

Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13

The book of Hebrews has spent the previous few chapters talking about the person and work of Christ. It has discussed the position of Christ – how He is the uncreated God who has always existed, who will always exist, and who created the world. It has discussed the fact that Jesus is superior to both the angels and to Moses. It has also talked about Christ's role in our redemption – how He became a man and died for our sins.

Today we are going to look at the consequences of failing to have faith in Christ. The writer of this book warns us that unbelief carries very heavy penalties:

Hebrews 3:7: “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice,
8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

10 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.

11 So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)”

This passage is actually a quotation from the Old Testament. In order to put this passage into context I'd like to look at Israel's history. There is a very important lesson to be learned here.

If we go back to the book of Exodus, we will find the story of Israel's enslavement. The nation of Israel was in Egypt for 400 years, where they were persecuted and forced into slavery. God commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let God's people go. When Moses did this, Pharaoh refused to listen and made Israel's life even harder by refusing to provide them with straw. When this happened God said that He would deliver Israel with a strong hand (Exodus 6:1). However, Israel refused to believe:

Exodus 6:9: “And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.”

Even though Israel did not believe, God kept His word. He sent ten terrible plagues upon the land of Egypt, and miraculously spared Israel from those plagues. After He killed all the firstborn in Egypt, Pharaoh drove the Israelites out of the country. Israel left, but then found themselves trapped at the Red Sea.

Before this happened, God told Israel that He was going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would chase them. God would then judge Pharaoh for what he had done:

Exodus 14:2: “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea.

3 For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.

4 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord. And they did so.”

Things happened exactly as the Lord said: Pharaoh came with his army and planned to seize the nation of Israel. Keep in mind that at this point, Israel had just seen God deliver them from Egypt using powerful miracles. God had even warned them *in advance* what Pharaoh was going to do and how God was going to respond. Yet the moment it happened, Israel proved that they had no faith in God whatsoever:

Exodus 14:10: “And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord.

11 And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?

12 Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.”

Did Israel believe God? No. Did they have faith in Him? No. However, God was faithful. He parted the Red Sea and allowed Israel to pass over on dry ground. He then collapsed the Red Sea upon Pharaoh and his army, drowning the Egyptian host. God did exactly what He said He would do.

After this amazing miracle, God tested Israel. This time they came to the waters of Marah, which they found to be bitter and therefore undrinkable. When this happened, Israel could have cried out to God and asked Him to deliver them. But they didn't. Instead they murmured against Moses:

Exodus 15:23: “And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.

24 And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?”

Moses then cried out to the Lord (something the Israelites refused to do), and God provided. Even though Israel had just witnessed an astonishing miracle that God had done on their behalf, they still refused to trust Him.

God then tested Israel again: since they were in the wilderness, they needed food. Now, Israel had just seen God miraculously provide them with water. You would think that Israel would now cry out to God and ask Him to feed them. But they didn't. Instead they complained that this whole trip was just a plot to kill them all:

Exodus 16:2: “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:

3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

This is really astonishing. The *entire congregation* accused Moses of bringing them out into the wilderness for the express purpose of killing them all! None of the mighty miracles that God had done for them *made any impression on them at all*. These people had absolutely no faith in God. They did

not believe that He cared for them, even though He had shown them His love and care time and time again. They did not believe any of His promises. They were hardened in unbelief.

However, God still cared for them. He provided for their needs by feeding them with mana from heaven. God literally rained down food from the sky in order to feed them. Now, you would think that after yet *another* mighty miracle, Israel would have learned to trust God – but that is not the case. The next time they needed water, they once again accused Moses of trying to kill them:

Exodus 17:3: “And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?

4 And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.”

That's right: their response to this problem was a desire to *stone Moses to death*. Keep in mind that Moses had delivered them from slavery. He *should* have been a hero – someone held in high respect – but the people had no regard for him whatsoever. God had taken care of Israel's every need in astonishing ways, yet none of that made any difference to these people. They didn't care that God had never let them down. They had no faith in God, and they had no love of Moses either. Moses received no credit for delivering them from centuries of horrible slavery and bondage. These people were utterly faithless. They did not trust God in the slightest.

But God still cared for them, and provided them with water to drink.

Moses then brought the congregation to Mount Sinai. There the congregation actually heard God speak to them. They heard the actual voice of God Himself, and it terrified them so much that they told Moses they could not stand it. They asked him to go up to the mountain, hear what God had to tell them, and then come back. So that is what Moses did.

However, Moses was on the mountain for 40 days, and Israel decided that was too long to wait. Therefore, despite the fact that God was literally raining down food from Heaven to feed them and had delivered them in powerful ways, and despite the fact that God had never broken any of His promises, the Israelites decided to abandon God and turn to idols:

Exodus 32:1: “And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”

There are some people who say “Oh, if only God would show me a miracle. Then I would believe.” People who say that are lying. The truth is that in the Old Testament God showed people miracle after miracle, and they *still* refused to believe. These people had seen an *astounding* amount of supernatural miracles from God, but they absolutely refused to trust Him. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, there were people who refused to believe *even though they saw it with their own eyes* and who immediately went to the Pharisees so they could have Jesus put to death. Raising someone *from the dead* wasn't enough to convince them. The truth is that *nothing* would have been enough to convince them. They would not believe no matter what God did. No amount of miracles would have made any difference.

At this point God came very close to killing the entire nation of Israel. Given their outrageous behavior, it's not hard to see why. However, Moses persuaded God to give them another chance, so the

Lord spared them.

After this the nation built the Tabernacle, and God manifested His glory there. In fact, when the Tabernacle was built it was so filled with the glory of God that no one could enter it. You would think that at this point Israel would stop their rebellion – after all, they had gone so far last time that God had nearly killed them! But, sadly, that was not the case. Israel had not learned anything.

When God established the priesthood, He gave very strict rules about how things should function. However, Aaron's sons didn't listen. Nadab and Abihu decided they knew better than God, and they did things their own way:

Leviticus 10:1: “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not.

2 And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”

Once again we find that these priests couldn't be bothered to take God seriously – and they paid for that sin with their own lives. Now surely, after this, one would think that Israel had learned their lesson. In the past God had overlooked their complaints and simply rebuked them, but now He was killing them for disobedience. However, that was not the case. Israel stubbornly continued in their wickedness:

Numbers 11:1: “And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord: and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.”

After all God had done, Israel *still* would not believe. They still had no faith in God. At this point, though, God had stopped putting up with it. Now God was actually killing them for their utter faithlessness. You would think *that* would teach them a lesson, but it didn't. Immediately after this they started complaining about the fact that *God was raining down food from Heaven to feed them*:

Numbers 11:4: “And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.”

These people were getting free food from the sky, but that wasn't good enough for them. God had *just burned people alive* for complaining, but people still complained anyway. They were utterly, completely faithless. Nothing God had done for them had made any impression on them at all – nor had they ever shown God even the least bit of gratitude in return.

But God still gave them quail – in fact, He said He was going to give them quail until they were sick of it. Then, as they ate the quail, God smote them with a serious plague. You see, God had given them enough warnings. They would not listen to a mere warning, so now there was going to be consequences.

You would think that after all this, people would have learned – but that was not the case.

Immediately after that Miriam and Aaron decided it would be a good idea to criticize Moses. Oh, they had no criticism for the people of Israel, who were in flagrant rebellion. Nor did Aaron take to heart the fact that God had spared his life after *Aaron made Israel a golden idol to worship*. Moses had not done anything wrong. In fact, Moses had been faithful – even though *Aaron had not*. Yet they decided that now would be a perfect time to criticize Moses:

Numbers 12:1: “And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.
2 And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it.”

There's a very interesting story here about that Ethiopian woman and why Moses might have married her, but I don't have time to get into it today. What I do want to bring out is that what Aaron and Miriam did was completely unacceptable. We know this because God became very angry with them:

Numbers 12:6: “And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.
7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.
8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?
9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and he departed.
10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.
11 And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.”

What we see here is that when these people dared to criticize Moses, it made God very angry, and God judged them for it. It should have been obvious to everyone that criticizing Moses was a very bad idea. You would think that Israel would have learned from this lesson – but they didn't. They learned nothing.

We know this because after this event, the people finally reached the land of Canaan. Moses sent out twelve spies – and Numbers 13:3 tells us that these spies were not just ordinary people either, but the heads of the Israelites. Moses sent out the nation's leaders in order to spy out the land. The spies brought back a report that the land was an incredible place of bounty – but there were giants living in it.

Joshua and Caleb said that God was able to give them the land, but the other 10 spies disagreed. They urged the people to turn back, because they had no faith in God. Despite all the astonishing miracles that God had done on their behalf, they did not believe that God could give them the land. They persuaded the people that the right thing to do was to kill Moses and return to Egypt:

Numbers 14:1: “And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.
2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the

whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3 And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

8 If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

9 Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.

10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel."

Joshua, Caleb, and Moses had faith in God – and they were literally *the only ones*. Everyone else was determined *to kill them* and return to slavery in Egypt. None of the people had faith in God. Despite the astonishing miracles that God had performed on their behalf, they refused to believe. Despite the fact that God had miraculously provided them with both water and food time and time again, they refused to believe. Despite the fact that God was starting to kill them for their blatant disobedience, they still refused to believe. They did not take any of God's judgments to heart. They had no fear of God and no trust in Him either. It never crossed their mind that if *criticizing* Moses brought God's wrath, trying to *kill* Moses might have very serious consequences. They simply did not care. God had blessed this group of people more than He had ever blessed any other group up to this time, but that made no difference to them. They refused to believe.

This was not a single mistake, or a single act of rebellion, or an error of some kind. This was not Israel simply having a bad day. This was a determined, hardened rebellion that had been going on since *before they even left Egypt*. These people absolutely refused to believe no matter what God did. Even when God started killing them for disobedience they still would not believe.

So God decided He had had quite enough of these people, and told Moses that He was going to kill them all. Moses interceded on their behalf (which is astonishing: remember, these people wanted to kill him!), and God agreed to not kill them. But God was not going to give them the land of Canaan. Because they had proven utterly faithless, God was going to force them to march around the wilderness until they all dropped dead:

Numbers 14:22: "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: . . .

32 But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness.

33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.

34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

35 I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

36 And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land,

37 Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord."

Now you would think that after this, Israel would have repented of their sins and changed their ways. But they did not. In fact, they immediately decided to try to attack Canaan anyway, even though God told them not to. They never learned.

During their 40 years in the wilderness, they continued to prove that they were utterly faithless. They continued in their unbelief. No matter what God did for them, they would not listen. Time does not permit me to continue a look at their history, but I do want to show how it ends. The passage from Hebrew is actually a quote from the book of Psalms. There we get God's viewpoint of this whole miserable affair. This is what God had to say about it:

Psalm 95:8: "Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work.

10 Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways:

11 Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest."

Israel saw God's mighty miracles, but that was not enough to convince them to have faith. Israel was denied the land of Canaan, but that wasn't enough to get them to repent. These people continue to test and grieve God for 40 long years. Despite everything God had done, and despite all of His signs and wonders and marvelous care, they still would not believe. *That* is when God swore that they would never enter into His rest. That entire generation was damned.

Why? *Because they would not believe.* God had given them plenty of reasons to trust Him, but they refused. They persisted in their unbelief, even though it was completely irrational to do so. They were determined to never believe under any circumstances.

This brings us back to Hebrews:

Hebrews 3:12: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;"

The lesson here is very simple: *don't be like the Israelites*. Don't rebel against God. Don't refuse to believe. Many people act as if unbelief is some sort of get-out-of-jail-free card. They think that Hell will go away if they don't believe in it. They think that God won't judge them if they refuse to believe that God exists. They think that unbelief has magical powers.

But the truth is that unbelief is a fearful sin. Refusing to believe God had terrible consequences for ancient Israel, and it will have terrible consequences for us as well. The only hope of salvation is belief in Christ. If we refuse to believe, we will be damned. If we fall away from that belief, we will be equally lost:

I John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

The Bible is full of examples of people who started well but ended poorly. Judas was one of Christ's disciples, but in the end he betrayed Christ and perished. Saul started out as a good king, but in the end he abandoned God and perished. Demas started out as a helper of the apostles, but in the end he abandoned the faith and perished.

The fact that they abandoned the faith was proof that they were never actually saved at all. If they had really been saved, they would have remained in the faith. Yes, there are times when people have doubts and sin; Peter, in a moment of weakness, denied ever knowing Christ. But Peter repented of his sin. Anyone who rejects God and walks away was never saved to begin with. You see, God tests people, to prove if their faith is real or not. Now, God already knows the answer to that question – but the test shows *that individual* the true nature of his faith. Real faith will pass the test; false faith is not.

If you have real faith then you will endure to the end. If your faith is phony then you will crumble when the tests of life come. When the storms of life come upon your house, it will collapse and prove that you built your life on a foundation of sand.

The unbelief of the Israelites cost them everything:

Hebrews 3:15: "While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

16 For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and miraculously brought them across the wilderness to the land of Canaan – but that generation did not inherit any of it. Why? Because of their unbelief. Not only did their unbelief cost them the inheritance that God had promised them, but it also cost them eternity. God said that since they refused to believe, they would never enter into His rest. Unbelief carries a fearful price.

The same can be said of us. If we follow Israel's example and refuse to believe, we will also perish. We will die and face the wrath of God. But if we believe – if we trust the God Who cannot lie and who always keeps His promises – then we will find rest. We will find salvation, everlasting joy,

and life.

There are many people who will never enter into that rest:

Hebrews 4:1: “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”

Israel heard the word of God, but they refused to believe. They heard God speak with their own ears, but they refused to believe. They saw the miracles of God, but they refused to believe. They saw the provision of God, but they refused to believe. They witnessed the power of God, but they refused to believe. They had every opportunity and reason to believe, but they did not.

It is not enough to simply hear the word of God, and it is not enough to simply know about God; we must believe in Him. Believing that there is a God is not enough; we must put our faith in Him. The only way to be saved is to obey the gospel – to repent of our sins and believe in Christ. If we do not do that then our end will be the same as those who perished in the wilderness and were eternally lost. We must *believe*. Hearing alone will not do us any good.

You see, there is a better day coming:

Hebrews 4:3: “For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

Just as God rested from His works, so one day we will rest from ours. In this life we labor for the Lord, and after this life is over we will rest. There is a day of rest coming – a day when the troubles, pains, and sorrows of this life will be over; a day when sin and death and illness will no longer trouble us, and when persecution will be utterly unable to touch us.

However, not everyone will enter that rest. It can only be entered into through belief. And make no mistake – God can easily tell those who do believe from those who do not. You may think that you have the world fooled, but you can't fool God. Jesus knew all along that Judas was the traitor. Nothing is hidden from God:

Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

God knows all and sees all; He knows the truth. We cannot deceive Him. The Israelites who persisted in unbelief, despite all that God had done, perished. They failed to enter into God's rest.

But what about us? Will we believe and be saved? Will we lead lives of faithfulness – or will we also continue in our rebellion and perish?