

Lesson Seven

(3:7 — 4:13)

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, when you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, ⁹where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. ¹⁰Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their hearts; they have not known my ways.' ¹¹As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall never enter my rest.' "

¹²Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end, ¹⁵while it is said,

"Today, when you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts
as in the rebellion."

¹⁶Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was he provoked forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did he swear that they should never enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

4 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it. ²For good news came to us just as to them; but the message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers. ³For we who have believed enter that rest as he has said,

“As I swore in my wrath,

“They shall never enter my rest,” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” ⁵And again in this place he said,

“They shall never enter my rest.” ⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he sets a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

“Today, when you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later of another day. ⁹So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; ¹⁰for whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his.

¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

JESUS AND JOSHUA

If one would ask for stalwart men,
whose lives would do for ink and pen;
What greater names than these? Oh then,
what with God’s help, we might have been!

This little verse is to help all of us think about men, two men especially, Moses and Joshua, whose loyalty and willingness to yield to God, allowing him to work in them, have made them household words for every Bible reader. Not because they lived to become such, but rather because they so lived! The ringing declaration of Joshua to Israel, “You

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

choose today whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" has been a rallying cry for 3,000 years, encouraging the undecided, the faint-hearted, and the faithful as well. Who can read the account in Exodus 17:8-13 or the book of Joshua and not be thrilled with Joshua? Surely he, who did so faithfully, can but be honored! And honored he is — he is compared with Jesus (Greek students will know that the same Greek word is translated both Jesus and Joshua, both names meaning 'savior'). The comparison will show, however, that while Joshua could bring the people into the land of promise, he could not give them rest — only Jesus can do that — wherein we find the all-important difference. Christians have the better savior! It will be good to read I Cor. 10:1-13 as you study this lesson in Hebrews.

3:7 — **therefore** — The preceding section encouraged the first readers to think carefully about Jesus, shown to be better than angels and Moses, servants of God, those who brought the written word to Israel. Verse 6 put Christians into the picture as enjoying what God had done, and then turned the focus upon the need for constancy, an abiding faithfulness to God. This whole lesson will deal with the Israelites, by-and-large a nation that "started fast but didn't last." They stand as examples of what not to be: faithless to God, the one with whom we (all) have to do, for whom nothing is hidden but, as it were, is shouted from the housetop.

Holy Spirit — Notice carefully: these verses are a quote from Psalms 95:7-11, but while written by someone (likely David), are yet said to be through the direction of the Holy Spirit. This is typical of many texts in the Bible that help us understand not only that scripture is "God-breathed" but also the "how" of that fact. Read now II Peter 1:20-21 — note that the "holy men of old" were borne or carried along, passively, as it were. Now peruse Acts 4:25 for another clear example. Then read Matthew 16:18-19; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-14, for the promise that Jesus gave the apostles in regard to their future ministry. The apostles, familiar with "their" bible, were not strangers to the idea of God speaking through men. Hence, they would be much more understanding, especially in retrospect after a time, about the matter than some people suppose.

today — Anyday, whenever God is speaking. Be alert to this fact as you read the scripture text: not all the people suddenly left God so much as they either drifted away or were never committed. The text of 2:1-4 comes into view again as the text unfolds.

V. 8. — **rebellion (= Meribah = provocation) . . . day of testing (= Massah = strife or contention)** — These two expressions rather sum up the wilderness experience. The greater amount of the people were characterized by first belief, then doubt; first trust, then rejection. Moses described them as rebellious against God from day one, Deuteronomy 9:24. God said of them early in the wilderness experience that they had

tested him ten times, Numbers 14:22, and that in spite of all his blessings (such as food, water, maintenance, Nehemiah 9:21, guidance, etc.)

V. 9 — **test** — Same word as “tempt.”

V. 10 — **I was provoked** — It is instructive to meditate upon the nature of God, a God who loves all. As earlier remarked, while it is true that all are loved, yet all are under the wrath of God, for all have transgressed and gone astray. If it be insisted that God is love, let it also be asserted that God loves enough to send any or all to hell except they repent, Luke 13:3, 5.

my ways — Yet Exodus 19 and 24 show that the Israelites did agree to the covenant God proffered, and were willing to accept it as given. They then had no excuse.

V. 11 — **my wrath** — One of the compelling motivations to do justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, Micah 6:8.

my rest — This has in mind the rest we know as heaven, typified by Canaan for the Israelites.

V. 12 — **take care** — Be alert or watchful, as a rule in life. The reason follows.

evil, unbelieving — Unbelief is both wrong and bad. As seen in 3:19, unbelief issues in disobedience, but in fact in and of itself, unbelief is disobedience. The necessary effect (remember 3:4!) of it is a falling away from God. The idea of a falling away will be seen again in 6:4-6.

V. 13 — **exhort** — As is being done in our text. A daily care is to be exercised on the part of all for all.

hardened — The effect of sin, as seen next.

The eternal effect of sin may only be avoided by accepting Jesus' ransom, the temporal effect through repentance and Jesus' intercession.

deceitfulness of sin — As Paul stated in Romans 7:11, sin fooled him. He encouraged Timothy to help others recover themselves from the devil's snare, II Timothy 2:24-26. Judas thought first of the gain, but after the sin of betrayal, the guilt. Paul thought he was doing God a favor (John 16:1-2) by persecuting Christians, but later was dismayed to discover he was opposed to God, I Timothy 1:12-14.

V. 14 — Repeating the idea in v. 6, and emphasizing the necessity of staying with God. We have before commented on confidence (3:6) and firm (2:4).

V. 16 — The next verses are filled with a series of rhetorical questions, designed to heighten the lesson in the wilderness experience of Israel. Note the continual thrust that Israel heard, they knew, they accepted, they started — but they failed, and God rejected them. A real-life illustration!

V. 19 — **unbelief** — An act of the will, just as much as belief is. All could have entered Canaan had they kept on. The example of the many who failed is especially clear in Numbers to the few (Joshua, Caleb)

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

who succeeded (read chs. 11-14). Consider also that there was adequate reason for faith — some who saw the same things and experienced the same events, missed, but some attained. In fact, the reasons for faith were so great that forty years later, the residents of Jericho yet remembered and trembled, Joshua 2:8-11.

V. 4:1 — **while the promise** — The rest of God was typified by Canaan, but was not equal to it. As 4:8-9 show, God's rest, the real rest obtained by faithfulness through life, has been and yet is available to all, whether Jew or Greek, whoever, wherever.

let us fear — It is good to recall the parable of the sower, as Jesus called it, in Matthew 13. Many seeds were started, few bore fruit. The character of the soil was the deciding factor.

V. 2 — **good news** — The seed of Matthew 13.

us . . . them — No people have been without enough evidence to believe. Some have had more than others, but all have sinned, which fact implies knowledge of choices and exercise of will. No one has to live as if there were no God. Fools do, but it is not necessary to be a fool.

it did not meet with faith — Israel especially is in view here, the Israel that walked out of Egypt, between water walls on dusty earth — the Israel that God redeemed from slavery but who willfully loved this present age. A message is of no avail except it be trusted. A sad fact is that the nation that came later still persisted in their father's sins, the most of them for fourteen centuries being privileged to have God's word and continual intreaties, yet being depicted as a "disobedient and contrary people," Romans 10:18-21.

V. 3 — The question is not, as Robert Shank so well said, "Is the believer secure?" but rather "Who is the believer?" As the verses say, God honors the faithful, whoever they be.

foundation of the world — God has prepared a place for those who love him; it is where he is, John 14:1ff., and it has been so from the beginning. The redemption in Jesus makes that possible, and that has been so from the same point in time, Ephesians 1:4-14.

V. 4 — **God rested** — The point about which "rest" remains is being clarified. It is not Canaan, nor is it the rest of the seventh day, the Sabbath. God has ceased from "labor" and is now "resting" in heaven, where he awaits the coming of the faithful to share his rest.

V. 6 — **it remains** — It was not God's fault some didn't enter what was made available — the rest was there.

Some have wondered if those who failed to enter Canaan also failed to enter the actual rest represented by Canaan. We are not told if any of those who were sentenced to die in the wilderness later repented, receiving forgiveness. Hence, we can not say certainly. What can be stated is that God dealt/deals justly with all, even extending his loving kindness to such as Rahab, David, Saul of Tarsus.

disobedience — The Greek term, *πειθω*, means to persuade. If one is not persuaded, then in reference to the gospel, one is disobedient. Note Paul's efforts in Acts 17:3, and the results in 17:4. Such is always the case with men and God, and those who serve God, II Corinthians 5:11.

V. 9 — **sabbath rest** — A rest, as given above, where God is, prepared for those who love him, II Timothy 4:7-8; Revelation 14:13.

people of God — Those who are being sanctified in this life, who unite indissolubly faith and the message of Christ, I Corinthians 15:1-4.

V. 10 — **God's rest** — not sleep, nor physical death necessarily. It might be that physical death would not bring rest, but torment, Luke 16:19ff.

V. 11 — **Let us . . . strive** — Note how many times we are exhorted on the basis of some fact, or group of facts. Here the Greek term is *σπουδάζω*, conveying the idea of earnestness, haste or eagerness. See it in Romans 12:8, 11; Galatians 2:10; Ephesians 4:3; II Peter 1:10, 15; 3:14; Jude v. 3. Of course, this frame of mind was not evident among those whose bodies fell in the wilderness, providing manna for the birds!

V. 12 — **Word of God** — If God be living, 3:12, then his word would also be, as well as energetic. Both terms are attempts to enforce the point about the necessity of continued obedience. If God could know each and every person's heart among the Israelites who left Egypt, and could protect them all while afflicting the Egyptians, etc., then he is also capable of doing the same for anyone else, anytime. Hence, if the first readers of this epistle who had started on the pilgrimage of faith did not finish, they need not suppose that God would fail to notice the fact, and act accordingly, anymore than God would fail to notice their good deeds and reward in kind, 6:10, if they led lives of obedience as did some of Israel, 6:11-12.

soul and spirit . . . joints and marrow — Descriptive terms indicating the more-than-human ability to rightly know and accurately judge,

thoughts and intentions — It may be, and often is, that we do not correctly perceive what is in our own mind, not to mention the minds of others. Hence, we can not always say what our motivation was for some deed. However, the assurance needs to be ours that God is not so limited — he knows all, as v. 13 says.

V. 13 — The Psalmist said it so well, that God knows our frame, for he has made us, 103:13. If this be so, then we are but open books to him — we can't deceive anyone but ourselves if we think otherwise. All is laid bare.

him with whom we have to do — God of course. The Greek text reads "to the eyes of him (God) with whom our account is." The Greek term behind "account" is the familiar *λόγος*, seen in Matthew 12:37; Luke 16:2; John 1:1; Romans 9:6; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:17; I Peter 1:23; etc.

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7:

47. What do you see as the thrust of this text in relationship to the whole book?
48. How many times does the writer draw a conclusion ("therefore" or a similar term)?
49. List the various ways the exhortations are stated.
50. Why were the Israelites such a sad but instructive case-in-point?
51. What text speaks about inspiration? (Did you read John 16:7-15; Acts 4:25; and I Peter 1:20-21?)
52. What brings about an evil, unbelieving heart/mind?
53. What is the effect of that type mind?
54. What causes sin (which produces the evil mind, etc.)? Stated differently, suppose the message heard was united with faith — would sin or righteousness result?
55. How long were the first readers to exhort each other?
56. How long does one share in Christ?
57. How does the writer show that a rest of God remains for believers?
58. How would the first readers decide that no one could mimic the Israelites and not be punished in a like manner?
59. Do you believe that God knows you and that nothing can be hidden from him?