



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## The Book of Hebrews Bolstering Belief Hebrews 3:7–19 Tim Badal | October 18, 2020



Turn in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews. We are in a series we've entitled, "Jesus: Greatest of All Time." This is another warning passage in Hebrews, intended to remind the people to be careful. Remember, this letter was written about 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ to people who had given their lives to Him. They were now being persecuted for their allegiance to Him. Because of this, they may have been tempted to give up on their walk with Christ. They were tempted to hedge their bets when it came to their relationship with Him.

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To be honest, I imagine you and I have faced that same temptation at some point. Maybe someone asks us a question or makes a derogatory comment about Jesus or His cause; it can be easy when the going gets tough to take a step away from Him. This is what these readers were struggling with. "If I take a step back from Jesus, my life might go a little better. I'll have a little more comfort and peace." But the writer of Hebrews is telling them, "Don't forget that Jesus is the greatest of all time." They needed to realize—and we do as well—that to give up on Jesus or to step back from Him would be the most foolish thing we could do. In this passage the writer will warn us through a lesson from Israel's history that to give up on Jesus is to miss out on the great promises God has for His people if they will remain faithful to Him.

So let's look at our text this morning—Hebrews 3:7-19:

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

"Today, if you hear his voice,

<sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,

<sup>9</sup> where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.

<sup>10</sup> Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;  
they have not known my ways.'

<sup>11</sup> As I swore in my wrath,  
'They shall not enter my rest.'"

<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup> As it is said,

"Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

<sup>16</sup> For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? <sup>17</sup> And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

This passage contains a lesson from one of the most well-known seasons in Israel's history. In all of their history, this generation saw more of God's power in their lives than any other generation. They witnessed more miracles at the hand of God than any other generation. Yet as we'll see, this generation rebelled against God and because of that, they are an example to us.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10 that their experiences are intended by God to demonstrate what His people are not to do. They experienced the goodness and power of God, yet they turned away from Him, hardening their hearts against the One Who loved and blessed them in so many ways.

We too are being blessed by Him. Every day you and I experience the goodness and grace of Almighty God, yet we too can be tempted to turn from Him and go our own way. This example in Hebrews has been given to us as followers of Christ to bolster our belief and strengthen our faith so we can persevere to the end. Let's look at three ways in this text by which we can bolster our belief.

## **Bolstering your belief means never forgetting about a certain spiritual pandemic.**

As soon as we hear the word pandemic, our minds go to COVID 19. Let's be honest. This pandemic has changed every aspect of our lives. One of the nation's top doctors said this week, "Thanksgiving is going to look a lot different than normal."

That change is true for a spiritual pandemic as well. While the impacts of COVID are everywhere, we need to realize there is a far more insidious pandemic going on in the hearts of people. COVID affects the lungs. It takes away a person's ability to taste and smell. It can put someone in the hospital. But this spiritual pandemic is more subtle. It affects the heart. The Bible says this pandemic hardens the heart. It literally causes us to stop following God and His Word, then to go after sin. This pandemic was so insidious, that of the 600,000 men who left Egypt, all but two were infected. Talk about a transmission rate.

So we need to ask ourselves, "Is that pandemic alive and well today?" The author of Hebrews is answering that question by saying, "Absolutely yes." We need to be ready to prepare for this pandemic, because as we learn from the ancient Israelite pandemic, it's incredibly contagious. If we're not careful, we could be passing unbelief on to others, perhaps without even knowing it.

The verses in Hebrews 3:7-11 are directly quoted from Psalm 95. Why did the author choose to use a song from the Psalms? It's a reminder that their ancestors had been praising God and reminding one another not to be like the earlier generation of Israelites. They wanted to avoid the errors the Israelites had fallen into. That's why they sang this Psalm. "Don't let your hearts be hardened. Don't entice God's wrath through your disobedience. Remember these things so we don't follow in their steps."

The particular generation the writer of Hebrews is speaking about is the generation who had been in the wilderness for 40 years but who were not able to enter into God's rest. He gives us three pictures to clarify this: they were led by Moses out of Egypt, they walked toward the Promised Land, but they did not enter it. Let's look back at what preceded this generation.

For 400 years, the Israelite people had been in bondage in Egypt. During this time they were not allowed to worship their God as they wished to. For 400 years they were held prisoners in Egypt. Essentially there had been nine generations whose cries God had not responded to. But this generation was heard by Him and He answered their prayer to be set free. So God sent Moses into Egypt, into Pharaoh's house, to tell Pharaoh, "Let My people go." Of course, Pharaoh responded, "No way, Jose. They can't leave." Moses then told him, "All right. God is going to bring you a reckoning." God then brought ten plagues against Pharaoh and his people, then eventually Pharaoh relented. It took the tenth plague—in which God destroyed the firstborn of all Egypt while at the same time protecting His people—to bring Pharaoh to that final step. He finally said, "I give up. They can go." Pharaoh not only sent the Israelite people away; he also gave them treasures to take with them. Three million people headed out toward the Promised Land.

Imagine the incredible exaltation and worship these people expressed toward God. Imagine the excitement they felt as that caravan left Egypt and began the journey into the wilderness. They lifted up their voices in song, saying, "Our God is our Redeemer. Our God is our Liberator and great Savior. We are with You, God. You are our God and we are Your people."

This generation started out so well, but something went terribly wrong. God wasn't done yet. As they began their journey, they suddenly realized that Pharaoh's army was pursuing them. They found themselves backed up against the Red Sea without any way to escape. They realized it would only be a matter of time before they were carried back into slavery. Even though they had no

army and no weapons, God protected them by parting the Red Sea. They were able to walk across to the other side on dry land. Pharaoh's army followed them, only to have the wall of water crash down upon them. The enemy of God's people was vanquished once and for all.

As they continued through the wilderness, God met them every day. He provided manna from heaven for them to eat. He produced water from a rock to quench their thirst. God kept their shoes from being worn out from the miles of walking over the course of 40 years. They asked for meat and God gave them quail. Each day, every one of their needs was met.

They were also led by God through a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God was incredibly merciful and generous with His people. Notice what it says in Hebrews 3: "They thanked God every single day. They praised God every single day." No, that's not what it says at all. It says they rebelled against God. Time out. Wait a minute. God gave them blessings, provisions and protection, but what was their response? They said, "No thanks, God. We'll do this on our own."

That should stop each of us who are Christ followers in our tracks. To be a recipient of God's grace and then go their own way was not a temptation just for that generation—it's true of us today as well. We also experience the goodness of God, yet we're tempted to drift away into disobedience. How does this happen? What are the symptoms? Doctors have told us regarding COVID that we need to watch for certain symptoms, but one of the scary things about COVID is you can have it and be asymptomatic. You might be carrying the virus without even knowing it. That can be true also with this spiritual pandemic. You might not know you're carrying this sickness around. We need to ask ourselves, "What are the symptoms of spiritual apathy?" I'm going to give you three.

## **Discontentment**

The first symptom we see in the people in the wilderness is that they were discontent. They began to be bored with the things God had given them. "Manna—again? I am sick and tired of manna. I'm tired of walking around in this wilderness. When are we going to get there?"

This wasn't necessarily verbalized. Discontentment is a malady of the heart. Nobody may be aware of your discontentment. Your spouse may not know you're discontent with them right now. Your kids may not know you're discontent with them and their performance. Your boss doesn't know you're discontent in your workplace. Your pastor doesn't know you're discontent with the church. You can keep all this close to your vest because it happens in the heart. Discontentment often starts out as boredom.

God had given the Israelites no variety in their lives, then increased as they began to compare what they had with what others had. Can you believe these people were so bored with their wilderness days they actually wanted to return to Egypt? They began to believe they had it better when they were slaves.

Some of us find our discontentment increasing because we are comparing our situations with those of other people. We might not say these things out loud, but this is what we're saying to ourselves: "My life would be better if I was married to her, or to him." "I would be filled with Christian joy if my kids were doing better in school or better in life." "You know, I might love Jesus more if I drove the car they drove, if I had the house they had." "If I didn't have the problems I have..." "If I could have their carefree life..."

We begin to become discontent in our minds and hearts by comparing ourselves with other people. The Israelites began to think their lives as slaves in Egypt were better than their lives with God in freedom. That's the foolishness of our discontentment. We often long for something that's worse in the long run than what we have.

## **Disgruntlement**

Any time something happens in the heart, it always overflows. The Bible says out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). The second symptom that will tell us we're moving toward spiritual apathy goes beyond the invisible discontentment of our hearts; we can fake others out regarding that. The next thing that happens is we become disgruntled.

Disgruntlement comes in two phases, as we see in the people of Israel. First, it begins with murmuring. It's one of those words that's an onomatopoeia—the word sounds like its meaning. When you say, "murmuring" it sounds like what you're doing. It comes out in little groans or moans.

If you've ever been on a long road trip with children, you know what I'm talking about. "Are we there yet? I'm gonna die. It's so long. I only have Netflix and every app on my phone. I don't know what it's like to look out the window without air conditioning for 48 hours straight. I have my whole entertainment system with me. Are we there yet?"

That's murmuring, and the Israelites did that. They complained internally. But murmuring leads to the next step: grumbling and complaining. Various biblical authors describe this generation of Israelites as grumblers and complainers 25 times. While murmuring is saying, "Don't forget me," grumbling says, "You're the problem. You're the reason I'm not happy."

The people complained about their conditions. They complained about Moses' leadership. And can you imagine, they even grumbled and complained about God Himself. Murmuring says, "I'm in a bad condition." Grumbling and complaining say, "You're the reason I'm in this condition."

The question is: are we leading other people astray through our grumbling? Have you ever noticed that grumbling is contagious? Grumbling are the two guys on the Muppet Show in the balcony. "Well, I think that was a terrible show. That was just terrible. They did a terrible job." That's how we sound when we grumble. "I thought that was a terrible message. Why does Pastor Tim talk so long? He makes no earthly explanation of what he's talking about." Or "Why do we sing these songs? Josh's guitar was way too loud. I just don't understand it. Do you understand it?" Or "We go to our small groups. Even though we're women, we talk like this."

This is what the children of Israel were doing. "Manna's stupid. I hate manna. You hate manna? Who's with me? We all hate manna." A lot of grumbling and complaining is going on. This is where it begins to go.

## Disobedience

Grumbling and complaining lead to one more thing—disobedience. You cannot think or feel things and not say things. You can't say things and not do things. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. Out of the overflow of the mouth, feet and hands move to action.

What happened? The Israelites started to build idols. They started to say to God, "We're not going to do what You command." They began to rebel against Moses. All of this happened even while day by day God was still good to them.

If you've been saved by the grace of God, He bestows blessing upon blessing on you. Are you grumbling this morning? Are you murmuring? Are you putting a group together to grumble and complain? Are you thinking, "Lord, I don't want to go Your way; I don't want to follow You anymore"?

God said to the Israelites, "Fine. If you don't want to follow Me, you're going to walk around this wilderness for the rest of your lives. You'll be buried here." Can I just tell you how sad that was? A life that leads to nowhere is very sad.

I want to say something with love and sincerity. Because of your discontentment, disgruntlement and disobedience, some of you are walking this life in circles. At the same time you're wondering, "Why is God not blessing me? Why am I not getting where I need to be?" It's because you keep wandering around. Yet in the wilderness experience, God still meets you. He's meeting you right now, but if you're blind to Him and turn away, you will remain unhappy, wandering in circles. "Didn't I just walk by that tree last week, last year? Why am I....?" You never understand you're not getting anywhere and neither did the Israelites.

## **Bolstering your belief means finding some spiritual partners.**

What are we to do about this? What is the antidote? We need a vaccine for this pandemic and we need it as soon as possible. We need God's advice. What's His advice? He calls us to find spiritual partners. Look at Hebrews 3:12: "*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*" We don't want to have an unbelieving heart. We don't want to fall away from the living God. So what do we do? We are told to take care.

Then go to verse 13: "*But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*" God's Word says if you don't want this hardening of your heart, if you don't want to fall prey to this pandemic, find some people around you. They need to be fellow Christians who are on this journey with you. What are these Christians supposed to do?

## We need to find partners who protect us.

Verse 12 says, *“Take care, brothers...”* That phrase, “take care” is a warning. Beware. Look out. There’s danger ahead. We are to be on the lookout for something on behalf of someone else. What are we to be looking for? The deceitfulness of sin, the lies of sin. The devil knows what lies work on you. He’s got a playbook on each of us. Here’s the craziness of the deceitfulness of sin, the lies of the devil. They may work on you, but they don’t always work on other people.

Ladies, there are lies the devil uses on you that work every time. The devil might say, “You’re not beautiful.” He might tell you you don’t have worth unless a man tells you you do. And many of you fall for those lies.

Don’t think I’m singling out the women. Guys, there are lies we are told. We’re told the world revolves around us. We’re told that our worth is found in how much we provide for our family. Men, we don’t fall for the ladies’ lies and ladies, most generally you don’t fall for the men’s lies.

Then there are lies young people hear—lies about what it means to be popular, lies about what their identity is. There are lies even within generations. We have lies today about our gender and sexuality that are being promoted right now. These weren’t the lies I was hearing when I was a kid; these are a new generation of lies. That’s why older people, you have your own lies to worry about. Young people, you’ve got your own lies to worry about. The devil doesn’t use just one standard lie for everybody. Because we’re being bombarded by our own lies, we need someone else to help us.

I have a set of lies I fall prey to all the time. I need people around me who don’t fall for those lies to say, “Hey, Tim, look out. You’re going to fall for that trap again. Stay away from that.” I need people in my life who are going to protect me from those lies. I need to figure out what lies I’m believing.

I’ve seen a book titled *Lies Women Believe*. There also need to be books like *Lies Men Believe*, *Lies Old People Believe*, *Lies Young People Believe*. We need to be able to identify the lies in our lives so we won’t fall for them. I need to tell my friends the lies I fall for, so they can protect me from them. You might think this is the pastor’s job. Can I tell you something? There was one person in their generation who was telling the Israelites to be careful about the lies, the man Moses, but he wasn’t enough. It’s not good enough for one person to be doing this. We all need to be involved.

## We need to find partners who push us.

Second, we need spiritual partners not only to protect us—that’s the defensive side—but also to push us. How do we stand against the deceitfulness of sin? Verse 13 says we need to *“exhort one another every day.”* The word exhort carries the idea of someone coming alongside another to render aid. This is what the Holy Spirit does. He’s the Paraclete, the One Who helps us in our hour of need.

Picture this. You’re driving down the road and you see a car on the side of the road. You’re quickly able to diagnose the problem: they have a flat tire. You walk up to the car and ask the person sitting in the driver’s seat, “Why aren’t you going anywhere?” “I have a flat tire. Every time I start driving, the car starts shaking.” “Well, let me help you. Let’s get your spare tire and put it on, so you can get back on the road.” This is what exhortation is. It’s finding someone who is on the side of the road, in need of aid, and helping them resolve the problem.

For us, what is that journey? Our journey as believers is to move toward holiness. In this context, exhortation is found in Hebrews 3:7. *“Today, if you hear his voice...”* What are we to be exhorting one another about? Are you hearing the voice of God?

I’ve known Mario Arindaeng, our student ministries pastor, for 20 years. He drives me nuts. This is how he starts his conversations with me. “Hey, Tim, what’s the Lord been teaching you this week?” Why do you have to start with that, Mario? I mean, I’m a pastor. I’m learning a lot from the Lord.

“No, Tim. What is God teaching you right now?” Mario is living out Hebrews 3. He’s exhorting me by asking the question, “How are you hearing the voice of God.” Notice, he doesn’t ask the question, “Hey, what did you learn last year about the voice of God?” It’s *“today, if you hear his voice.”* Mario asks those questions because he’s living out what it means to push me. If you’ve been around Mario, and I’m sure many of you have, he doesn’t just do that with me. He does it with all of us, right? He’s showing us what the writer of Hebrews is saying. We have to push one another.

When we gather together, one of the things we always have to be asking is, "What's the Lord teaching you? What are you learning from the Lord today? What truth is holding you together and keeping you on the right path? What promise, what example, what verse is God impressing on you today?" This is a reminder that we can't go a day without the exhortation of God's Word and God's people in our lives. Whose ministry is this? It's everyone's.

The reason why the generation of Israel fell away wasn't because they didn't have a great pastor. Moses was the greatest leader, the greatest pastor, the greatest shepherd in the Old Testament days, but still the people went astray. Why? It wasn't Moses' fault. It was their fault. They missed great blessings because they weren't exhorting one another every day to not fall into sin.

All it takes is one day for you to start the journey away from God. The journey away from God doesn't start with a big, massive step of rebellion. The children of Israel didn't begin their walk away from God when they fashioned the golden calf to worship. It was little by little, drifting ever so slowly and subtly away from God. As it says in verse 11, they would not enter God's rest. They refused to enjoy the gracious generosity of God, therefore they missed the mark.

Can that be said of us today? Can it be said that we're journeying away from the Lord to our own demise? What a passage. What a reminder of how easy it is for us to fall into the same trap they did. So what do we do to prevent that? The Pharisee in us looks across the aisle and thinks, "I'm glad they're here today. They need to hear this." Some of you old people are looking at the teenagers and thinking, "I'm glad they're here today. They need to hear it. They're buying into all the devil's lies. That generation isn't like our generation. Preach it, pastor." No, we need to recognize we can all fall into the deceitfulness of sin. We all need to hear this.

## **Bolstering your belief means figuring out your spiritual progress.**

This is why the third step in this process is that we need to figure out our own spiritual progress. Where are we at? Here's the correlation. Just as the children of Israel were set free to head to a promise God had for them in the future, we too have been set free with a promise for our future. Do you see the correlation? They were led by their leader Moses; we are led by our Leader Jesus. As we watch the journey unfold in the book of Exodus, we should realize we too are on a journey. We're pilgrims. Just as the wilderness was not their home, this world is also not our home. We are sojourners headed toward our heavenly home. How then should we live here?

Our text ends with a set of questions and answers. We should ask ourselves these questions. Let me read the verses again. Verse 16, "*For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?*" How could the group that was so excited to be set free start so well and finish so badly?

Here are similar questions for us today:

### **Have you been liberated by Christ? If so, praise Him today for your salvation.**

You started well on your journey when you got saved. Can it be said of you that your spiritual fervor and vitality has waned since then? If so, today is the day you need to say, "God, You've been so very good to me. You have blessed me and I see that with fresh eyes. Although my heart has grown harder, it's softening as I'm reminded of the truth of what You've done for me. Jesus, You saved and liberated me; I praise Your name today. You're my Savior and Lord; I recommit myself in praise and adoration as if it was my first day of salvation. I love You, Jesus, and I'm going to worship and follow You." Can you say that today?

The writer of Hebrews continues in verse 17: "And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?" God became angry with these people. Why? He was doing all the work and they were mindlessly wandering about.

### **Are you lollygagging in the wilderness? You're playing with fire. Stop before it's too late.**

Lollygagging is a word my grandmother used: "Tim, stop lollygagging." I had to learn what that meant. It means aimlessly wandering. In your Christian faith, are you aimlessly wandering, not following the plan of God? These people went all over the place. What should have been a very short journey from Egypt to the Promised Land took them 40 years. Why? They had no plan to follow God, so as a result, they discovered they were playing with fire.

You and I are also playing with fire and we need to stop before it's too late. Are you allowing your heart to be hardened? Are you allowing the deceitfulness of sin to lead you away into consequences you could never have imagined? Consider how people in that generation were dying every day. "Well, he didn't experience God's promises. He didn't experience God's blessing."

Brothers and sisters, there are some of you who are wandering in the wilderness of our own decisions. You're blaming God and other people, but could it be because you've chosen to go your own way and not God's way? Are you lollygagging? Stop before it's too late. I love how the passage keeps using the word "today." You don't have to lollygag anymore. You can follow Christ today because He is a gracious Savior Who forgives.

### **Do you long for the Promised Land? Press on. Don't grow stagnant.**

What should have driven the children of Israel from Egypt to where God wanted them was the promise of God. He asked them, "Did I not liberate you?" Yes. "Have I not taken care of you?" Yes. "Am I not going to give you a land flowing with milk and honey?" Their answer was no. They stopped believing the promises of God. Notice what it says in verse 19: "*They were unable to enter because of unbelief.*"

Were they not believing in God? No, they sought God. They knew there was a God. Their unbelief was that this God, Whom they had seen do miracles, would not be able to keep His promise about the Promised Land.

You will fall to a hardened heart, you will fall to disbelief, when you stop believing that there's a heaven that God will take you to. God has promised us a land greater than the land beyond the Jordan River. Whether through our death or through His second coming, we will experience eternity in a place where there is no more crying, no more pain, no more sorrow and no more sin. But on this side of that glorious day, we can slip into disbelief. When this happens, our disbelief will lead us away from the blessing and rest of God, which we'll talk about next week.

Do you believe in the Promised Land? Then live it today. Press on. This is where Jesus is so gracious, saying, "You can change today. You can repent today. You can give your life anew to Me. When you do, I will be the Author and Perfecter of your faith. I will go before you and see you through to the end."

When Joshua and Caleb, the only two men out of the 600,000 Israelite men who actually entered the Promised Land, do you think they regretted their obedience? Do you think they would rather have died in the wilderness? We used to sing a song that says, "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be. When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory." Listen, you'll never regret following Jesus instead of wandering in the wilderness. Amen? So don't give up and don't quit. If we persevere, God will show us each day that He's going to see us to the finish line.

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