

HEBREWS

The Danger of Disbelief
3:7-15

Introduction

We've been learning why the Book of Hebrews was written. It is also important to learn when it was written. It was written approximately forty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and just prior to the fall of Jerusalem to Titus and the Roman legions in 70 AD.

Forty years... At a crucial moment in Jewish history... A Hebrew Christian would immediately see a parallel from the past:

1. The Hebrews in the Old Testament heard God's Word but disbelieved it at a crucial moment in their history and fell short of entering Canaan for forty years.
2. The Hebrew Christians in the New Testament had heard God's Word for forty years but would fall short as Christians if they disbelieved it at this crucial moment in their history.

The Danger of Disbelief is the warning of these few verses. It is not limited to Hebrews or Hebrew Christians. It is a danger you and I face.

In verses seven and fifteen you are told to "hear [God's] voice." Having heard, there are two possible responses:

1. You can "hear" but **harden** your **heart** and *regress*.
2. You can "hear" and **hold** onto **hope** and make *progress*.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 The Danger Of Disbelief Is Hearing God's Voice And Hardening Your Heart, and #2 The Defeat Of Disbelief Is Hearing God's Voice And Holding Onto Your Hope.

- #1 The Danger of Disbelief Is
Hearing God's Voice And Hardening Your Heart
(3:7-12)

This is the second of five warning passages scattered throughout the Book of Hebrews. They warn believers against the dangers of *drifting, disbelief, dullness, drawing back, and departing.*

It is important that we understand what we *mean* and *do not mean* by “disbelief.” We do not mean a lack of biblical knowledge... We do not mean having honest doubts about spiritual matters... We do not mean sincere questions about God and the Bible... None of these things constitute “disbelief.”

What we do mean is this: Disbelief is a definite decision to disobey God’s clear and unmistakable Word.

In verses seven through eleven the writer uses an example from the Old Testament. He quotes from Psalm ninety-five about the experience of the nation of Israel. God had redeemed the nation of Israel out of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. He led them to a place called Kadesh-Barnea, on the very border of the Promised Land of Canaan. When God commanded them to go into the Promised Land, they made a definite decision to disobey due to **disbelief.**

Let me read to you a few select verses from the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses is reviewing the decision to disobey due to disbelief at Kadesh-Barnea.

Deuteronomy 1:19 “So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the LORD our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea.

Deuteronomy 1:20 And I said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us.

Deuteronomy 1:21 Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up *and* possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.’

The Hebrews who had been redeemed out of Egypt clearly and unmistakably heard God’s voice. They were to “go up and possess” the land of Canaan without “fear or [being] discouraged.”

They disobeyed! Moses went on to say,

Deuteronomy 1:26 “Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God;

There are at least five things to learn from their example of disbelief. This first thing is what I would call **deliberation**. Here's what I mean: They had God's clear and unmistakable word but they decided to *deliberate* about it rather than simply *do* it. Immediately after God commanded them to "go up and possess" the land of Canaan without "fear or [being] discouraged," you read in the very next verse,

Deuteronomy 1:22 "And every one of you came near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.'

Deuteronomy 1:23 "The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from *each* tribe.

Deuteronomy 1:24 And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.

Deuteronomy 1:25 They also took *some* of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought *it* down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, '*It is* a good land which the LORD our God is giving us.'

This idea to send spies into the land seemed sensible to them and to Moses. It was, however, the beginning of their disbelief. The spies were in the land for forty days. All twelve of them brought back a good report of the blessings in Canaan. Ten of them also brought back fear and discouragement:

Deuteronomy 1:27 and you complained in your tents, and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.

Deuteronomy 1:28 Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, "The people *are* greater and taller than we; the cities *are* great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there."

God had not said anything about sending in spies. There was no reason to spy-out the land. They heard God's voice and *deliberated* about what He had said rather than simply *doing* it.

When God's Word is clear and unmistakable you are to do it without deliberation. Let me give you two contemporary examples of how we might deliberate:

1. Believers find them themselves drawn to and dating unbelievers. God's Word is clear and unmistakable that they are not to do so. If you discuss it with them you find that they are deliberating about whether or not they should obey!
2. Christian parents are commanded to discipline their young children. God's Word is clear and unmistakable that part of

discipline is spanking. Yet very few Christian parents actually spank their children. If you discuss it with them you find that they are deliberating about whether or not they should obey!

Do not deliberate when God has made Himself clear. Do it.

The next thing that contributes to disbelief are **difficulties**. The ten Hebrew spies saw the difficulties in Canaan – walled cities, iron chariots, and giants. The Hebrew Christians in the first century were suffering from difficulties – they were outcasts from both Jewish and Roman society, many of them homeless and penniless. Perhaps you, too, are overwhelmed by difficulties.

Your difficulties are real; but so is God's presence and power in your life! Jesus promised in John 16:33 that in the world you would have tribulation. Just prior to saying it, in the same verse, He said you could have "peace"; just after saying it, still in the same verse, He said you could "be of good cheer." Your difficulties are part of your discipleship. If you focus on them, you become overwhelmed. If you focus on Jesus, they are overcome.

The next thing that contributes to disbelief is called **departing** in Hebrews 3:12,

Hebrews 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

"Departing" means *to take a stand away from*. The "living God" is a description of God that reminds you He alone can give you power for living. To take a stand away from the living God means you refuse His power for living and look to other resources.

The Old Testament Hebrews refused God's power for living and looked back to Egypt. The Hebrew Christians were refusing God's power for living and looking back to the Jewish ritual religion.

You and I depart from the living God when we lack or lose confidence in Jesus Christ's sufficiency to give us power for living. As one author put it,

"Too many Christians have... acquiesced to the notion that our riches in Christ, including Scripture, prayer, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and all the other spiritual resources we find in Christ simply are not adequate to meet people's real needs" (MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency In Christ*, p. 19.).

The next thing that contributes to disbelief is called "the **deceitfulness** of sin":

Hebrews 3:13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "*Today*," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

The sentence literally reads "**the** sin." The writer is speaking of the specific sin of disbelief as being *deceitful*. Disbelief deceives you by minimizing the consequences of your decision to disbelieve God.

The Old Testament Hebrews minimized the consequences of disbelieving God. The consequences were severe: They would never enter the land but would wander in the wilderness for forty years until they died! When they repented and tried to enter the land they were defeated by their enemies.

The Hebrew Christians were considering returning to Jewish ritual religion in order to lessen their suffering. They were minimizing the consequences of their disbelief. In a later passage the writer will tell them it is a decision they cannot repent from.

God is gracious; He is merciful; He is forgiving. Still, our disbelief carries consequences. Some of the consequences can be severe and can change the entire character of our lives on earth.

Deliberation... difficulties... departing... and deceitfulness contribute to disbelief. They **hardened your heart**. A hardened heart is one that hears God's voice but does not heed what is heard. The life-giving, transforming power of God's Word cannot penetrate the hard heart of disbelief. You end up wandering in a wilderness of defeat and discouragement.

#2 The Defeat Of Disbelief Is
Hearing God's Voice And Holding Onto Your Hope
(v13-15)

There is another kind of hearing. In the Old Testament example, Caleb and Joshua had this kind of hearing. The writer to the Hebrew Christians had it and wanted them to have it. It is a kind of hearing of God's voice that defeats disbelief. Three words describe this kind of hearing: *heed*, *help*, and *hurry*.

Back in verse twelve, when the writer says "Beware, brethren," the word for "beware" is *take heed*. If you want to avoid disbelief, you must **heed** God's voice. "Heed" is an intense word; it means things like *discern*, *observe*, *perceive*, *discover*, *understand*, *consider*, *contemplate*, and *examine*. By God's "voice" we mean His revelation to mankind through His Word. I see at least two components to heeding God's voice:

1. You determine to submit to God's voice.
2. You discover God's voice through study of the Scriptures.

If you are "heeding" God's Word, there is no way you can make a definite decision to disobey. Let's apply these to one of the examples I used earlier, the situation of a single believer being drawn to and dating an unbeliever. If you have already discovered from God's Word that you cannot be unequally yoked with unbelievers you will simply not allow yourself to be drawn to one. If you have been drawn to an unbeliever but then discover God's Word, you will submit to God. It's not easy, but it is simple.

Another quality of hearing is **help**. You read in verse thirteen,

Hebrews 3:13 but exhort one another daily...

You and I are to "exhort one another." "Exhort" is from the Greek word for *come alongside* to help. It means *comfort*. It is the word used of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives as the One Who comes alongside to help and comfort us.

There are many ways we come alongside to help other believers. In the context of our discussion today, you are to exhort one another to heed God's clear and unmistakable Word!

It is not always as easy as it sounds. We want to comfort people by telling them everything will be alright even when their decisions are all wrong. We offer to pray for them when we know we should persuade them. We refer them to others when we know what needs to be said. The Church would be a much healthier place if we each spoke the truth with love to those who are in danger of disbelief.

Another quality of hearing is to **hurry**. In verse fifteen you read,

Hebrews 3:15 while it is said: *“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

The word “today” occurs three times in these verses. It is a word of urgency. We should be in a hurry to hear and heed God’s Word.

The Old Testament Hebrews did not hurry to hear and heed God’s Word. They delayed obedience and it cost them dearly. Instead of entering their Promised Land, they were left to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

The Hebrew Christians did not hurry to hear and heed God’s Word. In subsequent chapters the writer will tell them they ought to have made more spiritual progress by now.

We should learn from these examples. “Today” is all the time you may ever have to hear and heed God’s Word. You have no guarantee of tomorrow.

Even if you do have many “tomorrows,” the longer you wait to hear and heed God’s Word, the less likely you are to ever obey it. On the other hand, “today” if you will hear and heed God’s Word you will be changed moment-by-moment into the image of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It happens slowly, over time... Why waste any of the time you have!

The blessing of this kind of hearing is described in verse fourteen:

Hebrews 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

“Partakers” means *full participants*. You become full participants of Jesus Christ. “Confidence” means *hope*.

The “if” clause does not mean you can forfeit eternal life by failure. The writer is talking about the quality of your Christian life on earth as you await your entrance into eternity. If you heed what you hear you will fully participate in Jesus Christ and hold onto your hope until you see Him face-to-face. If you do not heed what you hear; if you instead harden your heart through unbelief – you will lack and lose hope and live a defeated life wandering in the wilderness.

Heed... help... and hurry and you will hold onto your hope to the end!

Conclusion

Our modern, fast-paced, technologically advanced world is subtly but effectively convincing us that the spiritual resources and solutions found in God’s Word and by God’s Spirit are no longer sufficient. Modern methods, meditations, and medications are rapidly taking the place of the study of Scripture and the practice of prayer.

Let me ask you a loaded question: How much is meant by the word “all?” “All” means **all!**

God has promised **all** you need:

2 Corinthians 9:8 And God *is* able to make **all** grace abound toward you, that you, always having **all** sufficiency in **all things**, may have an abundance for every good work.

2 Peter 1:3 as His divine power has given to us **all** things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,

Ephesians 1:3 KJV Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all** spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

I said earlier that these things are not easy, but they are simple. Simply take God at His Word.