to harden their hearts and turn away from the God who saved them. This is precisely what happened to Israel.** They murmured against the Lord, grew discontent with his redemption, and pined for the pleasures of Egypt ([Ps 106:6-43](#)).

*The author presses the word **today** on his hearers with a sense of urgency. The urgency remains for us in our current context just as much as it did for the original audience.*

Today is the day of decision. **Today we will either walk with God or walk away from him.** As Luther recognized, today is the day of salvation because today may be our last. **The original audience could not presume upon another day. Neither can we.**

The phrase ***“if you hear his voice”*** is very important. Entering God's final rest depends on hearing and heeding the voice of God.

For anyone to hear God's voice is a result of an act of mercy and salvation. God speaks in order to save his people. The original author teaches his audience that *God has graciously spoken so that they might be saved. Now they must obey God's voice and faithfully follow it into eternity.*

Rebellion and Rest: Why Israel Failed

The author also shows his audience why Israel failed to enter the promised land: they hardened their hearts.

The Lord tested them in the wilderness (v. 8) and they failed. The forefathers of the nation failed to keep their hearts God-oriented.

Though they saw the “works” of God “for forty years” (v. 9), they put God to the test and rebelled against him.

Israel presumed on God's kindness. God graciously preserved them for forty years. He delivered them. He kept them alive. He provided manna for them. He guided them through the desert with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. And yet they presumed on that grace and grumbled against the Lord.

What is the “*rest*” Israel failed to enter? The word *rest* in verse 11 refers to the land beyond the Jordan River.

God swore in his wrath that the people of Israel would not enter Canaan, the land he had first promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15:18-21). However, the context of the author’s argument indicates that Canaan looked back to the rest of Eden and also typologically foreshadowed the future eschatological rest of the new creation. This is why the writer of Hebrews uses this Psalm and the story of Israel in the wilderness to exhort his readers to remain faithful. He wants them to make it to the true land of rest.

Rest in Scripture metaphorically refers to God’s blessings of safety, security, and salvation. Hebrews develops this picture by bringing a uniquely Christological component to a theology of rest.

Hebrews 4 teaches that Jesus Christ is our Sabbath rest. Not a place but a person—Jesus Christ—most fundamentally gives us rest.

The warning in these verses is sobering and serious. Just as he did with Israel, God will shut out from his rest those who rebel, walk in unfaithfulness, and presume on the grace of God. Like faithless Israel, those who presume on the grace of God will die on the wrong side of the Jordan. We must hold firmly today lest we wake up outside God's eternal rest.

Exhorted to Endure

Hebrews 3:12-19

In verses 12-19 the author shifts away from showing his audience Israel's unbelief to exhorting his audience not to fall into unbelief.

He exhorts his people not to follow in first generation Israel's faithless footsteps. Instead, he encourages them to endure in the faith so that they can enter into God's eschatological rest.

An Evil, Unbelieving Heart

Verse 12 begins the author's application of Psalm 95 to his audience.

Israel sinned because they did not believe God. They had an “evil, unbelieving heart.” This type of heart ultimately sets us on the path that leads away from the living God. Thus, **the author exhorts his brothers and sisters to check their hearts so that they will not end up hard-hearted like Israel.**

How do we combat evil, unbelieving hearts?

Verse 13 provides the remedy.

Christians ***“encourage each other daily, while it is still called today.”***

Paul gives the same command to the Colossians when he encourages them to ***teach and admonish one another “in all wisdom . . . through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Col 3:16).***

Immersing oneself in the community of saints, in the care and watchfulness of the local church, in the preaching of God’s Word, and in the exhortation of fellow believers remedies an evil, unbelieving heart. These things protect us from falling

away. The author again highlights the urgency of this task. We must immerse ourselves in these things “today.”

Tomorrow is no guarantee.

The author also describes an **“evil, unbelieving heart”** as one that has been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

The Old Testament diagnoses the hardening of the heart as a terminal disease. A hardened heart leads to eternal death. Each of us at some point had a hard heart, but God, because of his love for us, replaced our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh ([Ezek 36:26](#)). While we were dead in our sins and opposed to God, God brought us to life by his grace ([Eph 2:1-7](#)). God’s miraculous work on hearts of stone grounds our endurance

and helps us fight evil, unbelieving hearts.

The danger of having a hard heart is not just that you might stumble. The danger of a hard heart is that it will lead to a final denial of God and rejection of his grace in Jesus Christ. **The danger of a hard heart is unbelief. Hard hearts do not recognize or accept their need for a savior.** Therefore, the ministry to which the author exhorts his brothers and sisters is no small ministry. Exhorting brothers and sisters in Christ to watch out for an evil and unbelieving heart is an urgent task for gospel faithfulness with eternal significance.

Holding Firmly to Faith

The “reality that we had at the start,” mentioned in verse 14, is a conversion—one’s first confession of Christ when God regenerated the heart by the power of the gospel.

While the author reminds us that God sovereignly ignites our conversion, perseverance in our faith (fueled and motivated by God’s grace) is our responsibility. **Ultimately, we cannot keep ourselves.** God is the One who began a good work in us and will bring that work to completion in the end ([Phil 1:6](#)). God is the One who will uphold and guard us by his power through faith ([1 Pet 1:5](#)).

Verses 15 through 18 push forward the author’s argument for perseverance in the faith.

In [verse 15](#) the author quotes [Psalm 95:7-8](#) to once again reiterate the importance and urgency of hearing and obeying God's voice.

The questions the author asks in [verses 16-18](#) underline a central theological issue—the fatal error of unbelief.

The Israelites committed many sins in the wilderness but only one prevented their entry into the land of promise, the sin of unbelief.

[Verse 19](#) powerfully demonstrates the need to persevere *in faith*. Without faith we will not enter the promised land. The faithless will not enter God's eschatological rest.

The faithful hold firmly until the end.

Reflect and Discuss

1. The author of Hebrews argues that one of the reasons Israel fell away was because their hearts were hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Is there any sin in your life that you entertain and refuse to put to death? Are you at total war with your sin, or do you pick and choose your battles? Explain.
2. Do you regularly confess your sin to other brothers or sisters in your church as a means to prevent the hardening of your heart? Which relationships exhort you to endure in the faith? How do you encourage others to endure?
3. In what ways do you, like Israel, presume on God's kindness? Do you expect God to grant you tomorrow?

Would today look any different in your relationship with the Lord if you knew it was your last?

4. How does the author of this passage use the reality of God's wrath to motivate his audience to hold firmly until the end? Do you typically think about God's wrath as a motivation for persevering in your faith? Why or why not?
5. In what practical ways can you encourage brothers and sisters in your church to persevere in the faith? Identify other places in Scripture that show us how Christians can exhort one another.
6. How does the miracle of rebirth help us endure in the faith? Does the miracle still flame your affection for Christ, or have you simply grown accustomed to it?
7. In what activities or things do you pursue rest? If Jesus Christ is our ultimate rest, what does that say about the "rest" we experience this side of heaven?
8. The perseverance of the saints is one of the most comforting doctrines in all of Christian theology. How might it help you and others to endure in the faith?
9. In what ways is the divine inspiration and living character of Scripture tied to perseverance in the faith? How does the author of Hebrews use Scripture to spur his audience forward toward God's eschatological rest?
10. Spend time reflecting on "the reality that [you] had at the start," to which the author of Hebrews refers in [verse 14](#). What is the significance of the word "if" in this verse?

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary

Do Not Harden Your Hearts (Hebrews 3:7-19)

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is full of warning signs from God, meant to deter men from sin and thereby keep them from His wrath. The Old Testament tells us that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11), and the New Testament tells us that He does not wish for anyone to perish but wants everyone to repent (2 Pet. 3:9). God did not create man to be doomed to hell, and throughout His Word He continually warns him of the dangers and penalty of sin.

Hebrews 3:7-19 is one of these warnings.

The Holy Spirit seems to be giving a supernatural push to anyone on the edge of accepting Jesus Christ.

Many people intellectually accept the gospel. They believe its message, but never commit themselves to the One whom that gospel proclaims. They do not repent of their sins and turn wholeheartedly to Him as Savior and Lord.

It is no favor to God—and no benefit to us—to like, to admire, to praise His gospel, without accepting and obeying it. To know the truth and not accept it brings worse judgment than never to have known it at all.

The warning here is to those who know the gospel, who affirm its truth, but who, because of love of sin or fear of persecution or whatever it may be, have not committed themselves to the truth they know is real.

It is as if there were a fire in a hotel and they are on the tenth floor. Because there is a net below, the firemen are yelling, "Jump." But they do not jump. They hesitate. They are well aware of the danger and they know the net is their only way of escape; but they do not act on what they know is true and necessary. They are concerned about saving some of their possessions, or perhaps they think that somehow they can find another way out. They may be afraid of being hurt from the fall. Some might even be concerned about how they would look while jumping—afraid of embarrassment. But the point is this: simply knowing about the danger and knowing about the way out of it will not save them. If they do not jump they will die. When your very life is at stake, nothing else should matter.

The writer of Hebrews, under the Spirit's leading, has a great concern for his fellow Jews who are in this predicament. **They have heard the gospel, some of them from the mouth of an apostle, but for various reasons they hold back from commitment. Some, apparently, had made a profession of faith or had given some statement of confidence in Christ, but were beginning to fall back.**

When they started getting ridiculed by their friends, they began to waver and hesitate.

They were not willing to throw their whole weight on Jesus, and as a result they became apostate. Knowing the truth, they willingly and intentionally turned away from it.

To enforce the warning, the Spirit uses an Old Testament story very familiar to Jews. Moses... has just been mentioned, and it is from the time of this greatest of Old Testament leaders that the story comes.

It falls into four parts:

- A. the illustration of Israel;
- B. the invitation to take heed;
- C. the instruction to exhort one another; and
- D. the issue of unbelief.

A. The Illustration of Israel

One of the best ways to begin a sermon is to give an illustration. Once you have the people's attention, you go to the Scripture to affirm your point. That is what the Spirit of God does here.

In this case the illustration itself is from Scripture. Hebrews 3:7-11 is a quotation of Psalm 95:7-11.

The passage quoted was written probably in the time of David, but it speaks about the time of Moses. It is a moving example of the problem many Jews faced in the time of the early church. **It describes Israel's disobedience and rejection of God in the Exodus wanderings.**

The psalmist used this story to warn his people against disbelief. A thousand years later the writer of Hebrews used it for the same purpose. Nearly two thousand more years later the warning is still valid.

The Holy Spirit here says to the Hebrews who are on the edge of decision but have never made a commitment, "Don't harden your hearts, hear today and do today what God wants you to do. **Don't do what the children of Israel did even after they had seen proof of God's power and care for forty years. They continued not to believe in Him. Don't do that.**"

Proof of the Bible's Inspiration

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice." ([3:7](#))

Here is one of the clearest testimonies in Scripture to its own divine inspiration. The writer of Hebrews is saying that the Holy Spirit was the author of [Psalm 95](#), from which [Hebrews 3:7b-11](#) is quoted.

Inspiration is the Holy Spirit's speaking through the minds of God's human instruments. *What the psalmist said was not his own opinion or his own choice of words. When he wrote these words the Holy Spirit was speaking. That is divine inspiration.*

Those are the words of the Spirit of God, who is the true Author of Scripture. *"For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God"* (2 Pet. 1:21).

The Holy Spirit was involved in the writing of every word of Scripture. That is why it is sin in the first degree, and opens the floodgates to every kind of heresy possible, to deny the absolute verbal inspiration of Scripture.

God originated the autographs, the first copies, to the very word.

The basic warning from the psalm ("Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts") is used three times in Hebrews 3 (vv. 7-8, 13, 15) and once in chapter 4 (v. 7).

Today, of course, indicates urgency. It means "now," not necessarily a 24-hour period. It refers to the period of grace, which sometimes may be less than 24 hours. In other words, it refers to the present moment.

If you know the truth of Jesus Christ, if you know the gospel of Jesus Christ, do not do what Israel did when she knew God's truth and saw His revelation. It is so foolish and dangerous to harden your heart. You never know how long you will have to decide. "For He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you'; behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' **behold, now is 'the day of salvation'**" ([2 Cor. 6:2](#)).

*God's time for salvation
is always now.*

ILLUSTRATION:

In his earlier ministry D.L. Moody often would end his message with, "Go home and think about what I've said." One night in Chicago he told the people to do this and to come back the next night ready to make a decision. That

night the Chicago fire broke out, and some who had been in his congregation died. That was the last time he told anyone to think over the claims of Christ and make a decision later. No one knows if he will have a tomorrow in which to decide.

Today signifies the present time of grace. Men today, as in the time of Moody and in the time of Hebrews and in the time of David and in the time of Moses, never know how long that time of grace for them will be.

Listening to God and obeying Him are matters of will. So is hardening the heart to Him, as Israel did.

Paul warns that our hearts, or consciences, can become seared and insensitive, as skin does when it is badly burned ([1 Tim. 4:2](#)). The scar tissue that replaces the skin has very little feeling.

When I was in college I was thrown out of a car that was going about 75 miles an hour. I slid some 100 yards on my back and suffered third-degree burns from the friction. The resulting scar tissue is now insensitive.

Something very much like this happens to a conscience that is repeatedly disregarded.

"Today" lasts only as long as there is opportunity to decide—and as long as the

conscience is sensitive to God. When a person's "today" is over, it is then too late.

His heart gets harder every time he says no to Jesus Christ or to any part of His truth or will. When the heart is soft, when the conscience is sensitive, when the intellect is convinced about Christ—that is the time to decide, when one is still pliable and responsive. Otherwise he will eventually become spiritually hard, stubborn, and insensitive. The gospel will no longer have any appeal.

Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness. ([3:8](#))

Israel had been in Egypt for more than 400 years, the last 200 years or so as slaves. Afraid that the Hebrews would become a threat, the Egyptians tried to weaken them and deplete their numbers by hard, oppressive labor in building cities and perhaps even pyramids. They were overworked, underfed, and regularly beaten. As both punishment and as an inducement to let His people leave this land, God afflicted the Egyptians with a series of ten plagues, the last and worst of which caused the death of all their firstborn. At this, Pharaoh pleaded with the Israelites to leave, which they hurriedly did under Moses' leadership. By the time they reached the Red Sea, Pharaoh had changed his mind and had led his troops to bring them back. God performed another miracle, allowing His people to travel through the parted waters, which afterward engulfed and drowned the pursuing army of Egypt.

After they arrived for the **trial in the wilderness**, God continued to bless them with miracles—travel direction by pillars of cloud and of fire (for night travel) and provision of food and good water. After each blessing they were satisfied only for a brief time. They soon started again to complain and to doubt God. They became the classic illustration of unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence. *God had clearly and miraculously revealed Himself; they knew He had revealed Himself; they knew what He expected them to do; and they saw evidence after evidence of His power and His blessing. But they never really believed. Just as the Egyptians quickly got over their fear of God, the Israelites quickly got over their trust of Him.*

They would not commit themselves to Him in faith. As a result, they had to wander and wander and wander—until all of the ungrateful, untrusting, unbelieving generation had died. For some forty years they wandered around in circles in a barren, desolate, and oppressive land—because of their unbelief.

Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. ([3:9](#))

Unbelief never has enough proof.

Asking for more proof is simply a pretext, an excuse, a delaying tactic.

The people of Israel kept testing God, and the **day of trial** lasted forty years. "Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water that we may drink.' And Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?'" ([Ex. 17:1-2](#)). They were not trusting God for water in faith; they were demanding water from God as their due and as a test to see if He really could and would provide it. Their real purpose is spelled out a few verses later:

"They tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us, or not?'" (17:7). God had been providing for them all along; they had abundant evidence of His power and care. But they would not put their full trust in God, so they kept saying, in effect, "God, just do this one more thing for us so we'll know you're real."

But when He protected them again or provided for them again, they still did not believe.

"Don't be like these people," pleads the writer of Hebrews. "Don't make excuses for not believing; don't harden your hearts to God like

they did—or you will lose your opportunity like they did."

God had released the Israelites from Egypt by awesome, miraculous plagues. Just as miraculously He brought them through the Red Sea and destroyed their pursuers. Without fail He had provided manna to feed them and the pillars of cloud and fire to guide them. But they still asked, "Is God among us?"

Nothing is more illogical or unreasonable than unbelief. It refuses to accept the most overwhelming evidence—simply because unbelief does not want to believe.

As Jesus made clear in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, no evidence is sufficient for the person who does not want to believe. *"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead"* ([Luke 16:31](#)).

The person, on the other hand, who *wants* to believe trusts God despite any evidence that may seem to be lacking. He says,
"I do believe; help my unbelief" ([Mark 9:24](#)).

Most people do not need more proof that God is real or that Jesus is His Son and the Savior. They need to hate and repent of their sin and to commit themselves to Him.

A God who is continually tested will never be accepted.

The one who tests God today does so for the same reason as did the Israelites in Moses day—to put Him off, because they love their sin, their own way, their own plans too much to give them up for God's.

Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart; and they did not know My ways"; as I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest." ([3:10-11](#))

The word angry does not mean simply unhappy or disappointed. It means vexed, wrought up, incensed. God was extremely angry with Israel's sin. The people kept it up, kept it up, and kept it up. The Septuagint of this passage could be rendered, "God loathed them."

He rejected and repudiated them. Why? Because they always went astray in their heart; and they did not know My ways.

As the Israelites finally neared the Promised Land, God commanded them to send out twelve men to spy it out before they entered. The majority report was extremely negative and pessimistic.

They saw the enemy as giants and themselves as "grasshoppers."

The minority report, by Caleb and Joshua, was optimistic—not because they underestimated the power of the enemy but because they knew the power of the Lord to be greater. The people believed the majority report and immediately began to grumble and complain to Moses and Aaron.

As punishment, God said, "*Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it*" (Num. 14:22-23).

They had more than enough evidence to believe that He could lead them safely into the land of milk and honey, but they would not believe Him and they were not allowed to enter.

The “rest” was Canaan, where the toil of wandering would end. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is a symbol of salvation.

That is when today is over. You can stand on the verge of receiving Jesus Christ for a long time, toying with the idea and thinking, "God, prove Yourself some more. I'm not sure. I'm not quite ready yet." And one day He will say, "You've had enough evidence; it's over now. It is no longer today; it is tomorrow. You will never see My promised land."

Respond today or Realize tomorrow. - JDP

If Israel had more than enough evidence to trust God in Moses' day, how much more do we have today?

- **Jesus**
- **Word**
- **Warfare**
- **Spirit**

➤ Church

We have the evidence that Jesus Christ the Son of God died on a cross, rose again the third day, and lives and saves men. The evidence is in, the evidence is secure. Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, has manifested God. He has declared Him, He has displayed His love, He has displayed His grace, He has sent the Holy Spirit. We do not need a Moses. In addition to all the historical evidence, we have the third Person of the Trinity to reveal Christ. Unbelief in the face of such overwhelming evidence is tragic indeed—and without excuse.

Even the generation that entered the land never knew God's rest in the true sense. The first thing God commanded them to do was to exterminate the godless and unbelievably wicked Canaanites. God was going to use His people as a tool of judgment.

The Canaanites were so pagan and evil that they buried live babies in jars in the walls of every building they built. They were such a grossly immoral and godless people that God wanted them wiped off the face of the earth. But instead of exterminating the Canaanites, the Israelites moved in with them. Consequently, except for a few hundred years under their own judges and kings, the

Israelites were exploited, exiled, and ruled by a succession of Gentile conquerors.

In A.D. 70 their Temple was destroyed and they have since been scattered across the world. Only in our own day has God begun to gather them back to a homeland. Israel's final rest will come only in the Kingdom that His Son will build when He returns again.

The Invitation: Take Heed

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

Based on the illustration of Israel's unbelief in the wilderness, an appeal is made to the readers of Hebrews not to follow this example. It is a warning against rejecting truth that is known. The judgment of the wilderness days fell on those who rejected God's Word through Moses, and the warning here is to those who reject God's Word in Christ.

Brethren is not a reference to Christians, as is "holy brethren" in [3:1](#). It refers to racial

brothers, unbelieving Jews, as the term does throughout the book of Acts.

The greatest sin in the world is unbelief.

It is the greatest offense against God and brings the greatest harm to ourselves. These readers were informed about the gospel. Many, perhaps, professed to be Christians. None considered himself to be actively, aggressively against Christ; but they all were against Him. No matter how close a person may be to accepting Jesus Christ as Savior, if he never comes to Him, he still has an evil, **unbelieving heart**. His punishment will be all the more severe because of his knowledge of the living God.

If such "have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance" ([Heb. 6:6](#)). When you have heard the truth of Jesus Christ, when you have acknowledged that it is the truth, and then turn your back and walk away from Him, there is nothing God can do. **Once you have heard the gospel and understood its claims, and then say no to Jesus Christ, you have fallen away. You have become apostate.**

The Holy Spirit is saying to everyone who hears the gospel: "Respond to Jesus while your heart is still warmed and softened

by His truth, while it is still sensitive. **Respond to His sweet love and His call of grace. Wait too long and you will find your heart getting hard and insensitive. The decision will become harder and harder as your heart becomes harder and harder.**

If you continue to follow your evil, unbelieving heart rather than the gospel, you will forever depart from the living God, and forfeit salvation rest.

Turning away from Jesus Christ is not rejecting a religion. Turning away from Jesus Christ is much more than rejecting historical, traditional Christianity. **Turning away from Jesus Christ is turning away from the living God. It is turning away from life itself.**

The Instruction: Exhort One Another Daily

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

([3:13](#))

Encourage is from the Greek *parakaleō*, a form of the word **used by Jesus of the Holy Spirit** in John 14:16. The root meaning has to do with coming alongside to give help.

The writer is saying to the believers among those to whom he is writing, **"Get along side each other and help each**

other." They are especially urged to help their unbelieving Jewish brethren by encouraging them not to harden their hearts but to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Deceitfulness means "trickery" or "stragem."

Sin is tricky; it seldom appears as it really is. It always masks itself. It lies and deceives (cf. [Rom. 7:11](#)). When a person becomes spiritually hardened, he rarely is aware of it. He can hear the gospel of Jesus Christ time and time again and not respond. My father often used the well-known expression,

"The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay." If your heart is not melted in faith, it will be hardened in unbelief.

The old nature constantly suggests that sin is not as bad and that trust in Christ is not as important as the Bible says. Becoming a Christian seems too costly, too demanding, too restrictive, too drab and unexciting—and, above all, unnecessary. From one's own perspective, he does not seem so wicked. "I take care of my family, I am a helpful neighbor and a good citizen. I'm not

perfect, of course, but I'm not evil, either. My life has room for improvement, but it doesn't need 'saving.'" So the thinking goes. This is what the sin nature deceitfully tells men about their need for salvation.

God's assessment is quite different.

"But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" ([Heb. 10:38-39](#)).

There we have it. You stand on the edge of decision, a decision which you cannot escape. Either you believe to the saving of your soul or you fall back to damnation.

BEWARE! *Those who choose to shrink back into damnation typically try to take others down with them... all in the name of freedom & grace.* - JDP

Continuance Is Proof of Salvation

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end. ([3:14](#))

Perseverance does not provide salvation, it proves salvation! - JDP

If we really believe the gospel, if we have committed our life to Jesus Christ, then at the end of the day, the end of the year, the end of life, our commitment will still stand. **The greatest proof of salvation is continuance in the Christian life.** The true believer stays with Christ. *"If you abide in My word," Jesus said, "then you are truly disciples of Mine"* ([John 8:31](#)). **When someone departs from the gospel, backs away from the faith, we can only conclude that this person never believed.** *"They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us"* ([1 John 2:19](#)).

Staying with the Lord marks the difference between possession and profession.

The Issue: Unbelief

*While it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? **And so we see** that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.*
([3:15-19](#))

The appeal to turn to the Lord without delay is repeated again.

God had become angry with **all those who came out of Egypt** who would not believe, and in anger He refused them His rest in the Promised Land. The writer pleads with his readers not to follow that example and suffer that fate.

The disobedience of unbelief forfeits blessing and brings judgment.

The illustration and invitation and instruction are worthless apart from belief in that to which they all point. God has great blessings prepared. He wants to pour out these riches on us, not only in this life but throughout all eternity. There is one thing required—faith. **They were not able to enter because of unbelief** (cf. [Prov. 29:1](#); [Jude 5](#)).

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 New Testament Commentary – Hebrews.

Beware of Unbelief ([3:7-19](#))

[Hebrews 3:7-19](#) is a literary unit with two major sections. The first section ([Heb 3:7-11](#)) is a quotation of [Ps 95:7b-11](#), and the second section ([Heb 3:12-19](#)) is a commentary on [Ps 95:7b-11](#). The two units are tightly framed, the first being demarcated as a quotation and the second using *inclusio* by the lexical repetition of *blepō* and *apistia* in [v. 12](#) and [v. 19](#). [Verse 12](#) contains an overt warning signaled by an imperative, and [v. 19](#) contains a covert warning expressed semantically by the indicative mood that parallels the warning of [v. 12](#). The quotation of [Ps 95:8a](#) with the overt imperative "do not harden your hearts" is positively answered in the second unit by [v. 14](#): "We have come to

share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." The two warnings in 3:12 and 3:19 that bracket the unit serve as a linguistic and theological frame for the covert command to have faith, which is expressed semantically in a conditional clause in v. 14.

Hebrews 3:7 begins the second warning passage in the book, but where it ends is debated. It may end with [v. 19](#), or it may extend to [4:13](#). Many interpret the warning passages as interrupting the flow of the author's argument, and hence these passages are often seen as digressions. This serious structural mistake is made by many older commentators. More recent ones have rightly understood them as integral to the argument of the epistle.

What is the relationship of 3:7-19 to 3:1-6? The author introduced the quotation in v. 7 with *dio* ("so"), an emphatic marker of result. This connector probably plays more than one role in the immediate context.

It carries forward the thought of [v. 6b](#) and relates it to the admonition in [v. 8](#), "do not harden your hearts." The *dio* clause indicates the consequence of the necessity of holding fast to be Christ's household: we are Christ's household if we hold fast. It also probably reaches to the "See to it, brothers" in [v. 12](#), which

is the beginning of the next semantic unit. **The semantic relationship would then be grounds- exhortation, with the grounds being the quotation of Ps 95:7b-11 in Heb 3:7-11 and the exhortation being the imperative of v. 12.** As an inferential conjunction, *dio* often marks the gathering up of the previous line of thought and connecting it to a new **line of thought:** *"since it is only by maintaining boldly our confidence, therefore, see to it that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart."*

The challenge is to determine how [3:7-19](#) is a result of [3:1-6](#), a relationship either ignored or inadequately explained. Some commentators see an implied contrast between the faithfulness of Jesus and the unfaithfulness of the wilderness generation. But since the comparison in [3:1-6](#) is between Moses and Jesus, it is unlikely that the original readers would have seen a contrast between Jesus and the wilderness generation. All the explicit contrasts in [3:7-4:11](#) are made between the exodus generation and the hearers, not the exodus generation and Jesus. The co-text in [Hebrews 1-2](#) was primarily linked to the description of Jesus in [3:1](#), and the following co-text **in 3:7-19 is explicitly linked to the readers' identity as described in 3:1 and 3:6.**

There is no mention of Moses' house in [3:6](#). The parallel is broken but picked up again in [3:7-15](#). It would seem, then, that *the main point of connection is that of the wilderness generation who were unfaithful and the*

original readers who were being exhorted not to follow suit.

There are several text-critical issues in these verses involving differences between the LXX and the author's Old Testament quotations in Hebrews. The divergences between the Hebrew text and the LXX are few and minimal with three exceptions. The first one is that the proper nouns "Massah" and "Meribah" are not transliterated by the LXX translators. Instead, they are translated as *en tō parapikrasmō* ("in the rebellion") and *kata tēn hēmeran tou peirasmou* ("during the time of testing"). The change could indicate a shift of focus from spatial location in the Hebrew text to the spiritual failure of the people. These two descriptive phrases do characterize the sins of the people during the entire 40 years of wilderness wanderings.

The second exception is the insertion by the author of *dio* in [3:10](#), which alters the punctuation so that the reference to 40 years becomes attached to the previous statement. In the MT and the LXX, the 40 years was the duration of God's wrath, but the author of Hebrews portrayed that 40 years as a time when the people witnessed God's work of grace and blessing. In [3:17](#), however, the author speaks of the 40 years as the time of God's anger ("with whom was he angry for forty years?"), making it more difficult to postulate that he deliberately altered the text, as is often suggested. More likely, the author viewed Israel's time in the wilderness as a time of testing, with God's blessings and anger both being demonstrated. P. Enns explained why the author cited [Psalm 95](#) and its reference to the 40 years in two different ways within the confines of eight verses: "The reason he cites the Psalm differently is that in [3:17](#) he is talking about

Israel, while in [3:10](#) he is talking about the *church*. In [3:17](#), the author is looking back to the original context of the Psalm, and so he cites it the way it was intended."

The third deviation occurs in [3:10](#) with the substitution of *tautē* ("this") for *ekeinē* ("that") before the noun "generation." This deliberate change shows the author's desire to contextualize [Psalm 95](#) for his audience and to sound a note of urgency for his readers. In [3:16](#) the lexical cognate of "rebellion" coupled with the cognate of "testing" used in [2:18](#) and again in [4:15](#) unites these verses in a comparison of the exodus generation, the author's generation of readers, and Jesus' testing as well. The author did not engage in hermeneutical "cheating" in the adjustments he made to the text of [Ps 95:7b-11](#) in [Heb 3:7-11](#). Standing behind his use of [Psalm 95](#) is the historical record in [Numbers 14](#). The author saw continuity between both texts, and his adjustments are made with the needs of his audience in mind and in such a way that he did no violence to the meaning of the text. Thus the author's approach must be distinguished from that of midrashic allegory.

[3:7](#) The quotation of [Ps 95:7b-11](#) is introduced here by the unusual statement, "as the Holy Spirit says," which occurs again only twice in the epistle ([9:8](#); [10:15](#)), though not in the identical fashion as here. This nomenclature indicates that the author viewed Scripture as the voice of the Holy Spirit, which gives added emphasis to the divine authority of the command. More important than the human author is the divine author.

The significance of the present tense *legei* ("says") is debated. The issue is whether the author intended the present tense to indicate that the Holy Spirit is speaking *now* to the hearers. It is

difficult not to see such an intention on the part of the author given the choice of the quotation that focuses on "today" coupled with this citation formula. This phrase indicates three things: (1) the Holy Spirit speaks in Scripture; (2) the Holy Spirit spoke through Scripture to the author's original audience; and (3) the Holy Spirit speaks to God's people today through this text when they read these words.

Of further interest is why the author chose to quote [Psalm 95](#) and not [Numbers 14](#), which is the historical account of the events behind [Psalm 95](#). The liturgical use of [Psalm 95](#) as a preamble to synagogue services is well known in Judaism. [Psalm 95](#) alludes to the occasion in [Exod 17:1](#) where the people grumbled against God at Rephidim because of the lack of water. Moses struck the rock and water gushed forth.

He named the place "Massah" ("testing) and "Meribah" ("embitterment"). The Greek terms in [Heb 3:8](#) correspond to the LXX rendering of the Hebrew words "Massah" and "Meribah." Although the background of [Psalm 95](#) is [Numbers 14](#), it is the language of [Psalm 95](#) that furnished the author with the themes that he developed through [Heb 4:11](#).

The use of *sēmeron* ("today") is significant in several ways. Its use in [Psalm 95](#) refers to the time of the psalmist, which was several hundred years after the events of [Numbers 14](#). Although the original readers of the book of Hebrews were several hundred more years removed from the writing of [Psalm 95](#), the author intended for his readers to see

the "today" as addressing them. "Today" is given emphasis by its word order in the clause, which serves to heighten the urgency of the warning.

Some suggest that the conditional particle *ean* ("if) carries the meaning of temporality and should be translated "when you hear his voice." But most see the condition as indicating uncertainty about hearing God's voice: either about whether God will speak again, or about whether the intended hearers are willing to listen.

Regarding the antecedent of "**his voice,**" Hanson suggested that it is Christ's voice. But it is more likely God's voice, and thus [Heb 3:12](#) and [4:12](#) form bookends for an entire section of the epistle with reference to a warning about the danger of disobeying God.

[3:8](#) The words *mē sklērūnēte* ("**do not harden**") form a subjunctive of prohibition. **The warning is against hardening one's own "heart" through willful disobedience. The heart in both the Old Testament and the New Testament includes not merely the emotions of human nature, but the mind and the will as well.** They were not to harden their heart as in the "rebellion." The use of "as" introduces a comparison to reinforce the preceding exhortation. The definite article "the" before "rebellion" points to the specific instance referred to in [3:9](#) when there was a lack of water. The phrase "in the rebellion" is something of a euphemism for the geographical location of Meribah. The use of *kata* ("during") with the accusative case in Greek indicates time according to most

commentators and virtually all translations (NIV-"during the time of testing"), although it is occasionally understood in a comparative sense with the meaning "according to the manner of." The question of the relationship of the phrase "during the day" to the other phrases in the text is not easily answered. It may be subordinate to "rebellion," indicating the time of the rebellion. It could refer to the incident at Massah. Lane suggested that it refers to the day they refused to enter the Promised Land according to [Numbers 14](#). Finally, some take it as inclusive of the entire 40 years of testing. Likewise, "rebellion" and "time of testing" could refer to two separate incidents, but probably not.

[3:9 Verse 9](#) provides an interpretive comment on the preceding thought introduced by "where." The KJV translates it temporally as "when," but it is more likely to be taken as indicating place. The phrase "tested and tried me" is (lit.) "tried by testing." Lane translates "by testing" as "through their distrust." The NIV renders Gk. "saw my works" as "saw what I did." The *kai* ("and") can introduce an added thought: "and in addition they saw" or, more likely, a concession: "although they saw." God's "works" may have a penal sense or a good sense. Most take "my works" to be connected with "they saw," but Morris construed it with the entire preceding clause. The "forty years" is linked with the preceding phrase and indicates the length of time they saw God's works. However, in the original Hebrew and the LXX, this phrase is related to the clause that follows, explicating God's wrath. This represents a subtle change by the author in the quotation to emphasize a theological point. There is also **an abrupt change from "his voice" in [v. 7](#) to "my works" in [v. 9](#).**

3:10-11 This change is illustrated in [v. 10](#) by the use of *dio*, which introduces the result of their testing and clarifies that the "forty years" is to be taken with what precedes and not with what follows (as in the Hebrew and LXX). **The author also substituted "this" for "that" before "generation," implying that his generation was included along with those of the Old Testament.**

The use of "always" connotes the idea of continually or constantly going astray during the 40 years of wilderness wandering.

The *kai* ("and") indicates the result of the preceding thought: "I became angry and so I said." The last "and" in [v. 10](#) is the translation of *de* in Greek and is translated "but" by Lane.

"They have not known my ways" means the wilderness generation willfully refused to do what God told them to do. There is a difference of opinion as to where the quotation introduced by "and I said" ends. Some take it as ending with "they did not know my ways," while others see it as ending with "heart" in the preceding clause as shown by the insertion of "but they." The phrase "and they did not know my ways" could be related to the preceding phrase and express a second charge against them, or it may be stating the same charge. Koester pointed out that the "ways of God" have two aspects: the ways God prescribes for his people, and the ways God himself acts.

The quotation concludes in [v. 11](#) with "so," indicating result. **God "swore" means he "declared on oath,"** as the NIV correctly translates. The phrase "in my anger" denotes the reason he swore the oath. The NIV's "they shall never enter" is (lit.) "if they shall enter"; it is rendered "they shall not enter" in the KJV and "they shall certainly not enter" by Lane. The oath is a conditional clause with the consequence "suppressed," implying a suppressed preceding thought such as "May God do so to me if...." According to Miller, when used by God, it may imply something like "I am not God if...."

There are "striking connections" between [Psalm 95](#) and [Isa 66:1](#), which has the only other occurrence of *katapausis* ("rest") in the LXX and which is quoted in [Acts 7:49](#). **The concept of "rest" plays a significant role in the remainder of Hebrews 3**, where it occurs in [vv. 18,19](#) and throughout [Heb 4:1-11](#). **The exodus theme is the dominant motif in this entire section.** Attridge noticed that this motif is either overplayed (as by Käsemann) or underplayed (as by Hofius). The association of [Gen 2:4](#) and [Ps 95:11](#), although possible when working from the Hebrew text, is more likely to have arisen as a consequence of the author's use of a Greek text.

3:12 The final paragraph of this chapter (3:12-19) comprises the author's application of the quotation to his readers. It is primarily hortatory in nature.

The situation of the original readers (3:12-14) is compared to that of the wilderness generation (3:15-19). The question of how [v. 12](#) is related to what precedes is not easy to answer. Some say it is connected to the *dio* of [3:7](#) and is parenthetical. Others begin a new sentence with [v. 12](#) and see it as an application of the preceding comments.

The imperative "see to it" introduces an urgent warning, implying "that there is urgent cause for apprehension founded on the actual state of the case." But it should not be interpreted to suggest that the author thought the "evil unbelieving heart" already existed among the readers. As noted previously, the heart includes the entire human personality of mind, will, and emotions.

The noun *apistia* ("unbelief") is translated by the NIV as a participle, "unbelieving." The genitive phrase "heart of unbelief" is, according to Delitzsch, a qualitative genitive "in the widest sense," not the genitive of cause or the genitive of consequence. Westcott argued that "evil heart" should be seen closely together with "unbelieving," which characterizes the "evil heart."

Unbelief stands in contrast to "faithfulness," which was the glory of Moses and Christ ([3:1-6](#)).

This "unbelief finds its practical issue in 'disobedience.'"

The importance of the heart for the author appears later in [8:10](#) and [10:10](#), where the Jeremiah quotation indicates that the new covenant includes a provision for a clean and established heart. In [Heb 10:22](#), with language very similar to [3:12](#), the author exhorted his readers to draw near to God with a "true heart... having our hearts cleansed from an evil conscience." Finally, the author spoke of the heart being strengthened by grace ([13:9](#)), which contrasts with a hard heart due to sin's deceitfulness ([3:13](#)).

According to Delitzsch, the *apistia* is both the root and the fruit of *ponēra*, and we don't have to decide between the meaning of "unbelief or "unfaithfulness": the word contains both meanings "which mutually involve each other." *Mēpote* introduces a clause that can be interpreted as expressing the content of seeing: "see to it that there not be an evil unbelieving heart." It can also be taken to indicate purpose: "Take care, brethren, [in order] that there not be" (NASB). *Mēpote* followed by the indicative implies urgent cause of apprehension founded on the actual state of the case and marks the reality and urgency of the danger. The entire construction to this point may be Semitic, as noted by many.

A key phrase in [v. 12](#) that impinges on the interpretation of the warning passages in [Hebrews 6](#) and [10](#) is *en tō apostēnai*, the aorist active infinitive of *aphistēmi* ("that turns away"). Lane agreed with the NIV and translated the phrase "that turns away," taking the infinitive in an epexegetical sense. The word carries with it the notion of movement away from a point of reference—in this case, the living God. In [Acts 15:38](#) it means "desert."

There is little doubt that the author was thinking of [Num 14:9](#) (LXX): *apo tou kuriou mē apostatai ginesthe*, where the very word in its nominal form is used. In [Num 14:9](#) the basic meaning of the Hebrew word is "to rebel." The Greek noun can mean either "rebel" or "apostate," and context must determine which is intended. Both meanings appear to be equally legitimate in the present context. Gheorghita gave a "slight advantage" to the reading "do not become apostates." On the other hand, Wevers translated it, "do not rebel against YHWH," noting that the LXX rendering best fits the Hebrew verb.

The language and imagery of [Hebrews 3](#) are paralleled in the other warning passages in the epistle with such verbs as *pararreō* ("drift away" in [2:1](#)), *parapiptō* ("fall away" in [6:6](#)), and *apostrephō* ("turn away" in [12:25](#)). Gheorghita stated:

In the NT the primary meanings of the verb ἀφίστημι [*aphistēmi*] are "to (physically) depart, to be separated from" ([Lk. 2:37](#), [4:13](#), [Acts 12:10](#), [15:38](#), [19:10](#)) and "to (be) release(d)", or "to send away" ([Lk. 13:27](#), [Acts 3:38](#), [22:29](#), [2 Cor. 12:8](#)). In addition to these frequent connotations, the verb ἀφίστημι and its cognate noun ἀποστῆναι [*apostēnai*] are occasionally employed by other NT writers with the same meaning as in Hebrews. Especially in the latter writings of the NT the verb is used with the specific meaning of "falling away from the faith / Lord" ([Lk. 8:13](#)) and it probably acquired the status of *terminus technicus* to describe the falling away from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1, [2 Tim. 2:3](#) [sic]).

The semantic range of this verb in the NT is much less extensive than in the LXX, where no less than 40 different Hebrew verbs are employed. The phrase in [Num 14:9](#) (LXX) is *mē apostatai*

ginesthe, which translates the Hebrew *'al-timrōd*» ("do not rebel"). The Hebrew verb *mārad* ("to revolt/rebel") and its cognate noun *mered* ("rebellion"; only in [Josh 22:22](#)) are translated by the verb *aphistēmi* or its cognates more than a dozen times in the LXX. Our author used the verb *aphistēmi* only once in this passage and did not use it again in any of the other warning passages, which argues against understanding his meaning as "apostasy" in the traditional sense of that term.

The author warned his readers not to turn away from "the living God." The absence of the Greek articles in this phrase focuses on God's character and nature. Westcott translated it "from Him who is a living God" because of the anarthrous construction, and he explained that the phrase suggests "the certainty of retribution on unfaithfulness." This phrase corresponds to "as I live" in [Num 14:21,28](#). In [14:3-4](#) the wilderness generation was about to abandon God by faulting him for bringing them out of Egypt. According to [Num 14:9](#), Joshua warned the people not to abandon God by disobeying his command to enter the promised rest. By analogy, the readers of Hebrews were in danger of doing the same thing, as chap. 4 makes clear. **Rhetorically, the author connected the "living God" (3:12) with "the word of God is living" (4:12) to form a possible chiasm-God/living and living [word]/of God.**

Lane and the NIV take the infinitive clause *en tō apostēnai* as a comment on the unbelieving heart as one "that turns away." Ellingworth said it expresses the possible result of the unbelieving heart: "should fall away as a result of disbelief." His

point that the danger the author fears for his readers "seems to have been a passive drift ([2:1](#)) away from faith rather than active revolt" tones down the harshness of the term and tends to interpret the infinitive in light of [2:1](#) rather than vice versa. Hughes interpreted the phrase to mean "a heart that is evil because it is unbelieving." Following Aquinas, Hughes correctly explained that this is not a case of a heart that has not yet come to belief, but a heart that departs from belief.

This falling away is not passive but deliberate disobedience.

This is the antithesis of the spirit of those who draw near to God (see [10:22](#)). Peter referred to those who have "left the straight way and wandered off" ([2 Pet 2:15](#)). He went on to say about them that "if they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning" ([2 Pet 2:20](#)). The author used *apostēnai* only this once in the entire book, which leads to a crucial question: If *apistia* and *apeithēs* are synonyms for *apostēnai*, then is apostasy in the usual theological sense what the author had in mind? It is highly unlikely that the theological sense of the term is what the author intended.

These verses contain an important aspect of the New Testament's use of the Old Testament. **The author's reference to the failure of the exodus generation as a warning for his readers is an example of Paul's statement in [1 Cor 10:6-11](#)**

that Old Testament events are written as warnings for the church.

3:13 Verse 13 parallels **v. 12** with another imperative, "encourage one another," but with a **positive focus** signaled by the adversative conjunction *alla* ("but") to balance out the warning. The contrast highlights the command. **This encouragement probably includes within it an element of warning as well as reproof with the present tense implying ongoing encouragement.** Virtually the same statement is made again in **Heb 10:25**. The use of the pronoun "one another" is reciprocal rather than the reflexive ("encourage yourselves"). The inclusion of *hekastēn* with "day" adds emphasis to the statement and has both a temporal and distributive meaning. This statement and **10:25** may indicate that the readers met together daily.

Both here and throughout the epistle (4:1,11; 10:24-25; 12:15-16; 13:1-3), the author challenged the community of readers to devote themselves to watching out for each other.

Collective responsibility was the order of the day for the author. The warnings were addressed to the entire community, but there is a double reference in **vv. 12-13** to individual members.

*Ellingworth says this illustrates the author's conviction, **expressly stated in 12:15**, that **it only takes one unbelieving member to corrupt the entire community**. If the individual is left alone, the author would have agreed with R. Robinson when he wrote, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love."*

The quotation in [v. 8a](#) uses the second person plural, and the author retained it in [v. 12](#) and [v. 13](#). Interestingly, beginning with [v. 14](#) and continuing through the end of this entire section ([4:13](#)) and into the opening paragraph of the next major section ([4:14-16](#)), all the exhortations are "we" forms. Ellingworth correctly observed that the change is not merely stylistic but integral to the argument as developed in [Hebrews 4](#).

The clause "as long as it is called Today" means that encouragement is to continue as long as "Today" lasts. The context does not specify this length of time, but it is to be understood as more than a single day from the context and especially **from Heb 4:7. It could refer to the second coming of Christ; it could be taken in a more generic sense as referring to the time while there is still opportunity to hear God speaking. Whatever the exact meaning, a sense of urgency is indicated since it is obvious that "Today" will not last indefinitely.**

The Greek definite article precedes the word "Today," which signals one of three things: (1) the word "Today" itself; (2) specifying the today as "this today"; and (3) as a reference to the entire quotation introduced by "Today." The differences between these three options are negligible for interpretation.

The *hina* ("so that") clause expresses the purpose for the mutual encouragement.

The position of the phrase "of you" is emphatic. The aorist passive subjunctive of *sklēruno* ("may be hardened") has the passive voice of permission, "to let oneself be hardened." The passive voice may have the force of the middle voice, "they hardened themselves." Hughes took the subjunctive as indicating that the hardening had not yet occurred. **The phrase "deceitfulness of sin" personifies sin as a power.** Most take the genitive here as subjective;

It is sin that deceives.

There is a certain lack of specificity among the terms the author used in these verses. Theologically it is reading too much into the words "sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" to interpret it in the sense of apostasy as do many interpreters, for the context does not define what the author intended. Taking the Greek term *apostēnai* as it is used here and burdening it with the theological baggage of apostasy is premature. No doubt, many commentators, aware of what comes in [Hebrews 6](#) and [10](#), are willing to label the term with the meaning of apostasy and interpret it either in an Arminian sense as the loss of salvation, or in a more Calvinistic sense (e.g., John

Owen), as describing one who was never truly converted in the first place. It should not be overlooked that the word *apostēnai* does not occur in either [Hebrews 6](#) or 10. One wonders why it would not be used there if the author had apostasy in mind since the warnings in those two chapters are more severe than the warning in chap. 3. It is entirely possible that the author did not think about apostasy in the traditional theological sense of the term. Rather, he probably used the word to describe disobedience that incurs God's judgment in line with what happened in [Numbers 14](#). In [Num 14:20](#) the text explicitly says that God had "forgiven" the people in accordance with Moses' intercessory prayer. Does this mean that the exodus generation had committed final apostasy against God? Apparently not, since God provided for them and protected them for the next 38 years during their desert experience. In fact, nowhere in [Numbers 14](#) did Moses explicitly mention the irrevocability of the loss of the wilderness generation. What the people lost was the opportunity to enter the Promised Land, not their covenant status as the people of God. Based on what the author said in [Heb 3:12-13](#), one may infer that apostasy is in view. But it must be admitted that this is an inference since it is not stated directly in the text, and it is not at all certain that such is implied in the text. It is better to interpret it broadly as distrust, disobedience, or disloyalty, and not attempt to define the exact scope of the warning.

3:14 Introduced by *gar* (untranslated in the NIV), this verse provides the grounds for the warning of [3:12](#). It may refer back to [3:6](#), repeating the warning found there, which is the subject of the command in [3:13](#). "We have come to share" translates the perfect tense of *ginomai* ("to become") with the noun *metochos*

("partner"). The perfect tense possibly intimates a relationship begun in the past that continues in the present, but it definitely indicates the aspect of a "timeless conclusion."

The two nouns in the construction *metochoi tou Christou* ("partakers of Christ") can be construed in more than one way. It may indicate having a personal interest in Christ, but this seems too generic for the context. Many take the phrase to mean that believers are partners with Christ, reflecting the root meaning of the Greek word *metochos*. Others interpret the genitive *Christou* as an objective genitive, meaning that Christ is the object of partaking in the sense of "we participate in Christ." A combination of the latter two interpretations gets nearest the mark.

Eanper introduces a conditional clause, and "if is a bit weak for this compound particle. A better rendering would be "if indeed." The word is stronger than the usual conditional particles ei and ean.

Ellingworth treated the condition as an open one, implying the possibility of not fulfilling the condition. However, speaking in reference to the conditional statements in [Heb 3:6](#) and [3:14](#), Fanning stated:

Careful attention to the wording shows that these lines do not cite what will be true if they hold on, but what is already true of them, and which is to be evidenced by their endurance through temptation. The writer asserted that their continuance in faith will demonstrate that they are (present tense in Gk.) members of God's household, not that it will make it so in the future. Holding on to their

confidence will reveal the reality they already have come to share (perfect tense) in Christ, not what they will share.... The warnings about falling away and exhortations to endure are designed to make this point.

The verb *katechō* ("hold") conveys the idea of maintaining or possessing. That which the readers are told to "hold" is the "confidence we had at first," which refers to the readers initial faith in Christ. The word *hupostasis* ("confidence") can also mean "trust," "assurance," or "steadfastness." Up to and including the time of the Reformation, the word was usually taken here in a philosophical/theological sense as in [Heb 1:3](#). But since the nineteenth century it is understood here as "firm confidence," a meaning that builds etymologically from the root of the word as that which "stands under something" as a foundation.

This is followed by the adjective *bebaios* ("firmly"). The believer is to hold firmly "till the end," which the author did not explain. It could refer to the end of a person's life, the end of the age, the return of Christ, or as Lane took it, entrance into God's final rest, linking this statement with "rest" in [v. 18](#). The almost identical phrase in Greek occurs in [Heb 6:11](#), where the readers are encouraged "to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure."

3:15 The crucial issue in [v. 15](#) is what should be grammatically connected to *en tō legesthai* ("As has just been said"), the

preceding or the following. Both are possible and commentators seem about evenly divided on the issue. If it is taken with the preceding clause, it gives the reason for what is stated. Lane (against Hofius) views **it as a summary of 3:12-14**. If it is taken with what follows, it is the condition whose consequence is expressed in the next verse (as in the NIV).

3:16 The theme of "rebellion" continues in v. 16, which probably refers to the rebellion at Kadesh in Numbers 14.

The conjunction *gar* is construed by some as a weak transition, but it indicates the reason that the wilderness generation was excluded, a reason that, as Greenlee pointed out, is implicit in the answer to the rhetorical question, "Who were they who heard and rebelled?" **The point is that they should not harden their hearts because those who did so at Kadesh were excluded from God's Canaan rest.**

The aorist participle *akousantes* (lit. "having heard") can be interpreted syntactically in one of three ways: (1) temporally, expressing the thought that when or after they had heard, they rebelled; (2) concessively, "although they heard, they rebelled"; or (3) as parallel in thought to "rebel": "they heard and they rebelled" (as in the NIV).

The author answers his rhetorical question with another one: "Were they not...?" The rebels God was angry with were "those Moses led out." Moses was the intermediate agent; God was the actual leader. This question is connected to the first by the

adversative connecting particle *alla* ("but"; untranslated in the NIV), which has three possible semantic functions. First, it could negate the uncertainty implied in the preceding question, with the sense that the question was not necessary since all who came out of Egypt (over 20 years of age) did not enter. Second, it could negate the response that it was only some who did not enter. Third, it could be seen as a rhetorical confirmation in the sense of "really, indeed."

3:17

In v. 17 the focus shifts from the people who rebelled to God who was angry with them over their rebellion.

Miller viewed the semantic function of this clause as continuing the reason for the exhortation in 3:15. Again, the question of v. 17a is answered with another rhetorical question in v. 17b. **God was angry with "those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert."**

A further relative phrase descriptively states "*whose bodies fell in the desert.*" The Greek term **kola** is too strong a word to be rendered by the innocuous "**bodies.**" "**Corpses**" or "**carcasses**" would be **more apt.** This relative phrase may imply something along

the lines of sudden death, but **it surely links their sin with their death in the wilderness.**

Though expressed in the surface structure as a negative, "was it not with those," the proposition encoded is clear: "it was with those who sinned" that God was angry.

3:18 Verse 18 begins with *de*, which is rightly translated "and." It continues the grounds for the exhortation of **3:15**. The key word in this verse is the aorist active participle of *apeitheō* ("**those who disobeyed**"). **The focus of this word is not so much unbelief as it is disobedience.** The implied subject of the future infinitive translated "that they would never enter" is those who rebelled against whom God's oath is declared.

The future infinitive *eiseleusesthai* ("enter") expresses timelessness in that it is not connected to any external temporal reference and refers to an impossible state of affairs.

3:19

Verse 19 is the conclusion of the preceding argument begun in v. 12 and is introduced by *kai* ("so"):

*"SO we see that they were not able to enter,
because of their unbelief."*

The noun *apistia* ("unbelief") is emphatic by word order since it is placed last in the clause.

The use of the present tense in [v. 19](#) after a series of aorists in [vv. 16-18](#) is stylistically effective.

In [v. 18](#) the author chose the verb *apeitheō* ("disobey"), but in [v. 19](#) he used the noun *apistia* ("unbelief"). The latter word occurs in [v. 12](#), thus forming *an inclusio*.

The Greek text supplies *apeithountes* without a direct correspondent to the Hebrew text. Gheorghita offers three possible explanations. First, the LXX translators may have had a different source than the MT. Second, perhaps the translators paraphrased rather than translating directly. Third, the prepositional noun *mē'ahārā^a* in [Num 14:43](#) "was read as a

derivative of the Hebrew root *mrh*, usually translated by the verb ἀπειθεῖν [*apeithein*]" . The author chose the word to describe most accurately the sin of the desert generation from a theological perspective.

The author does not repeat the strong word *apostēnai* ("fall away") that he used in [v. 12](#). **The focus is on unbelief that resulted in disobedience.** It is anachronistic to read later theological concepts of apostasy into this passage, as it is not clear at all that the theological sense of "apostasy" was used prior to the Christian era.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS.

- **Calls for serious theological reflection.**
- The influence of [Numbers 14](#) is so pervasive in [Heb 3:7-19](#) that it must be studied carefully. Even though the people corporately sinned against God at Kadesh, [Num 14:20](#) explicitly says that, because of the intercession of Moses, God forgave the people of their sin and still treated them as his covenant people. Yet because of their disobedience they paid a high price: they were not permitted to enter the promised rest in Canaan.
- A key point in the interpretation of [Heb 3:7-19](#) is the meaning of the conditional clause in [3:6](#) and [3:14](#). It is clear that in the main clauses in these verses the author addressed his readers corporately

and assumed they were believers. To be part of Jesus' "house" and "sharers" with him implies that they were Christians. *Reference to the congregation corporately is followed by a conditional qualification that essentially says "point A is true if point B is true." "We have become partakers of Christ in the past if we hold firmly to our confession in the future" is the sense the author intended, leaving the readers to draw the conclusion that future perseverance indicates past salvation, and lack of future perseverance indicates one was not truly saved in the past.*

➤ **The verse does not say:** *"If we do not hold on to our confidence, then although you were once saved, nevertheless now you lose your salvation."*

➤ **That is actually just the opposite of what the verse says.** The clear implication is well stated by Guthrie: *"perseverance does not gain salvation, but demonstrates the reality that true salvation indeed has been inaugurated."*

Failure to hold on to one's confidence does not

cause one to lose salvation; it indicates that one was not truly saved in the first place.

A second theological point in this passage is that *putting God to the test is an evidence of unbelief and disobedience* on the part of God's people. Hughes explained:

In their obduracy they failed culpably to learn the great lesson of God's unfailing faithfulness, with the result that he was *provoked* by the repeated manifestations of their mutinous temper ("They *always* go astray in their hearts") to punish them by causing them to forfeit the blessing of entry in the *rest* that lay ahead for the people of God.

What happened at Kadesh became the symbol of Israel's disobedience, and the author of Hebrews took over that theme as a warning to his generation.

A third theological issue has to do with whether the sin of so-called apostasy was a real possibility or not. Whichever interpretation is taken, whether the basic meaning is "to rebel" or "to apostatize," the language indicates a real danger and not merely some "virtual" falling away that in reality cannot occur.

- The New American Commentary

3:7-15 This passage refers to the Israelites who had hardened their hearts in the wilderness. A hardened heart is as useless as a hardened lump of clay or a hardened loaf of bread. Nothing can restore it and make it useful. **The writer of Psalm 95 warns against hardening our hearts as Israel did in the wilderness by continuing to resist God's will (Exodus 17:7; Numbers 13; 14; 20).**

The people were so convinced that God couldn't deliver them that they simply lost their faith in him. **People with hardened hearts are so stubbornly set in their ways that they cannot turn to God. This does not happen suddenly or all at once; it is the result of a series of choices to disregard God's will.**

Let people know that those who resist God long enough, God will toss aside like hardened bread, useless and worthless.

3:11 God's *rest* has several meanings in Scripture:

(1) the seventh day of creation and the weekly Sabbath commemorating it (**Genesis 2:2; Hebrews 4:4-9**);

(2) the Promised Land of Canaan ([Deuteronomy 12:8-12](#); [Psalm 95](#));

(3) peace with God now because of our relationship with Christ through faith ([Matthew 11:28](#); [Hebrews 4:1, 3, 8-11](#)); and...

(4) our future eternal life with Christ ([Hebrews 4:8-11](#)).

All of these meanings were probably familiar to the Jewish Christian readers of Hebrews. We can apply the verses as a warning about God's anger in the face of human rebellion against his Kingdom. **By rejecting God's provision (Christ) and not enduring in our faith, we miss the opportunity for spiritual rest.**

[3:12-14](#) Our hearts turn away from the living God when we stubbornly refuse to believe him. **[If we persist in our unbelief, God will eventually leave us alone in our sin.](#)**

But God can give us new hearts, new desires, and new spirits ([Ezekiel 36:22-27](#)). **To prevent having an unbelieving heart, stay in fellowship with other believers, talk daily about your mutual faith, be aware of the deceitfulness of sin (it attracts but also destroys), and encourage each other with love and concern.**

3:15-19 The Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land because they did not believe in God's protection, and they did not believe that God would help them conquer the giants in the land (see Numbers 14-15).

So God sent them into the wilderness to wander for 40 years. This was an unhappy alternative to the wonderful gift he had planned for them.

Lack of trust in God always prevents us from receiving his best.

- Life Application Study Bible.