
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Hebrews

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Hebrews 3:7-19: "Learning from Failure!"

General idea: A call of the Holy Spirit is given; a warning is proclaimed that we must listen to the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not to turn our backs on His precepts or usurp our will over His. This is what the pious, fraudulent people of Israel had done to anger God. They rebelled and disrespected and distrusted God as Lord, Sovereign of their lives as He led them from slavery into the Promised Land. They saw incredible, unprecedented miracles yet hid their hearts from God and wanted their way over His right way. God was angry with them and justly so. We do the same when we refuse to listen, risking the loss of what He has for us. We are called to be introspective, to look within our hearts and make sure there is no transgression or plan that is contrary to God's way and call. We are also called to help one another, to be accountable, to heed Christ and not disobey, so none of us is deceived by our pride or the problems of others. These people heard His voice and knew His will, yet they rebelled and disobeyed. What they got for their efforts of rebellion was death. They did not taste His goodness and blessings; they traded their pride in for disaster when they could have had it better than they could ever have imagined! All they needed to do was be faithful, look to Him as their lead, and enter His rest.

Contexts and Background:

Here, the argument is continued that Jesus is the Creator and thus is greater than Moses or anyone or anything else. It is all about trusting in His plan and care because we belong to Him. Thus, we must cling to His promise and live a life of faith, fight against sin, and live in mutual encouragement with one another as witness of His power and glory.

The author of Hebrews is also appealing to those who are philosophically minded, as the Jewish philosopher Philo who had some Gnostic tendencies but is credited in saying our reality on earth is only a mere shadow to heaven. Here the twist is that God is the Builder and the Essence of reality and we are in His shadow to please Him by following His purpose for our lives. Then a warning is given that resounds through chapter four, paralleling Psalm 95:7-11, which was commonly said in first century Synagogue liturgy. This was very well known and summarized the history of Israel's disobedience and the resting-wanderings in the desert. Thus, we are to pay careful attention to what is being said, short quotations from this psalm with rhetorical questions warning us of the consequences of a lack of obedience and faith. The goal of the text is the goal of life: rest with God as the ultimate happening in our lives now.

Commentary, Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Holy Spirit says.* Referring to His role as bearing witness and glorifying Christ. The Jews saw the Holy Spirit in conjunction with prophecy because He was not available to all and when He was, it was periodic and pointed the Prophets to what was to come. Now in the Christian age, we have the Spirit living within us permanently. His council and guidance is for us now. But, be aware: He never contradicts the Father or Son, so always go to Scripture as the test to what is said (Rom. 8:14, Gal. 4:6).
- *Testing in the desert/day of testing/rebellion.* Referring to the great trial of pride in Rephidim in Exodus 17, where the Jews put God to the test by not trusting Him for basic provisions—namely, water. This set up a habit of pride and disobedience that lasted 40 years and beyond. The goal was to rescue the Jews from their slavery, and to lead them to the Promised Land in Canaan—the destination for rest from their woes. This also points to God’s care, provision, and the hope of eternity (Psalm 78:40).
- *Tested and tried me/provocation.* They revolted against God as in the Greek word meaning *embitterment*. The point is, do not be like your foolish ancestors; rather seek Him first and do not rebel. Live for today by glorifying God and do not engage in sin. Psalm 95 indicates we can be cut off from our salvation by disobedience, but it was written before the age of grace and the perseverance we have in Him (Matt. 13:1-23; John 6:39; Rom. 8:29; Phil. 1:6; Heb.2:5-16; 11: 6). The warning is that those who are not regenerated have no hope (John 6:37-40; 10:28-29; 17:2-24; Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8; 9:1; 1Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:32; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18).
- *Swore.* Meaning an oath. Because the Jews were disobedient, prideful, and did not trust Him, God gave them to their own pride and as a result, they could not enter the Promised Land, a metaphor for rest. After 40 years, God’s grace allowed their children to enter and build a nation. This also points to how our pride keeps us from accepting Christ as Savior and how our disobedience keeps us from experiencing spiritual growth and His blessings now and to come.
- *Rest* is a very powerful and impacting word in Judaism. It means there is no reason to be fearful or nervous; our struggle is not in vain when He is there, and He always is. It also means we can enjoy God and relax; He is beautiful, wondrous, and in charge! It refers to God’s rest after creation and His call to us for a Sabbath rest. It also refers to Heaven and our reward to come. Our work and toil on this earth mean something: to enjoy Him now and be with Him in eternity. But here it is an invitation to join Him—a call to take care of ourselves now with a respite in Christ, to be prepared in faith, and be aware of the great enemy to us, for this invitation is our pride to harden our hearts away from Him now and forevermore (Gen. 2:2; Heb. 3:13-15; 4:7, 11).

- *None of you has a sinful/lest there be in any of you evil...*Just as we all struggle with sin, we all need help to endure in the faith. This is a call to be accountable and have a firm confession of faith that is lasting; if we do not, we will fall to sin. We must be in good Christian fellowship, and a good church to help keep us on His path through both the tough times and the good times. This is an aspect of fellowship as each of us influences and helps another to grow in Christ. (Heb.13:22)
- *Unbelieving heart.* Refers to spiritual confusion, pride, and arrogance that lead to disrespecting and rejecting God or ignoring Him in our Christian journey. In context and contrast, Christ is the One who completely saves and redeems us. An unbelieving heart will prevent someone from entering God's rest or being fulfilled in life now (Heb. 7:25; 12:15-17).
- *Turns away/fall away from the living God.* Meaning being apostate, a traitor against God. Spiritual rebellion is spiritual sterility and makes God justly angry, as we give up His best for our worst. To give up life and embrace death is as foolish as sin is, because sorrows and troubles follow sin and God hates for us to suffer and hates our sin that leads to it. He also hates our disrespect and arrogance that goes with it (Job 41:34; 2 Chron. 26:16; 32:26; Psalm 10:4-5; 18:27; 31:18; 56:2; 59:12; 62:10; 73:6-12; 101:5; 131:1; 6:17; Prov. 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; 21:4; 24; 29:23; 30:13; Isa. 2:11-21; 13:19; 16:6; 23:9; Ezek. 28:2; Obadiah 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:12; 7:4; Gal. 6:4; and these are just a few!).
- *Encourage one another...* Faith is also in community and mutual, as we each partake in Christ and need one another to grow further in our pilgrimage of Christian living. In so doing, we share Christ and therefore proclaim Him to those who do not know Him.
- *As it is called Today.* Even as we live in the day of divine grace, we are still called to respond to God and obey Him (Heb. 4:8).
- *Share in Christ....* Meaning we belong to Him as a Christians; so, what and how do we live and respond? Christ Himself is the benefit we receive in Him, along with His redemption, His empowerment for living, and His blessings, which we also enjoy in community. This is a privilege and should also be a joy! We are the display case of the Person and Work of Christ; it must be seen and it must be real in order to be an impact to us and others around us. This also means that in Christ, we can have confidence in Him to persevere in life.
- *Sin's deceitfulness.* Sin is deceptive as it paints a picture of fun without consequences and the illusion we are secure and okay when in fact, sin destroys; it causes a life of misery and an eternity without Christ if there is not

repentance and the receiving of salvation (Ex. 16:3; Rom. 1:18-32; Heb. 11:25-26)

- *They who heard and rebelled.* Just as the Jews who rebelled were not able to receive their earthly reward of rest and new homes in a safe place, we too, face consequences by our own hand as well as God's judgment when we rebel. We have the privilege to be led by Christ; we also have the responsibility to heed His lead and apply Him to our daily lives.
- *They were not able to enter.* This refers that God's just anger did not allow them to enter the land. This does not mean He condemned them to hell. For us, it means we must take our faith seriously and see the danger of a lack of spirituality in Christ (Num. 14:21-35).
- *Because of their unbelief.* Sin, disbelief, lack of faith, and more to the point of this passage, lack of confidence are the enemies of the Christian life. These are easily defeated when we remain in Christ, but our call is to put forth the effort to stay in Him and away from pride.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

This passage gives us a warning and call to make sure our hearts are lined up with His. We have to be careful that our hearts are after His and not chasing evil or pride or self-willed desires that will get us in trouble. We have a Living God who cares and does not want us to wander off the path because he knows that out-of-bounds area is filled with dangers and ills that will make us sick or even die. It is not worth it when we can have His wonders instead. Sin is deceptive and seems OK to us, when in fact, it will seduce us only to destroy us. It is a bad boss who steals from us and never pays us; we work hard only to get further in debt and get sick doing so. So, why do it?

God hates complaining and pride; they are a cancer to faith and our spiritual growth. God is Holy, Merciful, and Grace-full and does not deserve our mistrust. We can't trust in God when we resist Him or our hearts are prideful and filled with misguided scorn! We too may find ourselves wandering in our own desert or a void of no faith in Him, or being fruitless because of our disobedience, causing chaos and strife to us and those around us.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?

6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Can you describe a time in your life that you were rebellious and/or prideful? How did you truly feel? How was your spiritual condition then?
2. What causes you to drift away from your commitments including your commitment to Christ?
3. As faithful Christians, we have an obligation to know and apply as much as possible to our lives. How can you do this more? What gets in the way?
4. How does Jesus get you through life? How can He do so better? What do you need to do?
5. How have you seen God work in your life and the lives of others? How are they alike or different? Fair or not? What role do His requirements of faith and obedience play in this?
6. What does it mean that Jesus is our High Priest and is the One who makes us holy?
7. Why do you suppose the early Israelites rebelled and disrespected and distrusted God as Lord Sovereign? Why? Why do we do so today?
8. If you had seen the incredible, unprecedented miracles as the Israelites did, how would you have responded? How would this be different from them? So, why did they hide their hearts from God and demand their way over His right way?
9. Do you believe that God's anger with them was just? How so? Why would people say "no?"
10. How would it help if everyone was accountable to another? How would heeding Christ help you not disobey? So, what have you done about accountability? (See our Accountability page for more information!)
11. How does *enter His rest* give you motivation to be faithful and to look to Him as your lead?

12. Do you think that the goal of life and the ultimate reward of rest with God is happening in our lives now as well as being in Christ? How so? What needs to take place to heed this more?

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