
Words of Truth

Hebrews 3:12

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In our previous study we saw that God wanted these Jewish saints to look backwards to events of old (Hebrews 3:7-11). We know that lessons from the days of old, prior to and under the Law of Moses, are beneficial in learning (Romans 15:4, I Corinthians 10:1-13, and II Timothy 3:15-17). Looking backwards to the times wherein Israel provoked God and was punished for forty years (Numbers 13:1-14:38 and Psalms 95:7-11), the passage we are looking at in this study is about application. Whether they or us today, we don't look at the errors of those of old and just condemn them. We are supposed to learn from them. The penman of this letter wrote this: *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (Hebrews 3:12).

The emphasis of this passage is clear. “Take heed.” These two English words are translated from the Greek word “βλέπω”. Notice some parts of the definition of this word: “To look at (literally or figuratively): — behold, beware, lie, look (on, to), perceive, regard, see, sight, take heed. To see, discern, of the bodily eye... To see with the mind's eye; to have (the power of) understanding; to discern mentally, observe, perceive, discover, understand; to turn the thoughts or direct the mind to a thing, to consider, contemplate, to look at, to weigh carefully, examine” (Strong's # 991). There are hundreds of lessons in that partial definition. You can get lost in studies through the 135 times you can find that Greek term in the New Testament. Later in this chapter, we will read, *“So we see...”* (Hebrews 3:19). See, in that passage, is from the same Greek term translated “take heed” in this passage we are studying.

The point being made in Hebrews 3:12 is well summed up in this passage: *“Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward”* (II John 1:8). Do you remember the earlier point in this epistle wherein it was asked: *“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...”* (Hebrews 2:3)? Later in this epistle this is stated: *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears”* (Hebrews 12:15-17). As we studied last week, the children of Israel tested the Lord. They took Him for granted. That cost them dearly. God is not to be toyed with. He has and will reach a point wherein He will not extend His mercy (Romans 1:18-32, Hebrews 6:4-8, and Hebrews 10:26-31). For us, as

Gentiles in the flesh, consider that if God so punished His chosen people of old (Deuteronomy 7:6-9), what does that mean for us if we test Him (Romans 11:1-24; cf. Acts 17:30)?

These brethren needed to understand that the heart that departs from God is an evil heart of unbelief. Earlier in the context, this was stated concerning God's people of times past: "...*They do alway err in their heart...*" (Hebrews 3:10). We should know how important it is to have a good and honest heart (Luke 6:43-49, Luke 8:4-15, and Acts 8:5-24). The destruction of the majority of mankind, by way of the flood, came about because the thoughts of the hearts of humanity was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5-13). Good and evil actions are born out of what goes on in our hearts (Matthew 15:1-20, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 6:17, Romans 10:8-10, and Hebrews 10:22).

They had a collective problem in Israel of having evil hearts. That continued to be the problem even into Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 7:23-34, Jeremiah 11:6-8, and Jeremiah 18:5-18). Sadly, at the point wherein Judah was sent into captivity, they had done worse than their fathers with that continual problem of an evil heart (Jeremiah 16:1-13). Because of that evil heart problem, they did not continually believe. When Stephen was stoned by the Jews for teaching the truth, he stated that their problem was a heart problem (Acts 6:8-7:60). Therefore, when we read our current context we should understand that the evil heart of unbelief had not been purged from Israel even into the first century.

When we read that they did not believe, we have to understand something. It was not that they never believed (Exodus 14:31). The problem was that, they didn't continue in that faith. With our Lord, initial faithfulness is not the goal. The goal has been and will ever be continued faithfulness (John 8:30-32, John 15:9-10, Acts 14:22, Colossians 1:23, and Revelation 2:8-11). Remember, faith without good works is dead (James 2:14-26). Later in this letter, we will consider not drawing back unto perdition (Hebrews 10:38-39). It is a terrible idea to start to obey God and then not to finish faithfully (II Peter 2:20-22). That is why Jesus emphasized counting the cost of following Him with those that wanted to be His disciples (Luke 9:57-62 and Luke 14:25-33).

When a person or group of people cease to be faithful, that is the point of departure from the living God. The penman here reminds these Jewish saints that they are not serving some false idol. They are serving the true and living God with a hopeful expectation of the life to come (I Thessalonians 1:7-10). Why would anyone want to leave that? The choice was/is very simple. You can choose to keep the ways of the Lord or you can choose not to. If one chooses not to, that is when that person has opted to leave the relationship with God he/she/they once had (Psalms 18:21). For some, they depart from God having never truly committed to that relationship (I John 2:19). Those of old, as we already addressed, were not like that. The realization of the possibility of apostasy has to be something they then and we now guard ourselves against. Remember, God doesn't want to see you fail (Ezekiel 18:20-32).