



## INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 3:7-19

*IN THE LONG HISTORY OF THIS EARTH, no migration of any people began so well, and with such great expectations, as Israel's exodus from Egypt. At midnight on that unforgettable night, as all Israel was snug and secure in their homes, with the pleasing aroma of roast lamb hanging protectively over them, the destroyer struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast, and a mournful wail rose from every Egyptian house (Exodus 12: 29, 30). It was the end of 430 years of bondage.*

*Stubborn Pharaoh summoned Moses, commanded Israel to leave, and even asked for a blessing (Exodus 12: 31, 32). So as dawn broke, six hundred thousand men on foot, plus women and children (about 1,500,000 souls), and all their livestock began an orderly exodus by tribal divisions (Exodus 12: 37, 41, 51). It was a proud departure, with each tribe headed by its leaders. Ephraim was particularly noticeable as it triumphantly bore the catafalque containing Joseph's bones, fulfilling his dying wish to have his bones carried back to Palestine (Exodus 13: 19; cf. Genesis 50: 25, 26). Israel left unexpectedly rich as well, as the Egyptians, glad to see them go, "let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians" (Exodus 12: 36).*

*And then the most stupendous thing happened as they entered the wilderness— an immense pillar of cloud formed in the sky before them to lead the way. At sunset it became a pillar of fire, so that every night Israel was lighted by its swirling orange glow (Exodus 13: 20– 22). What a spectacle that must have been against the backdrop of the star-studded desert sky. Then, of course, there was the ill-fated pursuit by Pharaoh that trapped Israel against the sea. But the pillar protectively moved behind Israel, shielding the people from the Egyptian armies, providing light to the Israelites and darkness to the Egyptians (Exodus 14: 19, 20). Moses stretched forth his hand, and an east wind began to howl, driving a dry path through the sea for the people of Israel as they followed the pillar to safety (Exodus 14: 21, 22). Pharaoh's army followed and would have caught them, but God made their chariots swerve out of control. The armies realized too late that God was fighting for Israel, and as they turned to flee at daybreak, Moses again stretched forth his hand and the sea engulfed the armies of Pharaoh (Exodus 14: 23– 31). God was with them! The Song of Moses soon rose to the heavens, Aaron's sister Miriam took her tambourine in hand, and all the women followed her with tambourines and dancing: Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. (Exodus 15: 21) Wild exaltation gripped the people. What a fabulous beginning! What hopes! What dreams! Soon they would be in the promised land, bury Joseph's bones, and there forever enter their rest.*

*It all began so well— but ended so poorly. Of the six hundred thousand men (the million-plus Israelites who began so well), only two over the age of twenty ever got to the promised land— and that was forty years later. The rest fell, disappointed corpses in the desert. The grand and terrible lesson of Israel's history is that it is possible to begin well and end poorly. In fact, this tragic human tendency dominates much human spiritual experience.*

*It is this concern that haunts the writer of the book of Hebrews, as we have repeatedly seen. His fear is that the doleful fate of the generation of the exodus will be repeated in the experience of the Jewish Christians in their storm-tossed little church. He undoubtedly personally knew this little flock. Many of their spiritual exoduses had been beautiful, even dramatic. But now that they were undergoing hardship, would they finish well? Not if they made the same errors as the Israelites did when troubles came.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Hughes, R. Kent. Hebrews (2 volumes in 1 / ESV Edition) (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 1633-1654). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

## **Open it**

1. Describe a time when an opportunity or decision started out well but ended up going bad. When did you see things turn for the worse? How did you respond in that moment?

## **Read it**

Hebrews 3: 7-19

## **Explore it**

2. What Old Testament passage of scripture does the author quote to address the people in verses 7-11?
3. What did the Hebrews need to “take care” of not allowing to happen? What could this lead to?
4. What was the antidote that would keep them from an “unbelieving heart”?
5. What causes the hardening of hearts?
6. How does one know if they have shared in Christ? What Old Testament event is used to illustrate this?

## Apply it

### “Doubt”

This long section is the second of the five exhortations in this epistle. In the first exhortation (Heb. 2:1–4), the writer pointed out the danger of drifting from the Word because of neglect. In this exhortation, he explained the danger of doubting and disbelieving the Word because of hardness of heart. It is important that we understand the background of this section, which is the exodus of Israel from Egypt and their experiences of unbelief in the wilderness.<sup>2</sup>

- 7. What causes a Christian to doubt the claims and promises of God found in Scripture? How can doubts positively and negatively affect the Christian?**

*In the main argument of this text, the writer of Hebrews returns to the Psalms for support and to model how to read the Old Testament in light of Christ. The verses quoted here are from Psalm 95:7–11. In stark contrast to Moses, the people of Israel in Moses’s time were faithless to God. Thus, the author uses these verses from the Psalms to exhort us not to repeat the faithlessness of the Israelites. Psalm 95 warns God’s people not to harden their hearts and turn away from the God who saved them. This is precisely what happened to Israel. They murmured against the Lord, grew discontent with his redemption, and pined for the pleasures of Egypt (Ps 106:6–43).<sup>3</sup>*

- 8. The writer uses an example in Israel’s past to warn them in the present. Why is it good to look at examples of the past? Who around you do you use as an example either as a cautionary tale or as an example to follow?**

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Confident (Hebrews): Live by Faith, Not by Sight (The BE Series Commentary) (pp. 49–50). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Mohler, R. Albert. Exalting Jesus in Hebrews (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 50). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

## “Heathens”

*God had delivered His people from Egypt and had cared for them, revealing His power in many signs and wonders. Israel saw all of this and benefited from it, but the experience did not bring them closer to God or make them trust Him more. All that God did for them did not benefit them spiritually. In fact, just the opposite took place: They hardened their hearts against God! They put God to the test and He did not fail them, yet they failed Him. The heart of every problem is a problem in the heart. The people of Israel (except Moses, Joshua, and Caleb) erred in their hearts (Heb. 3:10), which means that their hearts wandered from God and His Word. They also had evil hearts of unbelief (Heb. 3:12); they did not believe that God would give them victory in Canaan. They had seen God perform great signs in Egypt. Yet they doubted He was adequate for the challenge of Canaan.<sup>4</sup>*

**9. Israel took all the good God gave and spent it on rebellion and sin? What causes such a response to the goodness of God? In what ways do we, like Israel, presume on God’s kindness?**

**10. After God had rescued them from slavery and bondage we are told that a whole generation of Israelites disbelieved and rebelled against God. How do we create a culture of disbelief and rebellion amongst other believers? What can a church do to combat the temptation to doubt God’s goodness and promises for his people?**

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Confident (Hebrews): Live by Faith, Not by Sight (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 52). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

## **“Cancer”**

*One more thing: It is absolutely vital that we do battle with sin’s deceitfulness in fellowship with God’s people. This is what the writer to the Hebrews pressed upon his readers (who were in grave danger of being taken in by sin’s deceitfulness): ‘But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today”, that none of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.’ We need the fellowship of our brothers and sisters as we seek to live lives that please and honour our Lord and Saviour. We need to look out for one another. We need to ‘exhort’ or ‘encourage’ one another. In this context, ‘faithful are the wounds of a friend’.<sup>5</sup>*

**11. Read Ephesians 5:6, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 6:7. What do these verses tell us about our gullibility to sin? What makes sin deceitful?**

**12. Read Jeremiah 17:9 & Hebrews 3:12. What do these verses say about the human heart? How can we know when our hearts are properly submissive to God?**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2010/sins-deceitfulness/>

## “Fall Away”

The warning in these verses is sobering and serious. Just as he did with Israel, God will shut out from his rest those who rebel, walk in unfaithfulness, and presume on the grace of God. Like faithless Israel, those who presume on the grace of God will die on the wrong side of the Jordan. We must hold firmly today lest we wake up outside God’s eternal rest. In verses 12-19 the author shifts away from showing his audience Israel’s unbelief to exhorting his audience not to fall into unbelief. He exhorts his people not to follow in first generation Israel’s faithless footsteps. Instead, he encourages them to endure in the faith so that they can enter into God’s eschatological rest.<sup>6</sup>

**13. The author uses the reality of God’s judgment in the past to motivate his audience to hold firmly until the end. Do you typically think about God’s discipline as a motivation for persevering in your faith? How do we balance this with our assurance of God’s love and acceptance of us as His children?**

## “Holding On To You”

*One of the responsibilities of every Christian is to challenge and encourage one another to follow Christ. **Exhort means to strongly encourage or urge someone. Sometimes being nice and cheering someone on isn’t what they need. They need someone who will challenge them to come out of their comfort zone and take the next step of faith.** The reason for that is that we can become complacent and be deceived by sin. When we have the courage to push someone beyond where they want to go, we could be saving them from the path to bondage. They may not like us initially but they will appreciate it later.*<sup>7</sup>

**14. Why do we all need someone exhorting us when it comes to our walk with Christ? What keeps us from engaging in the receiving or giving words of exhortation?**

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<sup>6</sup> Mohler, R. Albert. Exalting Jesus in Hebrews (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 51). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> <https://dailywalkdevotion.com/encourage-one-another/>

*The church needs more exhorters, people who care enough to save people from the bondage of sin. We need people who are willing to stand upon the truth of God's Word and speak that truth into our fellow Christians lives. Doing it can be the most loving thing for them. Doing it with grace will make them open to what you are saying. Look for those people who God can use you to encourage today.<sup>8</sup>*

**15. The writer doesn't tell us what exhortation looks like but simply commands us to do it on a daily basis. What makes for quality exhortation to take place?**

*Immersing oneself in the community of saints, in the care and watchfulness of the local church, in the preaching of God's Word, and in the exhortation of fellow believers remedies an evil, unbelieving heart. These things protect us from falling away. The author again highlights the urgency of this task. We must immerse ourselves in these things "today." Tomorrow is no guarantee.<sup>9</sup>*

**16. This ministry of exhortation is to happen on a daily basis. What does this teach us about the pervasiveness and quickness of sin? How does this verse impact our view when it comes to the daily need for Christian fellowship?**

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Mohler, R. Albert. *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (p. 52). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition

People with the gift of exhortation do not merely proclaim truth, as prophets often do. They develop relationships, often taking time to do those little extras that make the difference when someone is struggling. Rather than say, “You should begin reading the Psalms every day,” an exhorter might say, “Let’s start a Bible study together on Psalms. How about coffee Tuesday morning?” We are instructed to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, which implies that, as we are faithful with the ones we have been given, God will entrust us with more (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1). Regardless of our primary gifts, all Christians should desire to become better at exhortation to build up those who are weaker, encourage those who lead, and strengthen the Body of Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Corinthians 1:4).<sup>10</sup>

- 17. Often Christian fellowship and gatherings are nothing more than a sanitized version of what most people experience in their encounters with the unbelieving world (eg. weather, sports, kids). As a small group, take some time to talk about how the ministry of exhortation can have a greater place in your times together? What things must be balanced in order for this to be a reality?**

*The author presses the word “today” on his hearers with a sense of urgency. The urgency remains for us in our current context just as much as it did for the original audience. Today is the day of decision. Today we will either walk with God or walk away from him. As Luther recognized, today is the day of salvation because today may be our last. The original audience could not presume upon another day. Neither can we.*<sup>11</sup>

- 18. Take inventory of your walk with Christ. Where are your doubts or disbelief leading you to greater rebellion? What needs to be confessed and changed so that you might not fall into greater spiritual trouble?**

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/definition-exhortation.html>

<sup>11</sup> Mohler, R. Albert. *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 50). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal (Sugar Grove Campus) —[www.villagebible.church/smallgroup](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroup)