

Hebrews

Hebrews 3:7-19 - Holy Spirit speaking...

Part 12 was about who we are to Jesus: “we are his house,” **Hebrews 3:6**. We are the place where Jesus hangs out, the place he calls “home.” We are also members of the same royal family and royal household as he is, and as much the “royal house of Jesus” as the royal family of Britain is the royal house of Windsor. We are also his bride in training being prepared to join him in restoring this sorry world back to the glory God intended for it in the first two chapters in Genesis.

So, what we’ve found out in Hebrews so far is who Jesus is in relationship to the Father, who Jesus is in relationship to us, and in Hebrews 3 who we are in relationship to Jesus. In relationship to his Father Jesus is God’s Son, “the radiance of his (Father’s) glory.” In relationship to us he is our Apostle and High Priest, and in relationship to him we are members of his family, whom he cares for dearly.

It is with all this in mind, then, that in the next verse, **Hebrews 3:7**, “the **Holy Spirit says**: Today, if you hear his voice.” And that merits a quick pause already, because all of a sudden we have the Holy Spirit entering the picture for the first time, speaking very directly and very personally to us in the next few verses.

We’ve had a lot of speaking like that in this book so far too, because in **Hebrews Chapter One** we have God the Father speaking directly to us, and we actually get to hear his voice and what he says - with quotation marks too - in **verses 5-13**. We then get to hear Jesus’ voice speaking to us very directly and very personally too, and also with quotation marks, in **Hebrews 2:12-13**. And now we have the Holy Spirit speaking to us with quotation marks in **Hebrews 3**. Not only, then, do we have evidence of God being three persons here - who are all capable of speaking independently and separately - we also see this “three person” God as wanting to communicate very directly and personally with us in voices that we can hear.

We understand, of course, that all the quotations of them speaking here in Hebrews are words that were already written down in Scripture, so it isn’t new words we’re hearing in an audible voice. But it’s still God communicating with us directly with words we Christians need to understand and grasp “**Today**.”

Hebrews very nicely, then, summarizes what **all three members** of the God family want us to grasp, and especially if we're Christians who are having trouble staying motivated - both then and now - in a world that's constantly wearing us down. We need our "courage and hope" recharged and given a booster shot (Hebrews 3:6), and that's what these words from all three members of the God family are designed to do. And all three, take note, are involved in this together. They all want to get in on the act of speaking to us, with what's on each of their minds.

And this time, in **Hebrews 3:7**, it's the turn of the Holy Spirit. And what's on the Holy Spirit's mind is us hearing what all these voices in the **Old Testament** are saying to us, and not "hardening our hearts" against them, **verse 8**. Clearly, then, this is a problem we Christians face today - as much as it was a problem for the Israelites after they left Egypt. And the problem is serious too, because they "rebelled during their time of testing in the desert."

And for 40 years the Israelites never stopped rebelling, **verse 9**, which really "tested and tried" God, because - as he says - they "saw what I did" and all his amazing miracles on their behalf, but rebellion is what those "heart-hardened" Israelites did in return. Which merits another brief pause, because something really severe must have poisoned those Israelites' minds against God, and it's something we Christians need to watch out for too, because we're just as susceptible (verse 12). And if we don't think we're as susceptible as the Israelites, then why would the Holy Spirit be bringing this up in Hebrews, in a message to Christians?

So what exactly is the Holy Spirit saying to us Christians in these verses? Well, first of all, in **verse 10**, he's telling us that God was "angry with that generation" of Israelites," because their "hearts were always going astray."

God doesn't mince words here. The Israelites had justified hardening their hearts against him, but God was having none of it. We see that back in **Exodus 14:11-12**, when the Israelites complained bitterly to Moses for leading them out of sure death in Egypt only to starve to death in the desert instead. And, what's more, **they felt totally justified in complaining too**. But what was God's reaction? He tells Moses to "Tell the Israelites to move on," **verse 15**. In other words, "Quit moaning, do what you're told, and trust me."

But they never did, did they? And why didn't they? Because, as the Holy Spirit goes on to say in **Hebrews 3:10**, "they have not known my ways." And that, according to the Holy Spirit, is what can so easily turn the hearts of us Christians against God too: it's because we simply don't understand him.

It's in not understanding, for instance, why a loving God would allow horrible things to happen to innocent people, and why he doesn't stop children being sexually abused, or why he doesn't stop cruelty to animals, or stop natural disasters, or prevent the likes of Hitler, that our minds as humans can so easily become poisoned against God, and even as Christians too.

Well, in response to that the author of Hebrews doesn't mince words either. In **verse 12**; he comes out of his corner fighting too: "See to it, brothers," he writes, "that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."

The problem, in other words, isn't God, it's us and our "sinful, unbelieving heart." We blame God in our pompous moral superiority and opinionated hypocrisy for all our troubles, when it wasn't HIM who caused this mess we're in now, it was US. From the very beginning, starting with Adam and Eve, we rebelled against his instructions, we failed a simple test of loyalty to him, we didn't trust him, and we listened to a lying serpent instead.

And if we today feel it isn't fair that the penalty of Adam and Eve's rebellion should be passed on down to the rest of us who didn't have any choice or say in the matter, the Holy Spirit has a blunt and simple answer for us in Hebrews: it's "**Learn from Israel.**" This is why the Old Testament is so important, because this is where we "hear God's voice" speaking to us "today" (were 7). And what God is showing us through the history of Israel is that, even when God offered to bless the Israelites with every blessing they could wish for - for simply obeying and trusting him - they still rebelled. And if we think, "Oh well, that's because they didn't have the Holy Spirit," then look what we've done as the Christian church that **does** have the Holy Spirit.

We're just as guilty of outright rebellion against God and hardening our hearts against him in our Christian churches today too, as we see in so many of our churches openly supporting same-sex marriage. We're actually witnessing Christians thumbing their noses at God and his clear instruction from the beginning - confirmed by Jesus himself in Matthew 19:4-5 too - that marriage is only between man and woman.

So, listen up, folks, because God is answering back here in Hebrews, and he isn't mincing words either. He says he's angry, because, **verse 10**, it's OUR "hearts that are always going astray," not his heart, and it's because WE (including us Christians) have not understood "his ways." So neither the Holy Spirit or the author of Hebrews is taking this lying down.

Isn't it about time, then, we asked the question: "What might we Christians be doing that could be making God angry at us too?" He loves us, yes, but Romans 11:22 also tells us that God is both kind and stern.

Well, again, learn from Israel, because that's the answer given by the Holy Spirit here in Hebrews. And what we're supposed to learn from Israel is HOW their hearts became hardened against God, and why they blamed God for their troubles and held him accountable.

The answer is right here in **Hebrews 3:13**: it was "**the deceitfulness of sin**" that did it. It is crucial, therefore, as **verse 14** says, that we who "have come to share in Christ hold firmly till the end the confidence we had (in Christ) at first," and "encourage one another daily," **verse 13**, to not let OUR hearts be hardened by "sin's deceitfulness" too, because that, the deceptiveness of sin, **is where the danger lies.**

And that danger is just as real for us in the Christian Church today. As Christians we say we "share in Christ" - meaning in context, **verse 1**, that we "fix our thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." By "apostle" it means fixing our obedience on what Jesus taught, just as the first Christians "devoted themselves to the APOSTLES' TEACHING" (Acts 2:42). And by "high priest" it means fixing our trust in Jesus because "we are his house," **verse 6**. Jesus is the one who cares for us as head of the great household of God, and we trust in him to do that for us daily.

Well, Israel should have fixed their thoughts on him for their obedience and trust too. We can say that because we know from 1 Corinthians 10:4 that "the spiritual rock that accompanied Israel was **Christ**." So the constant test Israel faced was obeying what they were being taught by Christ through Moses, and trusting where they were being led by Christ through Moses. Obedience and trust were the two "ways" of God (**verse 10**) they were supposed to learn "during their time of testing in the desert" (**verse 8**).

Their desert experience, however, also taught them that their brains could **justify not obeying and trusting** God's leadership through Moses. And this was the "deceitfulness of sin" at work. It "turned them away from the living God," **verse 12**. They couldn't see a "LIVING God" was with them, or grasp that they always had an active, personal God leading them every step of the way. As soon as something didn't make sense to them "the confidence they had at first (when they left Egypt)" evaporated and they resorted instead to anger, frustration, complaining, blaming, and bitter accusation. And that can so easily happen to us today too.

The Holy Spirit is making the problem very clear, then, when he says in **verse 15**, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as the Israelites did in the rebellion.” Well, we’re “hearing his voice” right here in Hebrews, through the lesson of Israel’s 40 year trek through the desert, that they lost their confidence in God, and their minds became infected by “unbelief,” **verse 19**.

And what that unbelief creates is seeking other sources, other than God, for guidance, leadership, teaching, care and help instead. The Israelites, for instance, made a golden calf, a replica of the cow god of Egypt, and looked to that instead of God’s care and direction through Moses. The Christians in Hebrews, meanwhile, were drifting back to Moses as the one to obey and follow, not Jesus, and needed to be reminded in **verse 3** that “Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses,” and for obvious reasons. Under Moses the Israelites had never been able to obey and trust God. “Their hearts were always going astray,” **verse 10**.

And that’s meant to capture the attention of us Christians “Today.” But why? I mean, so what if the Israelites lost their confidence in God? Why should that matter to us now? Because, quoting Psalm 95:11 in **Hebrews 3:11**, God “declared an oath in his anger, that ‘**They shall never enter my rest.**’”

So there was a clear consequence to not obeying and trusting. And that consequence was stated with considerable anger on God’s part too, as we see in **verse 18** as well, when the Holy Spirit asks, “And to whom did God swear that the Israelites **would never enter his rest** if not to those who disobeyed?”

This is serious stuff, because according to the Holy Spirit this is just as relevant for us Christians today as it was for the Israelites back then. So what on earth does “entering (or not entering) God’s rest” mean?

(Continued in Hebrews 4 next time...)