

**Introduction**

The message of Hebrews is that we must have persevering faith in Jesus to be saved. This can leave some “assurance” tension in our minds: am I saved or not? That tension will be highlighted in this message. I believe some of that tension is healthy in that it gets us to think and not just rely on some words we said years ago—it gets us to think whether we rely on Jesus!

**I. Reflecting on the Exodus Generation Again, v. 16-19**

Verses 16-19 on first reading seem like simple repetition, but I do not think that is the case. All three questions are “whodunit” with the answer basically “the Israelites.” But the statements give some more details that are a powerful reminder to us about unbelief and sin.

**A. Those of the Exodus Rebelled Despite Hearing God, v. 16**

Exodus 19:19 indicates the people heard the voice of God answering Moses. This is confirmed in 20:22. God spoke. They heard.

But then they rebelled. Deut 31:27 and Psalm 105:7 confirm this directly with the same verb used in the LXX. They saw and knew the power and authority of God, yet they stiffened their necks and pushed back against God and his human leader Moses.

The text says “all” who came out of Egypt, led by Moses, were the ones who heard and who also rebelled. Everyone heard the voice of God, everyone saw the mighty miracles of the Exodus, everyone crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, all experienced the supernatural provision of food and water, and so forth. There was no shortage of information for anyone—all had the clear opportunity to hear God.

But still, a vast majority of the people rebelled at the various testings (Numbers 14:22).

**Application:** This statement magnifies the danger of rebellion. It says that you can have all kinds of spiritual provisions made to you, all kinds of even miraculous things done in front of your eyes, and yet still rebel against God. Exposure to the things of God is no guarantee of salvation. You can hear the gospel over and over and hear of its miraculous power to save, and continue to ignore it and rebel against it. That’s a fearful place to be.

**B. Those Who Sinned Died, v. 17**

The equation sin = death is forever an axiom of sinful human existence since the fall of Adam into sin. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus

Christ. Death spread to all men because all sinned (Romans 6:23, 5:12).

The text interposes something between sin and death, and that is God's anger. Sin leads to God's anger which leads to death. God is angry not in an temper-tantrum kind of way. Rather, he anger or wrath is a settled, calm, collected, non-sinful disposition against human sin that induces Him to have to react with the proper retribution against sin. Any moral wrong done amounts to insubordination to His sovereign, holy rule.

#### C. Those Who Did Not Obey Did Not Enter Rest, v. 18

The text plainly says that those who did not obey were prohibited from entering God's rest. "They certainly shall not see the land" (Num. 14:23) was the oath that God made. They died instead of seeing the rest-land.

The rest was the promised land; we have said that the rest is a type or foreshadowing of the salvation rest that God offers to believers. We think of salvation as being by faith, i.e. the entrance into that rest being by faith. But here God says that those who did not obey (read: works?) will not be let in. The next verse answers the question for us—is God talking about salvation by works here?

#### D. Conclusion: Israelites could not participate in God's rest because of **unbelief**.

The answer to our previous question lies here: unbelief is the cause of not being able to enter. That unbelief is signaled or proven by lack of obedience, by sin, and by rebellion. This is why the Bible can talk about judging someone's works, like in Romans 2, and on that basis determining whether they are saved. Belief is marked by works (James 2). Works include speech (Matt. 12:37) and conduct (Rom 2:6-11).

The sequence is this: A person believes and God changes their heart through regeneration; then out of that heart flows good things (Matt 12:34); those things can be used as guideposts or signals to what is in the heart; these things point back to regeneration and faith and thus to salvation.

Unbelief is marked by **rebellion** and **sin** and **disobedience**. Whenever those characteristics are present in one's relationship toward God, to that extent there is unbelief.

## II. Thoughts on "Beware", v. 12

Beware – there is a notion here of a spiritual level of consciousness.

### A. Illustration of physical life.

When we are born, our consciousness of things increases slowly over time and we reach increasing levels of “paying attention” to things around us and to ourselves.

B. Spiritual life is kind of similar.

Spiritually we may find the same kind of process happening once we become Christians. We may look back and wonder how we could think or behave certain ways when we were younger Christians. We need to increase our level of “spiritual awareness” through knowing and thinking God’s way (the Bible) so that we can “beware” about ourselves.

C. Specifically, “beware” means...

The idea of “beware” means that we have to be able to evaluate our hearts and see what unbelief is in there. We have to look into ourselves, think about ourselves and where we stand with God.

Any level of unbelief is bad. In the case of the Hebrew readers, there was a question as to whether they really had belief at all, or were back in Judaism, skeptical of the claims about Jesus. Such skepticism amounts to unbelief and that in turn amounts to a departure from God.

Note that today, it is no longer enough to say you believe in “God,” even the God of the Jews of the Old Testament. Rather, one must believe in Jesus in order to be saved.

### III. Applications of “exhort one another”, v. 13

A. We must be communicating.

1. Presumably that happens in church meetings of all the different sorts we provide.
2. I do not totally discount email, computer chats, texting, facebook, and all that, but those means have been found by many to not be the best, particularly when it comes to exhortation because they do not convey the whole communication (words, facial expression, body language, tone of voice, inflection, emotion, etc.) which is part of the context of the communication.
3. A good level of frequency to this communication is assumed here: “daily.”

B. We must be able to give exhortation.

1. Have to know the Bible.
2. Have to talk about spiritual things, that is, the things of the Spirit of God.
3. The things we exhort are to be substantive. I take this from the nature of the danger involved. Fluff does not cut it. We

are trying to avoid “an evil heart of unbelief,” “departing from the living God,” being “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” We are also concerned about knowing that “we have become partakers of Christ.”

C. We must be able to take exhortation.

1. Have to be wise and not a fool. The wise man takes instruction but the fool refuses it (Prov. 1:7, 9:8-9, 15:5).
2. Have to recognize the danger of not receiving exhortation: we can grow cold and hard because of continued living in sin. Hardening your heart leads to a harder and harder heart that eventually will be unable to recognize its own sin. Sin deceives us into thinking we are in better shape than we are. Satan is the master deceiver. The sin nature is like that too. Any time you sin and say to yourself, “I don’t care, I’m doing it anyway” you are in this hardened state. You need to take warning now and reverse course, or you may be confirmed in that hardness and demonstrate that you never really believed in the first place.

D. True believers will desire this sort of thing.

#### **IV. Why Beware and Exhort? V. 14-15**

We said last time, and again today we say, that **beware** and **exhort** are imperatives that protect us against stubbornness and hardness of heart. The whole purpose of them is to help us not depart from God and not be hardened by sin.

Note the relation of v. 14 to v. 15: we are sharers in Christ if we hold our confidence to the end...and TODAY we are not to harden our hearts.

What this says is that holding your confidence steadfast to the end is done one day at a time of just believing, that is, not hardening your heart. Belief on the first day leads to belief on the second; if belief stops, then it shows belief was not real to start; true belief just continues.

This “we are saved if we continue believing” notion is not uncommon, though American evangelicals may think it is uncommon: see Hebrews 3:6 which we studied a couple of sermons back. Or John 15:1-6. Or Colossians 1:21-23. Or 1 Cor. 15:2.

#### **Conclusion**

Do you want to know if you are saved? One indispensable question you must ask yourself is this: “Do I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?” Whether you truly believed 25 years ago or not, the question to ask yourself is this: do you believe NOW? TODAY?

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