

Today, the Day of Faith

1 "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling,
2 consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,
3 who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was
4 faithful in all God's house.
5 For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses-- as
6 much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the
7 house itself.
8 (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is
9 God.)
10 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to
11 the things that were to be spoken later,
12 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his
13 house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our
14 hope.
15 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice,
16 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing
17 in the wilderness,
18 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty
19 years.
20 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They
21 always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.'
22 As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"
23 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving
24 heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.
25 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today,"
26 that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
27 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original

confidence firm to the end.

¹⁵ As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?

¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief."

Hebrews 3:1-19

Making Their Way Through the Wilderness

THIS TIME OF YEAR, MANY CELEBRATE the coming of the Joy and Consolation of Israel. For a while today, I want to talk about the opposite. “**And the people grumbled,**” which is one of the main reasons why we needed the Lord to come to us in the flesh. This familiar refrain finds its way into the great song of redemption in the Old Testament—the story of The Exodus. “Redeemed.” “**It is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD brought you out with**

a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut 7:8), Moses was commanded to tell the people. Redeemed, meaning ransomed, meaning the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt and needed to be set free.

Israel had been sent down to Egypt as a free man in the days of his son Joseph. But after many years, when the king of those days died, another arose and put Israel’s children under a heavy yoke of slavery. The people **groaned** because of their affliction in slavery and **cried out** for help. God heard their groaning, and remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And in a precursor to the advent of Jesus who would redeem his people, he sent Moses and Aaron to be his voice and arm to the Pharaoh.

God sent one miracle and then another, then one plague and then another, and another, and another to the stubborn, hard Pharaoh. The LORD proved himself, as he blasted plagues directly at the gods of the land of Egypt who were unable to stop the God of Israel. But *God* did not want him to let the people go. Not just yet. He hardened Pharaoh. Ten plagues he sent in all, and finally, when the king’s own firstborn son was killed by the destroying angel, he

“graciously” permitted them to leave. But he was hardened again and chased after them all the way to the Sea, where the greatest miracle to date was about to unfold before the eyes of all the people. When they walked through the sea on dry land and saw Pharaoh’s army drown, after all the other things they had witnessed, they were a **grateful** and **happy** people.

For about two hours.

Suddenly it dawned on them. They were now marooned in the middle of a vast wilderness and desert, far from Egypt, far from Canaan, far from anything that could be called home at all. When the thirst hit them and then the hunger, they were undone. They began to **grumble**. Grumble: the word means to **complain or protest about something in a bad-tempered but typically muted way**—like under your breath, or behind the back of someone, or as a form of gossip against someone else. It is a ghastly sin, not only because of what it does to others, which is bad enough. But because of what it does to the person who engages in it. It hardens them against the mercies and graces of God. Because when you grumble, you say to God in whatever situation he has put you in that has been the occasion of this

illness arising in your heart, “How dare you put me in this situation.”

Grumbling is thanklessness taken out in a very specific way. **Its opposite is praise.** Praise, especially in religious concerns, is an act of **worship**. Therefore, grumbling would be an act of **anti-worship**. It is mockery of God and all his benefits. The thankless heart from which it springs, is as Romans 1 teaches us, the root sin from which all other sins arise. They refused to give thanks to God, therefore he gave them over to all kinds and every manner of sinful thoughts and deeds. **Thanklessness** is at its heart caused by **faithlessness** and unbelief that God really is good and really does do all that he has promised.

With Israel, her accusatory grumbling took the form of sharp rebukes and attacks against Moses and against God. “How dare you bring us out here in the wilderness to starve to death?” “What kind of a leader are you to go up that mountain and leave us down here all alone?” “Who do you think that you are to rule over the community like that, who made you God?” It is sometimes difficult to know how people who had grown accustomed to so many miracles could act in such ways—without faith, without thanks, and

full of grumbling angry hearts. But **signs and miracles do not create faith**, they merely confirm it if it is already there. They will not believe even if someone rises from the dead, Jesus once said. Skeptics will always find ways of denying even the most powerful and undeniable of miracles, because no amount of seeing the goodness of God externally will ever be enough to overcome a heart that is presently full of fear (bad fear) of him, fear of the exposure of our sin that humbling ourselves before him will introduce, for that fear does not arise out of faith that God will forgive those sins in Christ.

It is into this context that Hebrews 3 begins a **two-chapter long warning** for you to make absolutely sure, every day of your life, that you are not becoming like Israel. It is not just a warning for once moment in your life. It is ongoing.

The only reason it would do this is if it were possible. And it is possible, humanly speaking, for every single person within the sound of my voice to sin in such ways and thereby harden their hearts against a God that they confess to believe. That makes what is before us today both frightening and terribly important. It is frightening because of the

possibilities that lay within each one of us to turn away from the living God. It is terribly important because without such warnings, we could each grow so accustomed to our own particular sins that we no longer contemplate the dangers that they put us in. But you say, “I’m elect. The elect never fall away.” Beloved, make your calling and election *sure*. Let’s work our way through the passage so that we will learn to think rightly about this first of several significant warning passages in the sermon to the Hebrews.

Suffering When Tempted

Hebrews 3 begins with a “**therefore**,” and as they say, whenever you see a “therefore” you want to find out **what it is there for**. The word connects what comes next to what has just been said. In chapter 2, Hebrews lead us to the climax of what it means for Jesus to be greater than angels. The answer? He became a man, the second Adam, and died in our place on the cross as a substitute to save us from God’s wrath and to free us from the slavery of the devil.

This idea of a **substitutionary atonement** of Christ which takes away God’s wrath is there in **Heb 2:17** when Jesus,

who has been made like us in every respect, made a “propitiation” for the sins of the people. Jesus’ death made God favorably disposed towards the people, because his sacrifice as the slaughtered Lamb satisfies the demands of justice for the punishment due from sinning. In other words, there is nothing that a person could do to make God favorably disposed that can complete with what Jesus has already done. In fact, anything that they do would be a mockery of what Jesus has done, and that is why trusting in him is of absolute necessity to have your sins forgiven. Lack of faith in this matter means that you think you can do something that he hasn’t done to make God favorably disposed towards you.

The idea of Christ’s death [in reference to the devil](#) is found just above that when it says that through death Jesus might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil (2:14). And not only this, but he can now deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (15). Delivery from slavery? Sounds a lot like Israel in the Exodus doesn’t it? You can see why the preacher’s mind would start to drift in chapter 3 backwards from Christ’s delivery to the Exodus event as a precursor and type

of it.

At any rate, this work of Christ on the cross causes him to say one more thing in chapter 2. “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (2:18). Now, of course, Israel’s grumbling did not arise in a vacuum. We have already seen the circumstances of it as they found themselves alone, without food, without water, without shelter in the middle of a wasting desert. Life was hard. God did it this way on purpose. This is called a temptation in the book of Exodus.

“And he cried to the LORD and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statue and a rule, and there he tested them” (Ex 15:25). “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not’” (Ex 16:4). “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin’” (Ex 20:20). Now, I used the word “tempt,” but the verses I’ve just given all say “test.”

The thing is, this is all the same word in the Greek: *peirazo*. This is the word **Hebrews 2:18** uses. This is the word we will see in **3:9** when he quotes **Psalm 95:10** in the LXX. It is the word we will find again in **Heb 4:15** when it says that Christ was tempted in all ways as we are, but without sin. It is the word the LXX uses in Exodus. It is a testing to see whether your circumstances that you don't like will tempt you to sin against God and grumble. People often blame God for their circumstances. But this is the very temptation. We are not to blame a God who is helping us trust him by faith by giving us the things we need to wean us away from the world.

When Christ went to the cross, it was not easy. Some think, “**Well he was God. Easy as pie. No problem. Of course he did it. He is God.**” But our Lord Jesus suffered so intensely at the moment of that decision that he sweated drops of blood. Was there ever, again humanly speaking—and Jesus was a human after all—a more difficult choice to make: to be **cut off from the eternal fellowship** you have had with the heavenly Father for crimes you did not commit, to make satisfaction for the sins of people, and to save a certain group that would range down through history to the

present day by being tortured, mocked, crucified, and forsaken? You think that was easy? Hebrews says he was tempted and tested greatly at that moment.

But the Lord Jesus did what he came to do. He went through it even though he did not want to (he said, “**Not my will, but yours be done**” in reference to this event). He obeyed where all others failed. He won the battle and took the spoils. He conquered sin, death, and the devil. He appeased God’s wrath against sin. He showed himself to be King of kings. He was exalted above every name in heaven and earth and under the earth. He lead a host of captives in his train.

Therefore, because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. What an unimaginable blessing and help this is to anyone who will call upon the Name of Jesus. There is nothing he is not able to understand, to empathize, to sympathize, to help. No thing that you are enduring can overcome him. He is able to enter into your life on a personal level and change you from the inside when you cry out to him as his child.

All of this because Jesus became a child, grew, and went through all that you go through. You see, Jesus has done all

of these things. He is able to save. He is powerful to save. He wills to **save**. He *will* save. But he also is able to **sanctify**, to help, to aid, to rescue, to deliver all of those the Father has given him. This is infinitely greater than anything he did for the people in the Exodus. You say, Jesus did something for the people in the Exodus? Yes. The Lord's half-brother Jude said, "**Jesus saved a people out of the land of Egypt**" (**Jude 1:5**). But that was only a **physical deliverance** (though many were spiritually saved in those days as well). It was a type of the salvation that was coming when he came in the flesh as a man. It was but a shadow, but a token, but a symbol of an infinitely greater redemption wrought through his flesh and blood. As Simeon said when he saw the baby Jesus, "**My eyes have seen your salvation**" (**Luke 2:30**).

Therefore, Consider Jesus

Therefore.

You see, this is the context of the "therefore." Hebrews now addresses its audience, **those people who have confessed faith in Christ**. Those who in the previous chapter are called "**sons,**" "**the church,**" "**brothers,**" "**children,**" and "**the**

people.” “Therefore, holy brothers...” (Heb 3:1). He speaks now to all who hear him who have confessed faith in Christ. “... Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession” (1). You are not born a child of God. You do not get it by being born into a Christian family. **A confession is an outward activity**. It may or may not reflect an inward reality, but it is supposed to. People who confess Christ as Lord tell others that this is what they really believe in their heart of hearts. Of course, some have duped themselves into thinking they do when they really don't. I've known such people. Have you? Some have been forced to confess at sword-point, as the church has gone off the rails of true Christianity in days long gone when they thought they could force people into the kingdom by forcing a confession out of them, as if the outward is all that matters. Others baptize people without any confession at all. Many of these did not really believe what they were forced to say either.

But because his audience have confessed the faith, these people “**share in a heavenly calling**,” and are called “**brothers**.” As we will see later on in this book, non-elect people can do this, but only in as much as they *presently* are confessing Christ and have not yet turned away from the

faith. This is a vital point, because in this and the other warnings of Hebrews, our preacher is not addressing people as “elect,” but as “confessors.” Some elect people have not yet confessed Christ (indeed, some have not even been born yet to do so, some are not yet old enough to do so, and some have not yet heard the gospel). He isn’t (yet) addressing them. Some non-elect people have confessed Christ, like Simon the Sorcerer of Hymenaeus or Alexander, but it will not last, because for them this belief and confession has not merged together with genuine affection and love for Christ that only he can give them—and must give them first. Still, he is addressing them. So he addresses all who are calling themselves Christians and this would include everyone who hears him, the elect and the non-elect, all the professing Christians to whom he is writing.

This would include most of us in this room today, as most of us are confessing Christ as Lord. That means, **what he has to say is for all of us**, because we confess Christ. In what follows, the point is not like it might be in, say the Letters of John, where he is **trying to give assurance** to the elect who doubt. Rather, here, I think he wants **to create doubt** in those who are looking to anything but Christ for

their assurance! This is the point of the warning. Falsely professing people must turn, really turn in repentance to Christ by faith alone if they are to be saved. Why? Because how much greater is what Jesus has done for us than even what he did for Israel? And weak but truly professing Christians who are tempted to turn away from Christ also listen to this warning and God uses it to strengthen their mustard seed faith. “Yes, I will only trust in Christ!” Strong Christians are also tempted, and the same holds for them.

He wants to tell us a bit more about Jesus before entering into the heart of his warning. “Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession” (3:1). This is not talking about Jesus as if he were one of the twelve apostles. Rather, he is the Apostle of all apostles, because he is the one “sent from heaven” (John 6:38). Apostles are “sent,” that is what the word means. Apostles are sent to deliver messages. He was sent with a message, and his message is the Gospel: How can a person be made right with God? By entering through the Door of God’s temple. Jesus is the Way and the Door of that temple.

As high priest, a theme that will be greatly expanded in the coming chapters, Jesus has entered into a marvelous

temple to make sacrifices to God on our behalf. Thus it continues, “... who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house” (3:2). God’s “house” here refers to the tabernacle that he commanded Moses to build. Here, Moses is in view not because he was himself a high priest (his brother had that duty), but because he built the house of God.

Then things change slightly. “... as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son” (Heb 3:3-6). The Jews understood Moses to be the greatest of all the OT prophets. Perhaps only Abraham held a higher position in their minds than him, and that is debatable. Hebrews calls Moses a “servant” (*therapon*). The word means someone who attends to a thing. Moses was called to build a temporary house for the LORD, and then he was commanded to do many things to make sure that it would function properly as a model of the heavenly temple. He appointed priests and Levites to serve and guard it. He gave the people the law of

God, exactly as dictated to him by the LORD on the mountain. He **governed** their disputes. He **stood up** in extremely trying times, often alone, as one who would not be swayed by the grumbling of the people. Yet, in all these things, he was but a servant.

Moses' job as a servant did not end with the people of Israel. Rather, his voice and his testimony and his service come down through the centuries "to testify to the things that were to be spoken later." The saints of old never stop speaking. What this refers to is the coming of Christ who would do the same kinds of things that Moses did because he too was faithful over all God's house ... yet **as a son**. Jesus is not a mere servant, which is what both angels and Moses have now been called. Jesus is the Son of the heavenly Father. When our Lord was born the angel told Mary, "And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy-- the Son of God'" (Luke 1:35). Servant. Son. Which is greater? Obviously, it is the Son, and that is the point.

But as soon as it says this, Hebrews mysteriously incorporates those who confess the faith saying, "And we

are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (3:6). You see, one of the great differences between the OT and the NT is that the people of God had to go to the house of God. But now, because Christ is the builder, we who call ourselves Christians are his house. This is a very familiar theme in the NT. We are God’s “holy temple” (Eph 2:21). We are a building made of “living stones being build into a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5). Therefore, by the blood of Christ, we have been made clean. We have been set apart like the holy instruments of the tabernacle of old, for a special sanctified purpose—to glorify the living God through our lives.

But, he says, there is some kind of objectivity to this. Most of us, again, are accustomed to default to the “elect” position, which is subjective (meaning that is it subject driven, meaning individual driven), as we think about people who have literally and finally and truthfully been saved by Jesus. But Hebrews is talking, again, to those who make a confession. This is outward, but only hopefully inward. Still, there is something that happens to people who confess Christ, when they come into the holy presence of God’s holy house and are outwardly set apart, though

inwardly they may not yet know Christ by being born again. Our Presbyterian friends sometimes do a better job of thinking about this than us Baptists do, but as we see when we come to a passage like Hebrews 6, there are real blessings and real activities of God that people can partake in outwardly that, for them, make these warnings all the more dire.

Look at what he says, “... we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (3:6). Holding fast, to the end ... that is what truly saved people do. Confessing Christ for a moment at a Billy Graham crusade is something that anyone can do in the heat of a religious experience. That is the outward, but God looks at the heart. True believers want to—and do, by God’s grace—hold fast to the end. It is not a work of their own origin. It is the work of Christ in them.

What true believers, those genuinely converted have is a “confidence” and a “boasting.” Now *this* is inward. He is trying to help people who may not have that inward work look inside of themselves and question. Born again Christians are confident, even in the face of great adversity, even in the midst of sinful doubting (which is paradoxical of

course), but they are confident of their hope in Christ. We know that what Christ did was objectively real, that it happened in history, that it has changed the world, that no man can or will stop it. But we also know that what he has said about [those who come to him for rest](#) is true. We know it personally. He gives us rest. He removes the wrath of God against us, turning us from enemies to friends as he reconciles us sinners to a holy God. He engrafts us into his own life Vine as he fills us with his Holy Spirit. He gives us the fruit of the Spirit and transforms our affections from hatred of God and his law to love as he surrounds us and engulfs us in himself through the mystical union we have with him. He swears that he will deliver us safely to God in heaven. He promises us eternal life. He gives us real tastes of these things now. He makes it possible that we might know that we really are saved. And one of those is that through even this word, he encourages us through the warning to hold fast these confidences in the gospel, and sends us away from the preaching of his word with a boldness of boasting in the hope that no one else knows but the Christian. Christians know these things experientially, not just mentally.

Friend, do you know and have this confidence? Do you have such a boasting hope, not in yourself, but in the God who has promised such things as this? We will see by the end that there is only one way to get that hope, and it is not to look into your hopelessness, but to look beyond that hopelessness to the cross of Jesus Christ and the things that have happened in this world because of it. There you turn to Christ in faith alone, for nothing else will deliver that hope to your soul.

Do Not Harden Your Heart

It is at this point that Hebrews takes that important, but somber turn. Beloved, you have such a great confidence and hope, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’” (Heb 3:7-11). This is a lengthy quote from **Psalm**

95:7-11. And it is remarkable for a few things that are being said about it.

First, notice that it says “The Holy Spirit says...” It then in quoting the Psalm refers to “his voice” and “put me to the test” and “saw my works” and “I was provoked” and “they have not known my ways” and “I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.” All of these pronouns refer to the Holy Spirit in Hebrews understanding here (the idea has some origin in [Isaiah 63:10-11](#)). He is the one they are testing. He is the one they are provoking. He is the one who got angry. He is the one swearing an oath.

Now, of all the people in the NT, which writer focuses most on the Holy Spirit? Would it not be [Luke](#)? I believe Luke is doing this, not because the other two Persons (Father and Son) are not also involved here, but because he is linking you to Israel via the Holy Spirit. He is making a vital connection for you that you and them are, in one sense, no different. He isn't making a comment on Pentecost here and the differences between the Spirit's working in the OT vs. the NT (though there are probably implications here). Rather, he is trying to help the Christians who know that they have been given the Holy Spirit see that the OT people

of God also had the Holy Spirit. Maybe not in quite the same way, but he was with them nonetheless. **And what they did to him, we can do to him.** “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph 4:30).

It connects us to Israel in several ways. One way (not the first in the text, we will look at it last) is through its application of the word “Today.” “But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today...’” (Heb 3:13). Exhorting means encouraging with earnest persistence. Every day Christians are to encourage one another with just these words—“Do not harden your heart my friend, because it is still ‘Today.’” But “today” is the exact same day—and this is the point Hebrews is making—as the day Israel hardened its heart.

Of course, it doesn’t mean that the calendar stopped moving forward from some 1,200 B.C. until perhaps 68 A.D., as if there were not time change! It is making an **eschatological point**, not a chronological point. Israel lived “today” and we live during this same day. That day is the day of “rest.” Now, we will look at this idea much more thoroughly in the next chapter. But know even here that this day of “rest” takes us all the way back to **Genesis 2:1-3.**

On the seventh day God rested from his works. This day was understood as the day that Yahweh was enthroned in his temple called creation. It was the day all knew that he was the King. This rest was a royal rest, not a nap but an inauguration. God has been seated as King since that day. He has been resting since that day, though he has also been at work.

With Israel, God held out salvation to the people. Would they believe in him as King and God, or would they turn their backs on him and run to the gods of the nations? Would they rest in his works, letting him do everything, or would they turn to their own works which ended in grumbling and complaining because they didn't actually trust God to do anything, though he had done more for them than any other people in all of history in just a short amount of time?

When Jesus said that he gives those who are overwhelmed with burdens “rest,” he is harkening back to this idea. “Come to me, all you who are burdened and heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). “Come to me. Believe in me.” That is the offer that is held forth to any who hear the call of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel since

Adam until now. This is because it is all the same eschatological day. “For he says, ‘In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2Co 6:2). “This is the day that the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps 118:24). Not just any old day, but the day of Christ, the day of the cross, the day of the resurrection, the day that salvation is still available to any who repent of their sins and turn to Christ. Tomorrow, beloved, it may no longer be that day.

The second way it connects you to Israel is brought out in some translations as an interpretation of the meaning. These essentially call you them. “Don’t harden your hearts, as you did in the Bitter Quarrel” (Heb 3:15 CJB). Listen to the difference between that translation and this one: “Don’t harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled” (NLT). It literally reads, “Do not harden your hearts as in the provocation.” It is a direct quote from the LXX (not the Hebrew). But this difficulty of whether the hearers of the Psalm and Hebrews are essentially the same people as those back in Moses’ day has been around since the Targums (the Psalms Targum says, “... on the day you tested God in the

wilderness.”

The linking of the church to Israel makes sense, not because Christians are reincarnations of those ancient Israelite people like Korah and Dathan. That’s absurd and unbiblical and completely not the point. But because today is the same eschatological day, the people are the same eschatological people. God promised Abraham an offspring, and that offspring was always made up of a people within a people. The outer ring of people are those who confess Yahweh as God. The inner ring are those whom God has chosen and saved through faith in Christ. In this sense, Christ’s church is their church, which is why he borrows that term from **Psalm 22:22** calling Israel the church and using it for Christ’s church in the NT (see **Heb 2:12**).

The point is, they rebelled against the Holy Spirit in the days of temptation. All who profess Christ, when tempted, can—since this confession is outward—do the same thing. “God’s people, don’t do what God’s people did then. Do not go astray, which is what they were always doing. Stand firm to the end. Do not fall away.” See how it puts it numerous times here: Those who **heard and yet rebelled** (**Heb 3:16**); those who **sinned**, whose bodies fell in the wilderness (**17**);

those who were **disobedient** (18).

Now, people who constantly forget how the Bible says that we are saved will hear this and think “law.” Rebelling? Sinning? Disobedience? He must be talking about the works of the law. Yes, they did rebel against the Law. No question. But why? This is where the third and final and most important link comes in. It bookends the warning.

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (12) and “So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief” (19). Do you hear it? **Unbelief**. Not works of the law, but obedience to the command to trust in Christ! Faith was their problem. Had they hearts that were circumcised, they would have had faith. But they did not have faith, therefore they fell. Israel was saved ... *by faith*. You are saved ... *by faith*. Same faith.

The object of this faith is the same too. That object is the Triune God of the Bible. They did not *believe* the **Holy Spirit**—this is Hebrews’ focus now. To disagree with the Gospel and therefore disobey it by not believing, is to not have faith in the Holy Spirit today. It is the same sin. They knew **Christ** as the object of their faith, for he was this God

in the OT who walked with them. The same Word of God walked in human flesh in the First Century of the common era beginning at his birth. The object of our faith is the same Word of God. He was sent by his **Father**, the Father of lights, the Father of heaven, the Father of all. They knew the Father as well, for the Son in the OT is constantly referring to the Father just as he did in the NT. God, the True God, was the object of their faith. He is the object of our faith. It is by faith that you are saved, not works, so that no one can boast.

Do you see then? They were unable to enter God's rest because of unbelief. The warning is—believe upon Christ. But when you say that you believe upon Christ, take care. Be found to be true and not a liar. Do not have an evil, unbelieving heart that deceives others *and itself* by making a confession that it doesn't really believe. For what happens when you do this and then turn away is that you are hardened, and this is a terrible place to be found. As **vs. 13** says, sin is deceitful. It fools us. It tricks us. We do not see its trickery. We are deceived, blinded, and in the end found to be faithless, worthless fellows.

Therefore, take care. **Warn one another** not to look

within to your own failings or achievements. Look without. Look to Christ. Do not trust your own word or the word of a man. Trust the Word of God. Trust the Holy Spirit who is calling you even this moment. Believe what he says about your sins having the only pardon you can get be achieved by the Lord Jesus on the cross. Believe that he has conquered sin, death, and the devil. Believe that he can save you from slavery. Believe that he loves you. Hear the goodness and the kindness of God's mercy in Christ.

Do not be hardened by the things of this world that cause you to grumble. Think about your own grumbling. Consider the places and the people you grumble against. Some of you grumble against spouses—who are God's gift to you. Some of you grumble against your jobs—which are God's gift to you. Some of you grumble against Christ's church, his leaders, the place he has established you, the people he has given to surround you. You grumble against many of God's mercies and graces and benefits. Consider how this eventually caused Israel to stay in the desert at the hand of an angry God because that grumbling hardened their hearts against his grace. This is a terrible sickness and it must be rooted out, as all thanklessness must, lest we fall

away into horrible endless torment of soul, because we no longer trust or desire or love the goodness of God. But all there is left for us is complaining and bitter rage against Christ and all his benefits.

May it not be so of us brothers and sisters. Let us repent of our sins. Let us make our calling and election sure. Let us finish the race that is set before us. In times like these, the temptations will only grow—be they through the complacency of having too much stuff, or the horror of having to be persecuted for a faith that we no longer believe because the worries of this world have choked out the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our hearts.

Instead, let us absorb anew the opposite of such sins. Rejoicing. Thankfulness. Joy. Perhaps it is fitting on this Lord's Day when many are celebrating the birth of the Messiah to remember the words of the angel: **“Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and**

saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:10-14). From this peace and good will, from this joy and celebration must flow the faith that dispels our dark gloom and sinful desires to to grumble against God. How can we do such a thing, considering all he has done in Christ?