

Hebrews - A Letter Addressed to Modern-Day Christians

Part 7

Second Passage of Warning

The writer of Hebrews having proved the supremacy of Jesus, now powerfully expresses the inevitable consequence of this unique supremacy on us personally.

This is the second passage of warning and is a direct quote from **Psalm 95:7-11** and is primarily a warning against unbelief.

Hebrews 3:7 [NIV] *“So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice,”*

This warning passage starts with a very important statement: *“wherefore”* [KJ] *“so”* [NIV] Greek *“dio”* – for which cause, consequently, *“the Holy Spirit says”*.

The Holy Spirit is the recognised author of all scripture including [**John 16:12-13**]

Matthew 22:31-32 [NIV] *“But about the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”*

Jesus used what was spoken by God in Old Covenant as still being binding on them, as what was going to be revealed after He left them by Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth for all scripture was *“breathed by God”* [**2 Timothy 3:16**].

This is essential to understand when we use Old Testament quotations that back up New Testament statements made by Christ as above or by the writer of Hebrews.

Note the five listed mistakes that our forefathers made that caused them to lose out on their inheritance:

Did not hear God’s voice

The Greek word for *“hear”* [*“akouo”*] includes understanding with the intention of obedience.

John 10:27 [NIV] *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”*

“Hear” and *“follow”*.

Deuteronomy 28:1 [NIV] *“If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands that I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.”*

Romans 10:17 [NIV] *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*

Faith is acquired and maintained by hearing God’s Word and obeying that word [implied by Greek words used for *“hearing”*].

Hebrews 3:8-9 [NIV] *“do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.”*

Hardened their hearts

As a result of **not** hearing their attitude hardened against God.

Greek “*sklerunō*” render stubborn – callous or unfeeling.

A very accurate description of society today who do not hear God’s Word.

Tested and tried God

The two Greek words what happens so often when we do **not** believe what we have been told.

We want to “*experience*” for ourselves and as a result we cause the one advising us for God to become “*exasperated*”.

Humanity has reacted like this from the very beginning prompted by Satan’s influence.

[Genesis 3:16]

The trouble with such a response to what we are advised is it is so often leads to drastic results and even death.

Examples of drugs, smoking, sex outside marriage, etc., etc.

Psalms 95:8 [KJ] “*Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness:*”

The two words in the verse translated “*provocation*” and “*temptation*” are also two place names “*Meribah*” [Numbers 20:1-13] and “*Massah*” [Exodus 17:1-7] are both associated with events in which the children of Israel and Moses rebelled against God.

Both these acts were there was a lack of trust in God that caused the rebellion.

Hebrews 3:10 [NIV] “*That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.'*”

Going astray in their hearts

The Greek words here again are the flavour of today’s society:

“*astray*” to be seduced or deceived and roam away from safety or truth;

“*heart*” the thoughts or feelings.

God or God’s Word do **not** feature in the thoughts of the vast majority of mankind for the concerns or pleasures of society blind them to the truth.

2 Corinthians 4:4 [NIV] “*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*”

Satan blinds people to the wonderful truth of the gospel message, and the great joy that could be theirs.

Not knowing God's ways

Psalms 103:7 [NIV] *"He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:"*

There is a difference between knowing God's ways and seeing His acts.

Moses knew God's ways, the rest of Israel only saw His acts.

James 2:19 [NIV] *"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and shudder."*

The demons know there is a God, they see His acts, but will **not** believe God's way is right.

This statement is in the context of true faith only expressed by righteous deeds.

In many religions the people may experience what they feel are *"acts of God"* but by themselves these acts will **not** give them knowledge of God's ways.

Knowledge of God can only come to us through Jesus Christ and His Word prompted by Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 3:11 [NIV] *"So I declared **on oath** in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"*

The writer of Hebrews warns us against taking the same path our forefathers took, for they did **not** enter into *"my rest"* in their case the promised land.

In this verse we have two more key words found in Hebrews.

"Swear or oath"

When God wants to attach particular emphasis to something, desiring us to know that He really means it. God not only says it but confirms it with an oath.

The taking of an oath by God is **not** for His sake, for when God says something, that is it because of the total faithfulness of God's Word.

The oath is **for our benefit** and perhaps an example for fallible human beings.

There are many examples in God's Word of people taking vows to show God how earnest they are in what they are saying or promising.

But before we do take a vow, be sure we are able to fulfil it, for this is what God always expects.

For example, if you follow the response that Isaiah made to the loving mercy of God who cleansed him of all his sins, expect God to take you at your word.

Isaiah 6:1-8 [NIV] *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.' Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; **your guilt is taken away and your***

sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

After forgiveness of all his sins we read that God let Isaiah know of a job of work that needed to be done and Isaiah, out of pure gratitude, said *"Here I am, send me!"*

God gave him the job [v9] but I don't think that Isaiah realised what he had let himself into when saying, *"Here I am, send me."*

Isaiah 6:9 [NIV] *"He said, "Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving."*

I know this from personal experience that the jobs God has given me since I responded like Isaiah with the same words, *"Here am I, send me"*.

The places I have been sent to and the jobs I have been given have **not** been those I expected.

One thing I've found is that they have **all involved tasks beyond my natural ability**, making me totally dependent on God doing the job through me.

Reading the life of Isaiah, he found himself in a similar position, so be warned, God in response to a similar grateful reply from you could give you a task beyond your personal ability.

But one thing happens to you that is beyond price in such a situation; you are forced into a closer walk with God, you really have to accept the invitation Jesus Christ gave to all of us.

Matthew 11:28-30 [NIV] *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

When we "yoke ourselves" to Jesus Christ we have all the power and guidance to fulfil any task God may give us.

Philippians 4:12-13 [NIV] *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

Whatever situation we face in serving God we can accomplish the task with Christ to strengthen us.

Hebrews 3:11 [NIV] *"So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"*

"Rest"

With the first mention of this key word comes a warning that **there is a time factor involved.**

Hebrews 3:7 [NIV] *"So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice,"*

"Today"; v13 "As long as it is called today".

In effect, the writer of Hebrews is saying, while there is yet time, while **you** can still speak of today, give God the trust and obedience that God must have if you are to enter into His rest.

Of course, for the individual person the word today means while their life lasts.

There are certain powerful statements and warnings in this passage.

God makes humanity an offer.

Just as He offered the Israelites the blessing of the Promised Land, He offers us the blessings of a life which is far beyond that which people can live without God.

But to obtain this undeserved blessing from God, two things are necessary:

Trust. We must be willing to stake our lives on the fact that God's Promises are true.

Obedience. In any realm of life, success depends on obedience to the word of an expert; for example a doctor, athletic trainer or teacher. God, put simply, is the expert on life, so real success and happiness in life depends on obedience to His Word.

Time limit. To the offer God is making. The limit is the limit of this physical life.

We cannot know when we are going to reach that time limit, tomorrow may never come! God's offer must be accepted today.

Learn from our forefathers' failure to attain their Promised Land and we will not fail to receive from God the promised gift of rest.

The word "**rest**" is going to occur many more times in Hebrews and we will learn more about it as we continue our study.

Hebrews 3:12-13 [NIV] "**See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.**"

Unbelief is a sin in God's eyes, **not** a weakness to be excused, but a sin to be repented of.

We tend to condone our unbelief, we say "*well I find it difficult to accept and believe all I read in God's Word but I feel God will understand and it is no great problem!*"

Don't be deceived! The word for "*sinful*" associated with unbelief in this scripture is Greek "*poneros*" meaning full of labours and pains in working mischief, evil intent, malignant evil, worthless, and is used of Satan in **Matthew 5:37; Matthew 6:13; Matthew 13:19, 38; Luke 11:4.**

Showing that God takes unbelief very seriously.

Double protection against unbelief is mentioned in these verses:

1. "*See to it*" [NIV] or "*take heed*" [KJ] This is what we should do on an individual basis.
2. "*encourage*" [NIV] "*Exhort one another*" [KJ] What we should do on a collective basis as we come together in Christian fellowship. But note on a daily basis.

Malachi 3:16 [KJ] "*Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.*"

God took great interest in those conversations.

John 13:34 [NIV] "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*"

To enable us to fulfil this command of Christ to "*love one another*" we have to frequent fellowship to know how we can show that love through compassion.

Hebrews 10:25 [NIV] *“Let us **not give up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Meet to encourage one another all the more as we see *“The Day approaching”*.

Acts 2:42 [NIV] *“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*

Fellowship meals and prayers.

Hebrews 3:14 [NIV] *“We have come to **share in Christ** if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”*

“If”, there is a condition to this opportunity.

(a) hold firm; (b) to the end; (c) the confidence. Greek *“hupostasis”* – substance – what holds us up – our foundational faith.

Again it is shown we must **not** be half-hearted.

Hebrews is full of such good advice; be positive, emphatic – fully assured – a life built on a rock [Christ].

What do we share in Christ?

Share Christ's Righteousness

Romans 5:17 [NIV] *“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of **the gift of righteousness** reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”*

The first gift we receive from God, for until we are righteous before God, He cannot progress with His desire to mould us into something beautiful.

Malachi 3:17 [NIV] *“They will be mine,” says the LORD Almighty, “in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.”*

“Jewels” [KJ] *“Treasured possession”* [NIV]

2 Corinthians 5:21 [NIV] *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Share Christ's Life

Romans 6:23 [NIV] *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Colossians 3:4 [NIV] *“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

Share Christ's Sufferings

Romans 8:17 [NIV] *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*

Philippians 1:29 [NIV] *“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,”*

Acts 14:22 [NIV] *“strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.”*

1 Peter 2:21 [NIV] *“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”*

Share Christ's Kingdom

Luke 22:28-30 [NIV] *“You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*

Revelation 20:4 [NIV] *“I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”*

Revelation 22:5 [NIV] *“There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”*

Share Christ's Glory

John 17:22 [NIV] *“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:”*

Romans 8:30 [NIV] *“And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”*

Share Christ's Relationship with the Father

John 17:26 [NIV] *“I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”*

John 14:20 [NIV] *“On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”*

Share Christ's Total Inheritance

Romans 8:17 [NIV] *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*

Galatians 4:7 [NIV] *“So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”*

Acts 20:32 [NIV] *“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*

But all this is conditional upon maintaining our first assurance and perseverance to the end.

Hebrews 3:15 [NIV] *“As has just been said: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”*

Today God’s Grace is available to us, but no-one knows how long “today” may last.

Proverbs 27:1 [NIV] *“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”*

Hebrews 3:16-19 [NIV] *“Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? **So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.**”*

Except for Joshua and Caleb, the entire generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt [a type of sin] failed to attain their inheritance [rest].

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 [NIV] *“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did, and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”*

They are a warning to all subsequent generations of God’s People.

One basic cause of their failure was unbelief.

Luke 18:8 [NIV] *“I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”*

Does this indicate as much lack of faith on the Earth today in the Church as there was in the “Church in the wilderness” under Moses?

Our rest is found **only** within our inheritance [**Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:9; 25:19** always linked].

This will be explained more fully in future studies as we come across the key word “rest”.