
Words of Truth

Hebrews 3:15-19

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“While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:15-19). Much of the above is a review of things we covered already in this chapter (Hebrews 3:7-11). You can find the events the Hebrew writer is referencing in Numbers 13:1-14:38. Since we have already covered the hardened hearts and other points made earlier in this chapter, we will only address a few points in this study.

It should say something that “To day” is mentioned three times in this chapter (Hebrews 3:7, 3:13, 3:15) and will be readdressed in the next chapter (Hebrews 4:7). Urgency is certainly the message. Whether it was of old, to those saints, or today; the fact has always been that tomorrow is not guaranteed (Proverbs 27:1 and James 4:13-16). For us, we not only need to be prepared to die, but also for the coming of our Lord which could be at any moment (Matthew 24:35-25:46, I Thessalonians 4:13-5:2, and II Peter 3:10-14).

When this penman addresses what happened back when Israel provoked the Lord in the wilderness, he addressed that not all that heard provoked the Lord. The original account reveals that Joshua and Caleb didn’t provoke the Lord to anger (Numbers 32:12). There is a principle there and throughout the word of God that we should not miss. Though times of apostasy are far too frequent and often large in scale, there has always been a remnant of faithful people. We can see that going all the way back to the days of the flood and forward (Genesis 6:1-10, Genesis 8:15-9:1, II Kings 19:20-31, Ezra 9:7-8, Isaiah 1:9, Isaiah 10:20-21, and Romans 11:1-5). The Lord was only grieved with those that had sinned.

When the Hebrew writer wrote of the events earlier in this chapter, the language used was about those that erred in their hearts and did not know the ways of the Lord (Hebrews 3:10). Now, we read the language of those that believed not. The statements we are going to focus on in the remainder of our study here are found in verses eighteen and nineteen. We are going to consider how they could not enter into the promised land because of unbelief. In the original account of the events referenced, we read this: *“And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the*

signs which I have shewed among them” (Numbers 14:11)? Later, Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock for water as told (Numbers 20:1-13). In that text, we read: “And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:12). Let that sink in for a moment.

What is the relationship between faith and obedience in the references the Hebrew writer is using to teach? Can a person believe in the Lord, but not obey Him? Well, we know that the evil spirits believed, confessed the Lord, and even trembled (Mark 1:21-28, Mark 5:1-20, Acts 19:11-20, and James 2:19). However, even knowing the power of God; Satan and his angels rebelled against the Lord and were/will be punished accordingly (Revelation 12:7-9; cf. Luke 10:17-18, II Peter 2:4, and Jude 1:6). So, it is possible for there to be belief and yet disobedience at the same time. That is not just among angels either.

There have been people whom believed, but chose not to obey the Lord. Notice: *“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:37-43).*

Had the children of Israel believed, they still may not have obeyed. The question of faith here is about obedient faith. The relationship of faith and obedience exists in that faith needs to lead to obedience. We see this when individuals initially obey the Gospel of Christ (Acts 18:8). In addition to initial obedience of the will of God, there has to be faith that moves one to continue in obedience to the Lord (Revelation 2:10). As we study the word of God thoroughly, we see that faith brings about obedient works (James 2:21-22). That point will be made clearly later in this epistle (Hebrews 10:38-11:40).

As we conclude this chapter, we are not done with the points therein. They continue into the next chapter. The points being made were for them, and now for us, to consider how those of old were lost because they lacked obedient faith. We have to learn from those lessons of old (I Corinthians 10:1-12). Jude wrote: *“I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not”* (Jude 1:5). They that despised the promised land did not believe the Lord. As a result, they did not hearken unto Him (Psalms 106:24-26). We would be wise not to repeat their erring ways!