

Introduction

3:7-19 hang together as a unit and are tied closely with the next chapter; it is the second major warning passage of the book.

Notice that the faithfulness of Moses and Jesus (3:1-6) is starkly contrasted to the unfaithfulness of the wilderness generation. That generation failed to enter the promised land (3:7-19). Moses was a faithful leader with faithless followers. Jesus is a faithful leader too, par excellence.

The issue of stubbornness comes up in our text. I recognize it in myself. Stubbornness is “marked by tenacious unwillingness to yield”; “resolute adherence to your own ideas or desires”; “refusing to move or change one’s opinion”; “obstinate”. Stubbornness may be evidenced in somewhat benign ways in our lives, or it may be demonstrated in complete rejection of God. In spiritual matters, stubbornness in what you may think are small areas of disobedience to God’s word can portend devastating outcomes down the road. It may even indicate an unbelieving heart that, in the end, will evidence its lack of salvation by totally departing from the living God.

I. Historical Background from Exodus, Numbers, etc.

God miraculously brought the people of Israel out of Egypt against all odds. About 500 years earlier God promised Abraham that the people would be released from bondage and brought back to the promised land (Gen. 15:13-16). The nation was now on their way to the land God had promised. But there were some serious problems along the way that led to a big delay. Auspicious or promising beginnings do not always lead to happy endings.

A. Meribah and Massah, Exodus 17:1-7

1. The terms are interesting, because Meribah means rebellion or contention, and Massah means test or trial. The names were given to the place where the people complained for lack of water.
2. Notice who was being tested: God! Normally we think of God testing people or people being tested by temptation. Not so here. But remember, Jesus said you shall not put God to the test (Matt. 4:7, quoting Deut. 6:16).
3. Putting God to the test is the opposite of faithful obedience (Deut. 6:17) and belief in the promises of God (Gen. 15:13-16 again). There are some good alternatives to complaining.

B. Kadesh Barnea, Numbers 14:1-38, esp. v. 11-12, 22-23

Here the people refuse to enter the promised land because of human obstacles. They failed to believe in God who had brought them thus far.

C. List of Testings (Ten are mentioned in Num 14:22 up to that point)

The Lord mentions “ten times” He has been tested. What are these ten times? Note that this was at the beginning of the 40 year period. The whole wilderness wandering was in front of them. They had failed to believe the Lord every two or three months along the way.

1. Exodus 14:11-12?
2. Exodus 15:24
3. Exodus 16:2-3 (and did not listen about use of the manna, 16:20)
4. Exodus 17:2-3 (Massah and Meribah are mentioned in 17:7)
5. Exodus 32:1 (golden calf incident)
6. Leviticus 10:1-2?
7. Numbers 11:1
8. Numbers 11:33 (they complained again, but not recorded?)
9. Numbers 12:1-2 (Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses)
10. Numbers 14:2-4 (refusal to enter the promised land; see Deut. 1:26-27)
11. Numbers 21:4-6 (poisonous snakes)

Sidebar: Note Deut. 7:8 speaks of God’s love for the nation; yet he also was angry with them (Heb. 3:7, 17). Chew on that thought for a while!

II. Connection to the Psalms

- A. Note that human author of this Psalm was David (Heb. 4:7). But Hebrews 3:7 attributes the Psalm to the Holy Spirit. This is a clear note about divine inspiration of the Bible.
- B. The Psalm teaches through its structure that the opposite of worship (95:1-7a) is hardness of heart (7b-11). If you have the latter, you cannot be doing the former!
 1. Hardness = stubborn, obstinate, stiff-necked.
 2. The heart is the Biblical picture of the center of a person’s emotions and will. We might in our culture say “a stubborn mind” or “an obstinate will.”
- C. Note that the people of Israel were in the rest land of Canaan at the point when David wrote the Psalm, so the Psalmist must be talking about a then-present possibility of having a hard heart and incurring God’s anger.

III. Connection to Hebrews

1. Hebrews uses the term “rest” to refer to more than the promised land. The rest in Hebrews is spiritual salvation and, ultimately, heaven, with all the attendant blessings (see Heb. 4). The historical rest has been made by God into a type or foreshadowing of the present-day and future rest for God’s people.

2. A hardened heart would be manifested in the Hebrew readers by them turning away from God, turning back to Judaism or to some other works-based religion.

Unbelieving attitude = apostate attitude = active rejection, not simply a passive thing.

Note that not holding fast to Jesus was, for the Hebrews audience, equivalent of turning away from the living God (v. 12).

3. Such would incur God's anger. The word means that God is very upset. That is understandable after you have done EVERYTHING faithfully for someone and they still don't trust you and instead reject you.

IV. Connection to Today and Remedy for Stubbornness

A. There is just as much possibility today of being stubborn and not heeding what God says as there was in the Exodus; in the time the Psalm was written; and in the time Hebrews was written. There is a severe danger of apostasy today.

B. What is God saying to us today?

1. Jesus = God
2. Jesus is the final and complete revelation of God to man.
3. Jesus is higher than the OT prophets; than angels; than Moses.
4. Jesus became a man.
5. Jesus suffered and died to defeat the devil and death.
6. Jesus also suffered to the point of death to pay for our sins, aka make propitiation.
7. Jesus was buried, and then He was raised from the dead.
8. Jesus became our high priest, that is, *only* access point to God.
9. Jesus asks that we believe in Him as the only condition of saving us from sin and letting us enter into the eternal heavenly rest (John 6:47).
10. Jesus promises that if we truly believe, we will be saved (John 6:37).

The trouble is that many people harden their hearts when they hear this message. They do not like to hear that they are bad people or that they need to turn to Jesus along with the corresponding opposite response to turn away from sin.

C. Remedy for a Hard Heart

1. Hear his voice = listen to God, v. 7.

As a church, collectively, we need to hear what God says. “If you will hear” is 2nd person plural.

2. Beware = look out = watch out = see to it, v. 12.

“Any of you” obviously zeroes in on the individual response. Take stock of yourself and really think: “Am I being stubborn to God? Am I really listening to what God has said?” Some people pay more attention to the “beware of dog” sign than they do the “beware” sign in the Bible.

An unbelieving heart is an evil heart, an apart-from-God heart.

3. Exhort one another, v. 13.

The passage does not focus solely on the individual.

It emphasizes that we should check out ourselves *and* exhort one another to ensure that no one falls into the stubbornness and deceitfulness of sin.

Sin is deceitful, like the devil is the father of lies. It tries to trick you into thinking that you are not so bad or that you don’t need God’s help. A big lie!

Exhortation can include teaching, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and things like warnings, appeals, encouragements, comforts, etc.

Both the individual and corporate remedies are powerful preventative measures to apostasy.

Conclusion

There are two basic responses to the word of God: belief and unbelief.

Sometimes three are suggested from Acts 17:32-34: (1) ridicule; (2) delay with or without real interest; and (3) belief. The first two amount to unbelief—either completely or “for the time being.” Only the last response, the one of faith, is what the Bible calls for.

Today means that we need to respond in the present. I cannot use a scare tactic and say you have to do it this very day, as in this is your last chance. But the reality is that indeed you might die tomorrow, after which point it is too late to change your mind. And the reality is that you may not hear this kind of message ever again.

What matters is that you are alive **today**; you are here **today**; you heard the message of God **today**; you are able to respond in faith **today**. Will you believe **today**?

MAP