

July 10th 2011
The Letter to the Hebrews
Part Eleven

1). Heb 3:7 ¶ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. 10 Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"*

a). We had seen last week that the original recipients of the Letter to the Hebrews had already begun on the process of hardening their hearts, where the word ‘hardening’ speaks of stubbornness. We are therefore looking at stubbornness with regards to accepting the nature, character and ways of God with a view to receiving the inheritance.

b). And this would go hand in hand with that which is recorded about this group of people later in the letter - Heb 5:11 *of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

c). They were not always ‘dull of hearing’, but had now become that way – and in the word ‘dull’ we have the idea of slow and sluggish, denoting a lack of effort – and what is very interesting for us to note here is that their lack of effort did not leave them at a place of status quo but rather caused them to regress; they literally went backwards to a place where they needed to be taught ‘the first principles of the oracles of God’ all over again. These first principles were things that they had known, but as a result of their lack of effort the very things they had known they had now forgotten to the point where it was as if they had never known them in the first place.

d). And again, because of this, they now needed milk again and not the solid food they should have been consuming. They had then reverted from being spiritually mature to a place of spiritual immaturity.

e). Therefore this is the reason why they are exhorted to hear the Lord’s voice ‘today’, because if they would not hear and instead continued to harden their hearts then they would continue to regress to a point where they would have

completely abandoned their pursuit of the Kingdom. They would of course remain eternally saved, but would have separated themselves from God's purpose for their creation and the purpose for their salvation.

f). And as we look at all of this it should call to mind the subject of the first warning that we saw at the beginning of Chapter 2 - Heb 2:1 ¶ *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*

g). Drifting away as a result of a lack of effort, not giving the more earnest heed, with regards to 'the things we have heard' is an apt description of the process we have just seen described to us through the scriptures.

h). And so, with respect to ourselves, does this really need to be spelled out any more clearly? Remember the original recipients of this letter were Kingdom believers and were in pursuit of their inheritance, just as we are - Heb 10:34 *for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.*

i). They were at one point serious about that which God had offered them, but that seriousness was in the process of changing for some in this group.

j). With respect to their seriousness they were then much like us, and we, like them, are not exempt from the same process of regression.

k). And as we said last week, it is a sobering thought that even now some of us could have begun this process towards an abandonment of the Kingdom thereby forfeiting our inheritance through the hardening of our hearts.

l). And should any of us recognize the tell tale signs of regression then the Holy Spirit provides us with the same exhortation – stop right now and hear His voice while it is still called today.

2). The example given with respect to the outcome of the hardening of the heart is of course the first generation of Israel in the wilderness and particularly 'the day of trial in the wilderness' - Ex 17:2 *Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?"*

a). It is at Rephidim, a place signifying rest, but not the rest of God, that this incident takes place – and what might we see in 'rest', but a ceasing of effort – becoming 'dull of hearing'.

b). And what reason does God give for Israel's actions? *'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.'*

c). They are easily led astray by their feelings, their emotions and the dictates of their circumstances and this happens because they do not know God's 'ways'.

d). With this in mind do you remember what we read in Hebrews Chapter 5?
13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

e). Those then who will know the ways of God through experiential knowledge must be those progressing to spiritual maturity, those who are not hardening their hearts, those who are hearing His voice while it is called today; those who are not unskilled, not ignorant in the word of righteousness, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

f). Have you ever wondered why the ways of God must be learned through experience, by reason of use, and not just through the intellect? Well, I think our answer would be in what the Lord Himself says concerning them - Isa 55:8 *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

g). God's ways are not our ways and because of this we will realize that God's ways are completely contrary not only to the ways of our flesh, which would also include our thinking but also to the very essence of the human nature. Therefore in order to know God's ways and understand His faithfulness in response to our faithfulness we must experience His ways in practice in order that our faith may grow.

h). For example, from our study of 1Peter - 1Pe 2:18 *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;.....*

3:1 ¶ Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

i). Everything that is in us would cry out against that which we read here and yet what does v21 say? ‘For to this you were called.’ What we see here then is an example of the ways of God – ways that must be embraced through faith so as to be part of our experience. It is then only through our practice that we would show that we are not ignorant of His ways – as right here we have to trust Him as a faithful Creator – Pr 3:5 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. 7 ¶ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones.*

j). As we consider this we might also realize how easy it would be for us to be led away from the right course by the difficulty of our circumstances. And how even easier it would be to be led astray if we remain spiritually immature.

k). That which was true for the nation of Israel, who are our example, must also be true for all who would harden their hearts after the same fashion – in doing so we would be guilty of testing God and trying God which would result in His loathing us. And perhaps we have never made the connection here, but this would be a Judgment Seat issue. At the Judgment Seat, as a consequence of this action which we will have chosen the Lord will be disgusted with us to the point of loathing; perhaps we will remember that which the Lord says to the Laodicean church - Re 3:16 *"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

l). And the ultimate conclusion is abundantly clear - *11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'*"

m). We might also appreciate the seriousness with which God takes this by the fact that He swore an oath concerning it – not that God needed to be held accountable to enforce His decision, but rather to make it abundantly clear in the understanding of finite Man that He is not going to change His mind – the first generation of Israel to come out of Egypt, except Caleb and Joshua, did not enter His rest and nor will any who follow the same example as that generation. With regards to Israel His rest was to be experienced in the land of Canaan within the Theocratic Kingdom and with regards to ourselves His rest is to be experienced within the Millennial Kingdom, in the heavens.

3). And so, our Chapter and our warning continues - Heb 3:12 *Beware, 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 "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

a). Here in v12 the implied warning of the previous verses is spelled out for us in no uncertain terms. The word translated ‘beware’ means to keep under constant surveillance. We, the ‘brethren’ – the same ‘holy brethren’ the ‘partakers

of the heavenly calling' are to be constantly watching, to be constantly paying attention in case there should be 'an evil heart of unbelief' in us as there was in Israel in the wilderness.

b). The order that the words 'an evil heart of unbelief' are written in the Greek language gives us 'a heart that is evil with respect to unbelief' – it is therefore a specific evil and not evil in a general sense – it is the evil of unbelief.

c). Also the Greek word used for evil here does not describe evil in an abstract sense, but rather evil that is in active opposition to that which is good, therefore this kind of evil is not content with its own destruction, but seeks to corrupt others along with it.

d). As we have seen, some of those who originally received this letter had already begun to harden their hearts and therefore we might assume that some of them already possessed an evil heart of unbelief – and again please note that those who possessed such a heart would actively seek to draw away others after themselves, to follow the same course that they had embarked upon. -

Ac 20:30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

e). And this evil heart of unbelief would cause the person possessing it to depart from the living God.

f). The word in Hebrews 3:13 translated 'departing' is the Greek word 'aphistemi' from which we get our English word 'apostasy' – the same word we had seen in our study of 1 + 2 Peter with regards to the false teachers.

g). The active evil in unbelief then would result in a standing away from the living God. And as we will remember from our previous study of this word, you can't stand away from something you have not already stood with. And so, those with this actively evil heart of unbelief at one point stood with the living God in respect of what He offered concerning the coming Kingdom, but had now chosen to stand away, to believe something other than that which God had said.

h). So why would this be? Well if we remember that all the warnings in Hebrews must be seen together then we will realize that the starting point, so to speak, for the evil heart of unbelief has its origins in the first warning at the beginning of Chapter 2, just as we saw earlier - Heb 2:1 ¶ *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*

i). And those things which were heard, that must be given the more earnest heed, are the foundational material laid out in Hebrews Chapter 1 concerning the coming Kingdom of Christ.

j). At the risk of becoming redundant, we will neglect this foundation at our peril. Now, when we think about neglecting the foundation we must think beyond just not making the effort to study it to include being dissatisfied with hearing it – again.

k). The first generation of Israel would once more provide the example for us in this - Nu 11:4 ¶ *Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 "but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" 7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. 8 The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil.*

l). Joh 6:31 *"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*

m). The manna is of course a type, a picture of the word of God and most specifically the word concerning the Christ and in the dissatisfaction of Israel with the manna we can see a dissatisfaction with the word concerning Christ.

n). Israel remembered the fish, the leeks, the cucumbers, the garlic as we might remember the days when we grazed our way through the Christian Bookstores or Christian TV nibbling on whatever took our fancy. It was a hard lesson, but also a very exciting one to come to the point of realization that the scriptures are enough in themselves, and we don't need anything else – but for some, continuing to read whatever anybody and his brother has written remains an addiction even if they know that what comes out of the Laodicean church is not worth the paper it is written on. And for others, they search out what is written that fits with their personal agenda – right here is not giving the more earnest heed to the things we have heard.

o). Now in both our examples here those who follow these actions would try to incorporate the wisdom of man into the word of the Kingdom, making it of equal value – and this is exactly what we see with Israel and the manna, they ground it, they beat it, they cooked it in pans and made cakes of it – anything except receive it how it was given.

p). Listen – what God has given us in the scriptures is beyond value – if God had given us only one verse to read over and over again that would be more than enough to sustain us during our wilderness journey resulting in a glorious outcome.

q). Adding to, changing, manipulating, massaging the word of the Kingdom to make it more acceptable to us personally is a demonstration of the evil heart of unbelief.

4). The very next verse in Hebrews Chapter 3 then provides for our personal responsibility towards each other so as to guard against the evil heart of unbelief -

Heb 3:13 *but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

a). We are then, 'to exhort one another daily'

b). Exhort = Greek – 'parakaleo', *par-ak-al-eh'-o* = to utter in a loud voice, to call urgently.

c). There is then in this word the idea of an intentional seriousness in encouraging one another and when necessary challenging one another with regards to that which we have learned – and we are to do this consistently, daily while it is still called 'today'.

d). And we are to do this lest any of us 'be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin'. The 'hardening' here refers us back to the warning concerning the hardening of the heart of v8.

e). The word sin in the original language is preceded by a definite article which simply means it is a particular sin and not sin in a general sense and the specific sin we are dealing with in our context is the sin of apostasy, of standing away from the living God as a result of having an evil heart of unbelief.

f). Now, according to our scripture our hearts may be hardened through the deceitfulness of this particular sin.

g). Deceitfulness = Greek – 'apate', *ap-at'-ay* = a trick, a stratagem

h). We are not dealing then with the quality of deceitfulness but rather with the way that our sin of unbelief can trick us into allowing our hearts to become hardened.

i). This would be the very reason we are exhorted to 'beware', to be constantly on our guard, in v12.

5). Heb 3:14 *For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

a). In v14 then we come once again to Christ and His companions with a view to being a joint heir with Him in the coming Kingdom.

b). Our being a 'partaker', a companion of Christ is based upon Christ's completed work in time past that extends completed into the present. Christ is our present High Priest, but His High Priestly ministry is set in place because of His completed work in the past. And so on God's part there is nothing more that needs to be done to make sure of our companionship with Christ. On our part however, there is more that needs to be done if Christ's past work is to be brought to completion in us, and here in v14 we see that we need to 'hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end'.

c). The word ‘confidence’ is the Greek word ‘hupostasis’ which is translated ‘substance in Hebrews Chapter 11 - Heb 11:1 ¶ *Now faith is the substance [hupostasis] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

And its primary meaning is ‘that on which anything is based’ – and that which is in view here of course is the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

d). So, on what is the Millennial Kingdom of Christ based? What is the basis for our hope with regards to the Kingdom?

e). Well in a general sense and put very briefly, it would be the evidence of scripture as presented in concentrated form in Hebrews Chapter 1, but also, along with this and incorporated in it would be Christ Himself. We will remember – Heb 2:5 ¶ *For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. 6 But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? 7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. 8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. 10 ¶ For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

f). It is Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession who is our ‘confidence’ when it comes to our participation in the Kingdom. Not only because of His sacrifice and present ministry, but also because of the example He set that we should follow – the example of suffering, of patient endurance, of overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil; and setting the example not as the Son of God but as the Son of Man resulting in Him being crowned with glory and honor.

g). Therefore seeing for ourselves His victory is the beginning of our ‘confidence’ and it is both the fact of and the means of His victory that we must hold steadfast to the end; whether that end is the conclusion of our life on earth or the rapture of the church. Whichever it is and no matter how long it takes we must hold that which caused us to hope steadfast to the end, as only in that way will we be Christ’s companions in the age to come.

h). And again our verse from Hebrews 3:15 places holding the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end within the context of hearing His voice and not hardening our hearts.

i). Hearing His voice then and holding the beginning of our confidence steadfast until the end go hand in hand with one another and that which will shipwreck both is the hardening of our hearts through the sin of unbelief.

6). Heb 3:16 *For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

a). V16-19 then, the verses that bring Chapter 3 to a close, serve to make absolutely sure that we have not missed that which has been taught to us in the preceding verses.

b). And in re-emphasizing that which has been taught the Holy Spirit presents a sequence of questions which require us to provide the answers thereby confirming what has been taught from our personal knowledge base.

c). The 2 questions in v16 make us realize that it was the whole generation of Israel who came out of Egypt led by Moses [except Caleb and Joshua and those under the age of accountability] who firstly heard and then rebelled against that which they had heard. It was then the entire generation that was guilty of apostasy.

d). V17 asks the question ‘with whom was He angry forty years?’ and the answer is the same – the whole generation. God’s anger with them marked by their corpses that fell in the wilderness without receiving the promised inheritance.

e). And it is this same entire generation that He swore would not enter His rest because they did not obey.

f). The word translated ‘obey here’ is the Greek word ‘apeitheo’, *ap-i-theh'-o* = to disbelieve (willfully and perversely):--not believe, disobedient, obey not, unbelieving.

g). And in this word is the idea of not allowing oneself to be persuaded, to refuse or withhold belief. We are then looking at a deliberate, willful choice to disobedience

h). Then in our final verse, v19, we see that God would not allow this generation to enter His rest because of their willful choice to unbelief.

i). The warning that is re-emphasized through this series of questions is, I am sure we will agree, abundantly clear for all to see.

j). And so to conclude for today – brethren let us beware lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief and let us exhort one another daily while it is still called today.