

# Hebrews 3:7-9 Commentary

[PREVIOUS](#)

[NEXT](#)

**CLICK VERSE**

**To go directly to that verse**

[Hebrews 3:1](#)

[Hebrews 3:2](#)

[Hebrews 3:3](#)

[Hebrews 3:4](#)

[Hebrews 3:5](#)

[Hebrews 3:6](#)

[Hebrews 3:7](#)

[Hebrews 3:8](#)

[Hebrews 3:9](#)

[Hebrews 3:10](#)

[Hebrews 3:11](#)

[Hebrews 3:12](#)

[Hebrews 3:13](#)

[Hebrews 3:14](#)

[Hebrews 3:15](#)

[Hebrews 3:16](#)

[Hebrews 3:17](#)

[Hebrews 3:18](#)

[Hebrews 3:19](#)

CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

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[Swindoll's Chart](#), [Interesting Pictorial Chart of Hebrews](#), [Another Chart](#)

## The Epistle to the Hebrews

### INSTRUCTION Hebrews 1-10:18

### EXHORTATION Hebrews 10:19-13:25

Superior Person  
of Christ  
Hebrews 1:1-4:13

Superior Priest  
in Christ  
Hebrews 4:14-10:18

Superior Life  
In Christ  
Hebrews 10:19-13:25

BETTER THAN  
PERSON  
Hebrews 1:1-4:13

BETTER  
PRIESTHOOD  
Heb 4:14-7:28

BETTER  
COVENANT  
Heb 8:1-13

BETTER  
SACRIFICE  
Heb 9:1-10:18

BETTER  
LIFE

MAJESTY  
OF  
CHRIST

MINISTRY  
OF  
CHRIST

MINISTERS  
FOR  
CHRIST

DOCTRINE

DUTY

DATE WRITTEN:  
ca. 64-68AD

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)  
(See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

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**Greek:** Dio kathos legei (3SPAI) to pneuma to hagion Semeron ean tes phones autou akousete (2PAAS)

**Amplified:** Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you will hear His voice, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** ([Westminster Press](#))

**NLT:** That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today you must listen to his voice. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** We ought to take note of these words in which the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear his voice, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Wherefore, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if His voice you will hear,

**Young's Literal:** Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,

**THE FIVE WARNING  
PASSAGES  
IN HEBREWS**

Hebrews 2:1-4 (notes)

Hebrews 3:7-4:13 (notes)

Hebrews 5:11-6:12 (notes)

Hebrews 10:19-39 (notes)

Hebrews 12:14-29 (notes)

**THEREFORE: dio:**

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Spurgeon says this introduces "a long parenthesis."

**Therefore** - for discussion of the value of taking note of [terms of conclusion](#). In short, whenever you encounter a "therefore" (consequently, for this reason, etc), take a deep breath, slow down and ask yourself what is it "there for"? As you begin to make this your habitual practice, you will find that it becomes second nature and begins to uncover the writer's train of thought in a way that heretofore you may have overlooked.

The point is that the preceding verse is a serious exhortation which leads the writer to reinforce the truth with a familiar illustration of the danger of not holding fast. He reminds his readers of the sad time in Israel's history when they did not hold fast. He explains that the results of their failure to hold fast was the stimulation of the anger of God and of their failure to enter God's rest. He explains that their "not holding fast" was manifest by their disobedience which was directly related to unbelief, an unbelief which produced a hard hearts which apostatized. So his point is "**Therefore**" remember their example of disobedience... we have a '**holy calling**' and it is proven genuine by our holding fast to the end.

In view of the fact that God has spoken in His Son in these last days and the Messiah is better than the prophets, the angels, and Moses, the readers were being warned not to harden their hearts in renouncing their professed faith in the finished work of Messiah and returning to their daily sacrifices!

**Wuest** explains it this way - The word "**therefore**" reaches back into the epistle to the three preceding arguments. In view of the fact that Messiah is better than the prophets, the angels, and Moses, the warning is, not to harden their hearts in renouncing their professed faith in Messiah and returning to the sacrifices. The construction is; Wherefore (Heb 3:7), take heed (Heb 3:12), the contents of Heb 3:7-11 being the parenthetical background and scriptural enforcement of the warning of verse 12. The warning of the parenthetical passage is however addressed to the readers. ([Hebrews - Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament](#))

**JUST AS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYS TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE:** kathos legei (3SPAI) to pneuma to hagion Semeron ean akousete (2PAAS) tes phones autou:

- **Just as the Holy Spirit -**

- Heb 9:8 = "**The Holy Spirit is signifying this**";
- 2 Sa 23:2 = "**The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me**";
- Mt 22:43 = "**Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord'**";
- Mark 12:36;
- Acts 1:16 = "**the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas**";
- Acts 28:25 = "**The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers**"
- **Today if you hear His voice** - He 3:13,15; 4:7; Ps 95:7-11; Pr 27:1; Eccl 9:10; Is 55:6; 2Co 6:1,2; Jas 4:13, 14, 15
- Ps 81:11,13; Is 55:3; Mt 17:5; Jn 5:25; 10:3,16,27; Rev 3:20
- Hebrews 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**JUST AS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYS** - Is there any argument that Holy Scripture is inspired by God? **Peter** explains the Holy Spirit's role in divine inspiration writing that "no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved ([present tense](#) = continually; [passive voice](#) = Source outside of themselves ~ "[divine passive](#)") by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Pe 1:21+)

The writer goes on to quote from Psalm 95:7-11 and in so doing corroborates the divine inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures explaining that they were the words of the Holy Spirit.

**Spurgeon** - The apostle is continually quoting from the Old Testament, but he does not often present his quotations in this peculiar fashion. In the very next chapter, when he is speaking of the same passage, he uses the expression, "speaking by David" (Heb 4:7) —mentioning the human author of the psalm. But in this case, to give full emphasis to the truth, he quotes the divine author alone —"As the Holy Spirit says." These words, it is true, are applicable to every passage of sacred Scripture, for we may say of all the inspired books, "As the Holy Spirit says." But it is designedly used here that the passage may have the greater weight with us. The Holy Ghost, in fact, not only speaks thus in Psalm 95, but it is His unvarying utterance. The Holy Ghost says, or continues still to say, "Hear His voice today." How does the Holy Ghost thus speak? He says this first in the Scriptures. Every command of Scripture calls for immediate obedience. The law of God is not given to us to be laid on the shelf to be obeyed at some future period of life, and the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not so intended for the eleventh hour as to be lightly trifled with during the first ten. Wherever the Holy Ghost exhorts, He speaks in the present tense, and bids us now repent, or now believe, or now seek the Lord. Further, while the Holy Ghost speaks in Scripture, He speaks in the same manner in the hearts of His people. He is a living and active agent; His work is not ended; He speaks and writes still. The pen is still in His hand, not to write with ink upon paper, but upon the fleshy tablets of prepared hearts. The like is also true when the Holy Ghost speaks in the awakened. They are not yet numbered with the people of God, but they are under concern of soul. Everywhere a truly awakened sinner pleads in the present tense, and cries mightily for a present salvation, and it is certain that whenever the Holy Ghost strives with men, He urgently cries, "Today! Today!" Once more, the Holy Ghost speaks thus by His deeds as well as by His words. We have a common proverb that actions speak more loudly than words. Now the acts of the Holy Spirit in the leading of many to the Savior are so many practical invitations, encouragements, and commands to others. The gate of mercy stands open every day in the year, and its very openness is an invitation and a command to enter. Is not the bringing of one sinner to Himself intended to allure others? (Hebrews 3:7 - [The Entreaty of the Holy Ghost](#))

In **Psalm 95** David writes...

For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. **Today, if you would hear His voice,**

**8 Do not harden your hearts,** as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness;

**9** When your fathers tested Me. They tried Me, though they had seen My work.

**10** For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways.

**11** Therefore I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest." (Psalm 95:7-11)

**Spurgeon** comments on **Today if you hear His voice...**

Dreadful "if." Many would not hear, they put off the claims of love, and provoked their God." Today," in the hour of grace, in the day of mercy, we are tried as to whether we have an ear for the voice of our Creator. Nothing is said of tomorrow, "he limiteth a certain day," he presses for immediate attention, for our own sakes he asks instantaneous obedience. Shall we yield it? The Holy Ghost saith "Today," will we grieve him by delay?

**Barton Bouchier** (quoted by Spurgeon) writes...

Oh! what an if is here! what a reproach is here to those that hear him not! "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"; "but ye will not come to me that ye might have life." And yet there is mercy, there is still salvation, if ye will hear that voice. Israel heard it among the thunders of Sinai, "which voice they that heard it entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more"; so terrible was the sight and sound that even Moses said, "I exceedingly quake and fear": and yet they heard too the Lord's still voice of love in the noiseless manna that fell around their tents, and in the gushing waters of the rock that followed them through every march for forty years. Yet the record of Israel's ingratitude runs side by side with the record of God's mercies -- "My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me."

**Thomas Cole** (quoted by Spurgeon) writes...

It will be as difficult, nay, more difficult, to come to Christ tomorrow, than it is **today**: therefore **today hear His voice**, and harden not your heart. Break the ice now, and by faith venture upon your present duty, wherever it lies; do what you are now called to. You will never know how easy the yoke of Christ is, till it is bound about your necks, nor how light his burden is, till you have taken it up. While you judge of holiness at a distance, as a thing without you and contrary to you, you will never like it. Come a little nearer to it; do but take it in, actually engage in it, and you will find religion carries meat in its mouth; it is of a reviving, nourishing, strengthening nature. It brings that along with it, that enables the soul cheerfully to go through with it. --Thomas Cole (1627-1697) in the "Morning Exercises."

The children of Israel tested God and challenged His authority by rebelling in the wilderness and because of their rebellion, they failed to enter into the rest of Canaan, the land of milk and honey and instead perished in the wilderness.

**John MacArthur** emphasizes the point that "The Holy Spirit was involved in the writing of every word of Scripture. That is why it is sin in the first degree, and opens the floodgates to every kind of heresy possible, to deny the absolute verbal inspiration of Scripture. God originated the autographs, the first copies, to the very word." ([Hebrews. Moody Press](#))

**Wuest** - The writer quotes from Psalm 95:7-11. The psalm was written by David, but the writer attributes it here to the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost spoke the words. David, the inspired penman, wrote them down. The Hebrew reads, "O that you would hear his voice." The Greek has the conditional particle *ean* introducing a conditional sentence, undetermined but with prospect of determination. **The condition which must be met if these Hebrews are to hear the voice of God** that they not harden their hearts. In the psalm, the pronoun "he" refers back to God. In the context into which the writer of this epistle has put it, it refers back to Christ. This makes the Jehovah of the O.T., the Messiah of the N.T. It is He who is said to have spoken the words of the New Testament (Heb 2:3). These Jews were leaning back towards the First Testament. This was a heart-hardening process. They are warned against it.

**Today** is a **key word** in this first section of Hebrews being used in this verse and in (Heb 3:13-note, Heb 3:15-note, Heb 4:7-note). **Today** emphasizes urgency. Not yesterday, not tomorrow but **today**. At this very time, this present moment. Now! The point of this section of Hebrews is that if one knows the truth about Jesus and His Gospel, they should not imitate the sluggish response of Israel who knew God's truth and saw His miracles and yet failed to surrender to His truth. To harden one's heart is not only very foolish but is also very dangerous, for you do not know how long you will have to decide. Benjamin Franklin was correct when he advised never to put off until tomorrow what you can do today, especially if it relates to your eternal destiny!

**Spurgeon** - Today is the only time we have. Happily for us, the Holy Ghost says, "**Today, if you hear his voice.**" Never do I find Him saying "tomorrow." His servants have often been repulsed by men like Felix who have said, "**Go your way for this time. When I have a more convenient season I will send for you.**" (Acts 24:25KJV+) And never did any apostle say, "Repent **tomorrow**, or wait for some convenient season to believe." The constant testimony of the Holy Ghost, with regard to the one single part of time, which I have shown indeed to be all time, is, "**Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.**" The text inculcates a special duty. The duty is that we should **hear the voice of God**. The text bids us hear the voice of the Father saying, "Return to me, you backsliding children. Come now, and let us reason together. Even though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white like snow" (Isa 1:18+). Or it may be the voice of Jesus Christ, for it is of Him that the apostle is here speaking. It is Jesus who calls, **Come to me, all of you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest**" (Mt 11:28+). In fact, the voice to be heard is that of the Sacred Trinity, for with the Father and the Son, the Spirit also says, "**Come.**" (John writes in some of the last inspired Words from God "The Spirit and the bride say, "**Come.**" [[present imperative](#) - the mystery is one [Needs the Holy Spirit to obey](#)] And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." - Rev 22:17+ - right to the very end God's heart is for men to "Come!")

**If you hear** - The idea of **hearing** is a key idea in Hebrews...

Hebrews 2:1 (note) For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what **we have heard**, lest we drift

away from it.

Hebrews 3:7 (note) Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU **HEAR** HIS VOICE, 8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS

Hebrews 3:15 (note) while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU **HEAR** HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."

Hebrews 4:7 (note) He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU **HEAR** HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."

Hebrews 5:9 (note) And having been made perfect, He became to all those who **obey** (literally "**hear under**", listen attentively **hupakouo** = hupo + akouo) Him the source of eternal salvation,

Hebrews 5:11 (note) Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of **hearing**.

Hebrews 11:8 (note) By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed (literally "**hear under**", listen attentively **hupakouo** = hupo + akouo) by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

This is a well-known **exhortation found in the Talmud**:

"Rabbi 'Eli'ezer said, 'Repent one day before you die.' His talmidim objected, 'Does one know in advance the day of one's death?' He replied, 'All the more reason to repent today, lest you die tomorrow! In this way, your entire life will be one of repentance.' " (Shabbat 153a)

Every Jew knew this Talmudic passage by heart because its opening line served as a call to worship every Sabbath evening in the synagogue with these words: "**Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts**" These solemn words were proclaimed week after week, year after year, as a call and a charge to carefully listen to the voice of God. Hebrew ears perked up at their sound or at least they should have! And so should ours, especially if we are reading these solemn passages and have only made a profession of faith but lack evidence to validate our profession (see the important discussion of what constitutes faith that is alive and that is useful, i.e., faith that brings about salvation - )

No one knows if he will have a tomorrow in which to decide. Today signifies the present time of grace. Men today, as in the time of Moody and in the time of Hebrews and in the time of David and in the time of Moses, never know how long that time of grace for them will be.

In the psalm, the pronoun "**He**" refers back to God. In the context into which the writer of this epistle has put it, it refers back to Christ. This makes the Jehovah of the OT, the Messiah of the NT. It is **He** who is said to have spoken the words of the NT (James 2:14-26+s).

But My people did not listen to My voice and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices. Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! (Ps 81:11,13)

**Listening to God and obeying Him are matters of the will** ([See related note on harden below](#)) So is hardening the heart to Him, as Israel did. Paul warns that our hearts, or consciences, can become seared and insensitive, as skin does when it is badly burned (1Ti 4:2). The scar tissue that replaces the skin has very little feeling. I had a subspecialty in infectious disease and remember how I learned that lepers can not feel pain sensation as from a fire or cut and this can be extremely dangerous, even life-threatening. Similarly when the spiritual heart is hardened so that it can no longer sense the piercing of the sword of the Word of God and the Gospel, the situation is far worse than leprosy for this person is in grave danger of eternal separation from God in the Lake of fire which burns forever!

**Something very much like this happens to a conscience that is repeatedly disregarded.** **Today** lasts only as long as there is opportunity to decide-and as long as the **conscience** is sensitive to God. When a person's "today" is over, it is then too late. His heart gets harder every time he says "NO" to Jesus Christ or to any part of His truth or will. When the heart is soft, when the conscience is sensitive, when the intellect is convinced about Christ....that is the time to decide, when one is still pliable and responsive. Otherwise he will eventually become spiritually hard, stubborn, and insensitive. The Gospel will no longer have any appeal.

**Related Resources:**

- [What is verbal plenary inspiration?](#)
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- 

**Are You Listening?** - One summer an annoyed senior citizen from Richmond Heights, Missouri, hung up on President Reagan. He did it not just once but half a dozen times. The elderly gentleman didn't knowingly refuse to talk to the Chief Executive; he just didn't believe that the President was calling him. He was sure it was a prank. But the Southwestern Bell operator and a neighbor finally convinced him it was for real. As a result, the man had the privilege of chatting with Mr. Reagan for about fifteen minutes.

Many centuries ago a young Israelite named Samuel also received a call from a surprising source. He didn't realize who was calling, even when it was repeated. It came from one greater than a president. At first Samuel was perplexed, but when Eli told him God was trying to get through to him, he listened.

We Christians sometimes have the same response when God speaks to us. Deep down in our awareness we may have a thought or conviction that we cannot understand. At first, we may not recognize it as God's voice. Then, when we're convinced it's Him, we're surprised that He would want to speak to us. But God is personal. He wants us to know Him. He has spoken through His written Word, the Bible, and through the living Word, Christ. In addition, He indwells us in the person of the Holy Spirit who enables us to "hear His voice."

God is always trying to get through to us. That means we must always be listening. —M. R. De Haan II [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

There are two kinds of Christians—

Those who wait on the Lord and those who keep the Lord waiting.

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**Hebrews 3:7ff** - D. L. Moody called it the biggest blunder of his life. It happened on October 8, 1871, during a preaching series in Farwell Hall, Chicago. His text was "What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ." At the conclusion of the sermon Moody said he would give the people one week to make up their minds about Jesus. He then turned to Ira Sankey for a solo, and Sankey sang "Today the Saviour Calls." But by the third verse Sankey's voice was drowned out by the noise outside the hall. The great Chicago fire had begun, and the flames were even then sweeping toward the Hall. The clanging of the fire bells and the noise of the engines made it impossible to continue the meeting. In the years that followed, Moody wished that he had called for an immediate decision for Christ. ([Wiersbe, Warren: The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers. Moody, 1984](#))

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**Steven Cole** writes...

If you have been a Christian for very long, you have watched someone make a profession of faith in Christ, followed by dramatic changes in his life. It's exciting to see his new joy. But then a difficult trial hits. His faith is shaken. He stops coming to church and begins to avoid other Christians. Soon he is back into his old ways. And you wonder, "What happened? Was his conversion genuine? Can Christians lose their salvation?"

Jesus explained what I just described in the parable of the sower. He said that the seed of the gospel falls on four kinds of soils: the hard road; the thin soil over a hard rocky layer; the soil infested with thorns; and, the good soil. I just described the seed that fell on the rocky soil. In Jesus' words, "When they hear the word, immediately [they] receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away" (Mark 4:16, 17). Neither they nor the thorny ground persevere to bear fruit unto eternal life.

The author of Hebrews is concerned that his readers may be the rocky soil that withers under affliction or persecution. They were in danger of going back to a more comfortable life in their old Jewish religion because of the imminent threat of persecution in their newfound Christian faith. So as he concludes his comparison showing Jesus' superiority over Moses, he says that we are God's house, but then adds, "if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope" (He 3:6).

He continues by illustrating his point with a story from Jewish history that all of his readers knew well, the story of Israel in the wilderness. He quotes the latter half of Psalm 95, which in its entirety was the call to worship in

the Jewish synagogues. It tells about a people who had been redeemed from Egypt by applying the blood of the Passover lamb to their homes. They had been “baptized” into Moses through the cloud that enveloped them and through the Red Sea (1Co 10:2). They had eaten the heavenly manna and drank water from the rock. Seemingly, they were a “redeemed” people. Yet, as Paul states, “with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness” (1Co 10:5). As he goes on to say, “these things happened as examples,” so that we would not fall into their same sins.

The author of Hebrews uses this story to make the same point. He is warning us against the soul-destroying sin of hardness of heart. He is saying, To avoid hardness of heart, we must submit our hearts to God’s Word and God’s ways, especially in times of trial.

We can divide our text into four lessons:

## **1. To avoid hardness of heart, we must submit to God’s authority through His inspired Word.**

He begins, “Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,” and then quotes from Psalm 95. In 4:7, he mentions that David was the human author of the psalm, but here he emphasizes that it was really the Holy Spirit who spoke and who continues to speak to us (“says” is present tense). This means:

### **A. What the Bible says, God is saying to us now.**

Although the author isn’t directly speaking to the issue of the inspiration of Scripture, his attributing Psalm 95 to the Holy Spirit shows his implicit belief that God inspired Scripture. The Holy Spirit used human authors, but He is the divine voice behind all Scripture. As Peter explains, “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:21). Or, as Paul puts it, “All Scripture is God-breathed” (literally, 2 Tim. 3:16). Charles Hodge (Systematic Theology [Eerdmans], 1:154) wrote,

On this subject the common doctrine of the Church is, and ever has been, that inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of his mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God, that what they said God said.

The starting point for avoiding a hardened heart is to recognize and submit to God’s authority through His inspired Word. If we sit in judgment on the Word, criticizing the things we don’t agree with as outdated or in error, our hearts are challenging God. To learn from God, we must submit to His inspired Word.

### **B. We should learn from the biblical stories how to avoid the sins of those who lived before us.**

As Paul says, these things “were written for our instruction” (1Co 10:11). We disobey or ignore them to our own peril. The starting point is that we hear His voice (Heb. 3:7). “To hear” in Hebrew often has the nuance of not just hearing sounds, but also of obeying what we hear. In this regard, it is amazing how many Christians never read the Old Testament. They are unfamiliar with the many stories of triumph and tragedy that are recorded there for our instruction in the faith.

The story behind Psalm 95 (Heb. 3:7, 8, 9, 10, 11) is recorded in Exodus 17. Israel had just come out of Egypt through God’s mighty deliverance. They went three days into the wilderness and found no water, except bitter water. Did the people say, “Well, God didn’t go to all the trouble of delivering us from Egypt so that we would thirst to death in this desert”? No, they grumbled at Moses. He cried out to God, who showed him a tree. When he threw it into the water, it became sweet (Exod. 15:22-25). Exodus 16 tells how God provided manna to feed Israel each day.

You would think that after these gracious miracles, the people would have implicitly trusted God. But then you come to Exodus 17, when again they came to a place where there was no water. Rather than asking God to provide, the people quarreled with Moses and put God to the test. God instructed Moses to strike a rock with his staff, and water gushed forth. Moses named that place Massah (= a test) and Meribah (= a quarrel). The Greek translates the Hebrew, “as at Meribah,” into, “as when they provoked Me” (He 3:8a). It translates, “As in the day of Massah,” into, “as in the day of trial” (He 3:8b).

The last part of the Psalm, referring to God’s swearing in wrath that they would not enter His rest, probably refers to Numbers 14, when the people grumbled after the report of the spies. In spite of all that God had done, they were ready to stone Moses and return to Egypt, when God intervened. On that occasion, He swore that all that had grumbled against Him would die in the wilderness, and thus not enter the land of rest. Only Joshua and Caleb, who believed God, were spared. The point is, we should learn from their sins and do differently!



### **C. God's Word speaks directly to us today.**

Says is in the present tense. "Today, if you hear His voice..." This very day, God speaks to us through His Word! Today lends a sense of urgency to this message. It says, "Don't put off obedience to a more convenient time. Now is the day of salvation! Now is the time God is speaking to you. Don't ignore Him! You may not get another opportunity!"

We have to apply Scripture to our lives in line with proper rules of interpretation, or we may misapply it. Before we apply it to ourselves, we need to figure out what it was saying to the original hearers in their historical context. We need to compare Scripture with Scripture, and interpret the text in its context. For example, we are not under the Jewish laws of sacrifice or cleansing. But there are lessons in these things that do apply to us who have seen the fulfillment of them in Christ. To sum up this point: to avoid hardness of heart, we must come to God's Word with submissive hearts, ready to obey His will.

## **2. To avoid hardness of heart, we must make sure that our hearts are in proper relationship to God.**

Note He 3:8, "Do not harden your hearts," and, He 3:10, "They al-ways go astray in their hearts." In the Bible, the heart refers to our total inner being-the mind, the emotions, and the will. As Proverbs 4:23 warns us, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."

### **A. All sin begins in the heart.**

Jesus taught, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness" (Mark 7:21, 22). We tend to look at the outward man, but God looks on the heart (1Sa 16:7).

For example, we see a man in ministry, who preaches God's Word. He serves the church selflessly. He seems so kind and caring. Suddenly, he falls into adultery and we are shocked. How could this happen? We didn't see that in his heart, he was lusting after women and was not judging his sin. He was not walking in holiness before God in his thought life. What came out in his behavior stemmed from his heart. This is one of the most helpful lessons I have learned about the Christian walk: all sin begins in the heart. If you deal with your thought life before God, you stop sin at the root.

### **B. Our hardness of heart stirs up God's anger and incurs His severe judgment or discipline.**

God says that He was angry with the generation in the wilderness (He 3:8). This word has the nuance of being disgusted with, or loathing someone. He swore in His wrath (He 3:11). Wrath refers to God's settled, passionate opposition to sin. God is not passive when it comes to sin. If we profess to be His children, but have not truly repented of our sins (as was the case with many who perished in the wilderness), God's eternal wrath is upon us (John 3:36). If we are truly His children through faith in Christ, then Jesus bore God's wrath for us on the cross, so that we do not need to fear His eternal punishment. But we should fear His discipline, which is never pleasant (Heb. 12:6, 11). He disciplines His children in love, that we may share His holiness. But He can get pretty rough if He has to! If we judge our own hearts, we will avoid God's discipline (1Cor. 11:27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32).

Thus, to avoid hardness of heart, we must submit to the authority of God's Word and we must do business with God on the heart level.

## **3. To avoid hardness of heart, we must recognize and submit to God's ways.**

God says of Israel in the wilderness, "They did not know My ways" (He 3:10). He says (Isa. 55:8-9), "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'" The only way that we can know God's ways are as He has revealed them to us in the Scriptures.

### **A. We are responsible to learn and submit to God's ways.**

We can't plead ignorance. We can't protest, "But, God, I didn't know that You were working in that way!" These people in the wilderness should have known God's ways. But since they didn't know His ways, they didn't submit to them. The time to learn God's ways is before we get into a difficult situation (Prov. 1:20-33). If we neglect wisdom when we have opportunity to learn it, we will be overwhelmed when we get into a crisis without it.

### **B. God's ways sometimes reveal His mighty power, but miracles alone will not change a stubborn**



**heart.**

Those who went astray had seen some of the greatest miracles that God has ever done. They saw the ten plagues in Egypt. They witnessed the Red Sea part for them and close up again on Pharaoh's army. They had seen God provide water and manna already in the barren Sinai desert. God emphasizes that for forty years they saw His works (3:9). If miracles alone could soften hard hearts, these people should have been mighty in faith! But they weren't.

You hear people say, "If I just saw a miracle, I'd believe." Sometimes God does use miracles to bring people to saving faith. But often, those words are just a smokescreen. The skeptic is just making an excuse so that he can continue in his sin. The rich man in Hades pled with Abraham to send someone to his brothers and warn them, so that they would not come to that place of torment. Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." The rich man replied, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" Just let them see a miracle! But Abraham answered, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:27-31).

### **C. God's ways often involve situations of extreme trial for His people.**

Remember, His ways are not our ways. He often works in an upside down sort of way that seems strange to us. Again, His Word reveals His different ways to us so that we will recognize them when they actually happen to us.

Consider God's ways in delivering Israel from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. To pull this off, He needs a strong Jewish leader. Pick a man who has been raised in Pharaoh's household, trained in all of the wisdom of the Egyptians, a man powerful in word and deed (Acts 7:22). So far, so good! Then, have this man fail in a colossal manner and spend the next forty years of his life tending sheep out in the wilderness. Whoa! Then, when God calls him to his task, He will harden Pharaoh's heart repeatedly, so that he will make the Israelites' task harder and will refuse to let them go.

Once he lets them go, march Israel to the Red Sea, where they're helplessly trapped for Pharaoh's strong army. Once they get through this crisis, lead them out into the barren desert, where there is no water. When they find water, make it bitter water. Rather than lead them directly into the Promised Land, an eleven-day journey (Deut. 1:2), take them on the "scenic route," a forty-year journey through the barren desert. That was God's way with His chosen people! He wanted to teach them to trust Him and learn warfare (Exod. 13:17).

Regarding Canaan, God could have sent a plague to wipe out the wicked Canaanites. Israel then could have moved in and lived happily ever after. Instead, God required Israel to fight many difficult battles to get rid of the Canaanites. Later, when Israel needed a prophet, God's way was to make a woman barren. There were many women with children in Israel, but God's way was to bring a woman to desperation, where she knew that she could not produce a son. When she cried out to God, He gave her Samuel, who became His prophet (1 Samuel 1 & 2). Later, when God wanted a man after His heart to be on Israel's throne, He didn't pick the man whom Samuel would have picked. He chose the youngest of Jesse's sons, a teenage shepherd, named David. Then, rather than putting him on the throne immediately, God had his chosen one run for years, in fear of his life, from the mad King Saul.

I could multiply examples, because they are all through the Bible. God's ways usually involve bringing His people to the end of themselves, so that they know that their trust must be in Him alone. If we do not know His ways, when we are put in the wilderness with no water, or when we are barren with no strength to produce any-thing for God, we will be prone to grumble, as Israel did. So we must learn to know His ways through His Word.

### **D. When we are confronted with God's ways, we have the choice of submitting to Him or grumbling and going back to the world.**

Psalms 95:1-3 reads, "O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, let us shout joyfully to Him with Ps. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods." The warning of our text comes after seven verses of praise. The choice is clear: rejoice in the Lord by faith, or grumble and turn back to the world (Egypt).

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians demonstrates the proper response to God's ways. He was in prison in Rome on false charges. Fellow Christian leaders in Rome were criticizing him and preaching out of envy. As God's great apostle to the Gentiles, Paul easily could have complained about his unfair, difficult circumstances. And yet he wrote, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing" (Phil. 2:15). The words "rejoice"

or “joy” occur over 15 times in this short letter. It’s not a coincidence that the Greek word for “attitude” also occurs ten times. Our attitude of submission and trust in God will lead us into joy, even in the midst of great trials. An attitude of pride and self-centeredness leads to grumbling, where we resist God’s ways and turn back to the world.

#### **E. To refuse to submit to God’s ways is to put God to the test.**

God says, “your fathers tried Me by testing Me” (Je 3:9). At the root of testing God is the sin of unbelief (which we will examine in more detail next week). When God promises something and we face trials that seem to negate His promise, we again are faced with a choice: Is God faithful to His word or not? Granted, we’re in a barren desert with no water. Granted, there are huge giants that live in the land. In ourselves, we are completely unable to deal with these problems. Will we trust in God and His promises, or will we allow the problems to cause us to grumble and not take God at His word? If we do not submit to God’s ways and trust in His word, we put Him to the test, which is normally not a good thing to do! (There are rare exceptions; see Mal. 3:10.)

Thus, to avoid hardness of heart, we must submit to God’s authority through His Word. We must make sure that our hearts are properly submitted to Him. We must recognize and submit to His ways of dealing with us. Finally,

#### **4. When we submit to God’s Word and His ways, we enter into His rest.**

We will deal with this more in chapter 4. But for now, note 3:11. God’s oath refers to His settled determination that those who rebelled in the wilderness would not enter the land of Canaan (Num. 14:21-36). When God swears in His wrath, we had better believe that He means business! There is no rest for the soul that is under God’s wrath!

God’s rest had an initial reference to Israel’s settling into the land of promise, but it also has a spiritual fulfillment, as we’ll see in chapter 4. Leon Morris (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. by Frank Gaebeline [Zondervan], 12:35) says that God’s rest refers to “a place of blessing where there is no more striving but only relaxation in the presence of God and in the certainty that there is no cause for fear.” God’s spiritual rest comes to the person who “does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly” (Ro 4:5). “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ro. 5:1).

Conclusion - One of God’s ways that is most unlike our ways is the cross. Jesus, the sinless Son of God died as the sacrifice for ungodly sinners. God justifies the ungodly through faith alone. That runs counter to human pride. Have you trusted in Jesus’ blood alone as your hope for heaven? Is your heart in submission to God’s Word and His ways, especially when those ways involve a trip through the barren wilderness? Your heart is either hardening against God because you are resisting His sovereign ways with you, or it is growing softer toward God because you are submitting to His Word and His ways. Your response to trials reveals your heart. Send down spiritual roots, deep into the fertile, moist soil of God’s Word, so that you can endure when the hot sun of affliction beats down on you!

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Since God’s Word does not all apply directly to us, how can we be sure that we are applying it properly?
2. Since the sinful heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9), how can we know when our hearts are properly submissive to God?
3. Why do God’s ways often involve trials for His people? Is it wrong to pray for these trials to be lifted? Why/why not?
4. Why is grumbling about our circumstances a serious sin? What does it really reflect?

([Hebrews 3:7-11 A Warning Against Hardness of Heart](#))

**Hebrews 3:8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS. (NASB: Lockman)**

**Greek:** me sklerunete (2PAAS) tas kardias humon hos en to parapikrasmo kata ten hemeran tou peirasmou en te eremo (this is almost a direct quote of Lxx of Ps 95:8)

**Amplified:** Do not harden your hearts, as [happened] in the rebellion [of Israel] and their provocation and embitterment [of Me] in the day of testing in the wilderness, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** Don't harden your hearts against him as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested God's patience in the wilderness. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** do not harden your hearts in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** do not go on hardening your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of the putting to the test in the wilderness

**Young's Literal:** DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,

#### DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS: me sklerunete (2PAAS) tas kardias humon:

- He 3:12,13; Exodus 8:15; 1Sa 6:6; 2 Ki 17:14; 2Chr 30:8; 36:13; Neh 9:16; Job 9:4; Proverbs 28:14; 29:1; Jeremiah 7:26; Ezekiel 3:7, 8, 9; Da 5:20; Zech 7:11,12; Matthew 13:15; Acts 19:9; Romans 2:5,6)
- [Procrastination; Self-will and Stubbornness](#)
- Hebrews 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### SPIRITUAL ARTERIOSCLEROSIS!

Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the United States with some 635,260 deaths per year which is 23% of all deaths. Every year about 2.8 million Americans go into eternity, most because of hardening of their arteries. Of that number only God knows how many enter a Christ-less eternity because of spiritual hardening of their hearts but if we use Jesus' assessment in Mt 7:13+ that "the way is broad that leads to **destruction** ([apoleia](#) = not annihilation, not loss of existence but eternal loss of purpose), and there are **many** who enter through it" then the truth is that many of these 2.8 million enter into eternal punishment! This is a horrible thought to me as a physician, because I have seen patients cured again and again from life-threatening illnesses because they willingly accepted the doctor's recommended medication (I've seen a few refuse it too). And yet hundreds of thousands of that 2.8 million (many of whom accepted the doctor's medicine) refused the only "medicine" of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see [The Romans Road to Salvation](#)) that could have allowed them to live forever! This is tragic! And that is why the writer of Hebrews is so focused on "Today!" Take the "medicine" today before you die physically and spiritually forever and ever! Paul writes

"AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU";  
behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, **now** is "THE DAY OF SALVATION" (2 Cor 6:2)

**Do not harden your hearts** - If you are reading this commentary as an intellectual exercise and do not know Christ as Savior, then beware for it can be dangerous to your spiritual health if you read it and steadfastly refuse to heed it! That is what was happening among some of the Jewish hearers of the Gospel of grace. It was like the proverbial saying "like water on a duck's back." Or like the sobering words of James to his readers/hearers to "**prove** ([present imperative](#) - commands this as one's habitual practice which necessitates dependence on [the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves **DOERS** of the word, and not merely **HEARERS** (WHY IS THIS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY?) who delude ([paralogizomai](#) in [present tense](#) = they are continually self-deceived. A deceived person by definition DOES NOT even know they are deceived!) themselves. (James 1:22+).

**Spurgeon on do not harden your hearts** - Do not provoke your God by your quibbling, or your murmuring, or your idolatry; act not as those unbelievers did who died in the wilderness. You are His house. Give Him rest; do not provoke Him. If you belong to Him, be holy; do not grieve Him. If you are His house, be not defiled; surely He should dwell in a holy place. A common way of provoking God and hardening the heart is that indicated by the context. "Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of testing in the wilderness." That is to say, by unbelief, by saying, "God cannot save me. He is not able to forgive me; the blood of Christ cannot cleanse me; I am too black a sinner for God's mercy to deal with." That is a copy of what the Israelites said: "God cannot take us into Canaan; He cannot conquer the sons of Anak." Though you may look upon unbelief as a slight sin, it is the sin of sins. I once preached in a certain city, and I was the guest of a gentleman who treated me with great kindness, but I noticed on the third occasion of my preaching that he suddenly left the room. One of my friends followed him out of the place and said to him, "Why have you left the service?" "Well," said he, "I believe I should have been converted altogether if I had stopped any longer, for I felt such an influence coming over me. But it would not pay. You know what I am; it would not pay." Many persons are of that kind. They are shaped for a while according to the earnest word they hear, but it is all in vain. The dog returns to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. This is to harden your heart and provoke the Lord.

**Harden** ([4645](#)) ([skleruno](#) from [skleros](#) = hard, dried up, stiff) means to make hard or stiff and figuratively to render stubborn. Notice that **harden** is in the [active voice](#) which signifies **personal choice or a choice of one's will** He is saying don't make a choice of

your will to stubbornly resist God's will!

The Greek construction of **Harden** with a negative particle ("me sklerunete") = forbids the continuance of an action already going on. The largely Hebrew readers of this epistle were **already hardening** their hearts just like their forefathers had done. The writer draws their attention to this tragic example which should have cut his readers to the quick. He reminds them of what happened to their ancestors who kept hardening their hearts...they died in the wilderness, most of them restless not only in this life but in the life to come!

**Spurgeon** commenting on **Ps 95:8** writes

**"If ye will hear, learn to fear also.** The sea and the land obey him, do not prove more obstinate than they!

*"Yield to his love who round you now*

*The bands of a man would east."*

We cannot soften our hearts, but we can harden them, and the consequences will be fatal. Today is too good a day to be profaned by the hardening of our hearts against our own mercies. While mercy reigns let not obduracy rebel. "As in the provocations, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness" (or, "like Meribah, like the day of Massah in the wilderness"). Be not wilfully, wantonly, repeatedly, obstinately rebellious. Let the example of that unhappy generation serve as a beacon to you; do not repeat the offences which have already more than enough provoked the Lord. God remembers men's sins, and the more memorably so when they are committed by a favoured people, against frequent warnings, in defiance of terrible judgments, and in the midst of superlative mercies; such sins write their record in marble. Reader, this verse is for you, for you even if you can say, "He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture." Do not seek to turn aside the edge of the warning; thou hast good need of it, give good heed to it.

**SAD ILLUSTRATION** - An old man, one day taking a child on his knee, entreated him to seek God now -- to pray to him, and to love him; when the child, looking up at him, asked, "But why do not you seek God?" The old man, deeply affected, answered, "I would, child; but my heart is hard -- my heart is hard." -- Arvine's Anecdotes.

**Heart** (2588)(kardia) in the NT does not refer to the physical organ that pumps blood but always refers (figuratively) to the seat and center of human life. The **heart** is the center of one's personality, and as such it controls one's intellect, emotions, and will. If one has a believing heart, such a heart is the wellspring of this person's spiritual life. You do what you do because you believe what you believe in your heart. As Jesus taught "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Mt 12:34).

**THOUGHT** - What fills your heart as you read these notes? You can know by what has come out of your mouth over the past few days. Remember that "the good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good (agathos)" (Luke 6:45+).

The **heart** is a key word in Hebrews 3-4 - Heb 3:8, 10, 12, 14 Heb 4:7, 12 - Six of the ten uses are in these two chapters! Why would this be the case? Clearly the heart of their problem is their heart! Other uses = Heb 8:10, 10:16, 10:22, 13:9.

**Hardening one's heart** suggests a cruel or unfeeling attitude. In Hebrew thought the **heart** was the center of the whole personality, including the intellect and will. Therefore **"to harden one's heart"** is to refuse to listen to or understand what someone is saying. Do not be stubborn is often rendered idiomatically; for example, "do not stop up your ears," or "do not shout 'No' to what is said," or "do not close the door of your mind."

**Hardness of heart** originates in unbelief leading to contempt for God and in turn to distinct behavioral patterns: negativism, grumbling, quarreling, disobedience, bitterness.

The one who tests God today does so for the same reason as did the Israelites in Moses day---to put Him off, because they love their sin, their own way, their own plans too much to give them up for God's. (Rebellion is the heart issue & it is as the sin of divination 1Sa15:23!)

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.

**Sidney J. Harris** wrote that "Once we assuage our conscience by calling something a "necessary evil," it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil.

## THE DANGER AND DECEITFULNESS

## OF A HARDENED HEART

**How does one harden their heart?** It's a process that occurs gradually as we complain about God's work and ignore His Word (and sin step by step, each step taking us further and further from God's goal for His children, our holiness!). The Israelites complained about the way He led them and the way He fed them (grumbling and sinning over and over). They **heard** God's Word and **deliberately disobeyed**. This is called **testing God**. This is what David prayed against - Keep back Thy servant from presumptive sins! Why? Because eventually they will rule over you! (Ps 19:13+, cf Paul's strong warning commands in Ro 6:12-13+ which are possible to obey because of Ro 6:11+ and Ro 8:13+) When you see God at work and you complain instead of rejoice, when you hear His Word and deliberately disobey it--you are **testing** Him. It's like a little child just daring mom or dad to discipline him (Heb 12:5-11+). The great tragedy is that when you (I) harden your (my) heart, you (I) will miss God's best for your (my) life. You (I) will miss what Jesus came to give us -- life, even abundant (overflowing) life! Are you experiencing abundant life in Christ, the Holy One of God? If not it could be because your heart is subtly, slowly being hardened to the beauty of Christ and His cleansing, life giving Word of Truth (Eph 5:26+). You are believing lies and forgetting that sin only gives passing pleasure (Heb 11:25b+) but can bring lasting pain! The people of Israel saw the miracles, while you and I have experienced the greatest miracle, the new birth (Jn 3:3+). They heard the messages, even as we have heard the living and active, convicting Word (Heb 4:12-13+), His Word which is our very life (Deut 32:47+)! They were fed day after day, even as we have fed on His Word (Mt 4:4+, 1Pe 2:2+). But in a period of 40 years, the entire first generation died, except for Joshua and Caleb. Do not be deceived (stop being deceived) beloved brethren (Jas 1:16), Sin is deceptive (Heb 3:13b+) and will harden your heart. God is not mocked, for whatever you sow, you will reap and it will be corruption (rotting of your soul) if you (I) feed the rotten fallen flesh (Gal 6:7,8+). What should we do to prevent a hard heart? Remember! Remember the way you felt when you first fell in love with Jesus as by His Spirit He wooed you into unbreakable covenant union with Him. Repent! Ask God to give you the gift of repentance (Ro 2:4+). Then do the deeds you did at first when Jesus was your first love (Rev 2:4,5+). Listen to God's Word and respond to it tenderly as the Spirit enables you. Watch God's work and respond to it thankfully. **Stop complaining** and **disobeying** and wantonly, presumptively sinning! Worship the Lord in spirit and truth and keep a **tender heart** before Him. As an aside when we take God and His provisions for granted, we become less thankful and less responsive to Him. Heed the warning: Keep your heart open to God's Word and obey Him. Or as Solomon wrote and sadly failed to practice "Watch over (GUARD) your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." (Proverbs 4:23+). A guarded heart is a great preventative to a hardened heart!

**William Gouge** (quoted by Spurgeon) has this note '**Harden not your heart**. -- Heart is ascribed to reasonable creatures, to signify sometimes the whole soul, and sometimes the several faculties appertaining to the soul.

- It is frequently put for the whole soul, and that for the most part when it is set alone; as where it is said, "Serve the Lord with all your heart", Deuteronomy 10:12KJV.
- For that principal part of the soul which is called the mind or understanding. "I gave my heart to know wisdom", Ecclesiastes 1:17. In this respect darkness and blindness are attributed to the heart, Ephesians 6:18, Romans 1:21.
- For the will: as when heart and soul are joined together, the two essential faculties of the soul are meant, namely, the mind and will: soul put for the mind, heart for the will "Serve the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul", Deuteronomy 10:12KJV.
- For the memory. "I have hid thy word in my heart", saith the prophet, Ps 119:11. The memory is that faculty wherein matters are laid up and hid.
- For the conscience. It is said that "David's heart smote him", that is, his conscience, 1Samuel 24:5 2Samuel 24:10. Thus is heart taken, 1John 3:20, 21.
- For the affections: as where it is said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind", Matthew 22:37. By the mind is meant the understanding faculty; by the soul, the will; by the heart, the affections. Here in this text the heart is put for the whole soul, even for mind, will, and affections. For blindness of mind, stubbornness of will, and stupidity of affections go together.

**AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS: hōs ên tōi parapikrasmōi ten hemeran tou peiras mou en te eremo:**

- **AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED** Numbers 14:11,22,23; Deuteronomy 9:22, 23, 24; Ps 78:56
- **IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS** Exodus 17:7; Deut 6:16; Ps 78:18; 106:14; 1Cor 10:9
- Hebrews 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Spurgeon** - All the histories of Scripture are written for our examples (1Cor 10:6,11, Ro 15:4), but especially the story of the Israelites in the wilderness. It is given to us at a length far exceeding the value of the narrative, except it be intended for purposes of spiritual instruction, for it occupies four books of the Old Testament, and those by no means short ones. These things were written

that we might see ourselves in the Israelites as in a mirror, and so might be warned of dangers common to us and to them, and be guided to a worthier use of the privileges we enjoy.

**Provoked (parapikrasmos)** is used only in the LXX, in the present verse and in verse 15. **Parapikrasmos** means embitterment, exasperation. This word is a translation of the Hebrew "Meribah" (Nu 20:13, 24; 27:14; Ps 81:7) which means conflict, contention, strife or rebellion or quarrel. For the simple verb **pikraino**, to make bitter, see Col 3:19

The reference in this verse is to [Massah and Meribah](#) in (Exodus 17:7+) -

"And he named the place **Massah** (Lxx substitutes peirasmos) and **Meribah** (Lxx substitutes loidoresis = railing, abuse, reproach) because of the quarrel (Hebrew = riybah = strife, a controversy, a contention. The primary idea = that of a quarrel or dispute) of the sons of Israel, and because they tested (Hebrew = nasah = Testing which shows what someone is really like!; ) the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

**Trial** - Literally "the trial" where **"the"** (definite article) identifies this trial as a very specific event, the episode in Exodus 17.

**Trial (peirasmos)** means simply to test or prove, and has no negative connotation (Click study of peirasmos). Whether it becomes a proof of righteousness or an inducement to evil depends on our response. God tested them & they in turn "tested" Him. Instead of trusting God in the midst of adverse circumstances, they demanded that He show His hand in order to demonstrate to them that He was in their midst to help them.

**Wuest** - The writer recalls to them the provocation Israel caused God by its hardness of heart on account of the lack of water at Rephidim, when the people murmured against Moses (Ex. 17:1-7). The word **"temptation" (peirasmos)** is preceded here by the definite article, pointing to a particular temptation. The Greek word means in its primary usage, "to put to the test." Israel put God to the test by asking, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" Instead of trusting God in the midst of adverse circumstances, they demanded that He show His hand in order to demonstrate to them that He was in their midst to help them.

Hebrews 3:9 [WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED](#) Me BY TESTING Me, AND [SAW](#) MY [WORKS](#) FOR FORTY [YEARS](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** hou epeirasan (3PAAI) oi pateres humon en dokimasia kai eidon (3PAAI) ta erga mou

**Amplified:** Where your fathers tried [My patience] and tested [My forbearance] and found I stood their test, and they saw My works for forty years. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** ([Westminster Press](#))

**NLT:** That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today you must listen to his voice. There your ancestors tried my patience, even though they saw my miracles for forty years. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** do not harden your hearts in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested me, proved me, and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said they always go astray in their heart, and ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** when your fathers put me on trial when they put me to the test for the purpose of approving me should I meet the test, and saw my works forty years. ([Eerdmans](#))

**Young's Literal:**

**WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED ME BY TESTING: hou epeirasan hoi pateres humon epeirasan (3PAAI) en dokimasiat**

Hebrews 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Fathers** ([3962](#)) (**pater**) refers in context not to the famous patriarchs but the people of Israel in general in Moses' day.

**Where - Where?** Answer = "the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water" (Dt 8:15)

This quote would certainly seem to support he is speaking most directly to ethnic Jews who should be very familiar with these passages. -



Numbers 14:22 "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the **test** these ten times and have not listened to My voice, 23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.

Deuteronomy 6:16 "You shall not put the LORD your God to the **test**, as you tested Him at Massah.

Ps 78:18 And in their heart they put God to the **test** by asking food according to their desire.

Ps 106:14 (They) craved intensely in the wilderness, and **tempted** God in the desert.

**Tried** (3985) (**peirazo** from the noun **peira** = test from **peíro** = perforate, pierce through to test durability of things) is a morally neutral word simply meaning "to test". Whether the test is for a good (as it proved to be in Heb 11:17-**note**) or evil (Mt 4:1 "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to **be tempted** by the devil") depends on the intent of the one giving the test and also on the response of the one tested.

**Testing** (1381) (**dokimazo** from **dokimos** = tested, proved or approved, tried as metals by fire and thus purified from **dechomai** = to accept, receive) means to assay, to test, to prove, to put to the test, to make a trial of, to verify, to discern to approve. **Dokimazo** involves not only testing but determining the genuineness or value of an event or object. That which has been tested is demonstrated to be genuine and trustworthy.

They "put Me to the test to see what evil or good there is in Me when they put Me to the test for the purpose of approving Me should I meet the test." What crass, blatant, presumptuous (stupid) unbelief!

What an insult this flings into the face of an all-loving, all-powerful God. The first-century readers of this letter are warned not to take this attitude toward God...to do so would be to end up missing His rest.

Proving a thing worthy or not, genuine or not. They were not content with God's promise, and miracles but demanded more proof of God.

**Spurgeon** comments...

As far as they could do so they **tempted** God to change his usual way, and to do their sinful bidding, and though he cannot be tempted of evil, and will never yield to wicked requests, yet their intent was the same, and their guilt was none the less. God's way is perfect, and when we would have him alter it to please us, we are guilty of tempting him; and the fact that we do so in vain, while it magnifies the Lord's holiness, by no means excuses our guilt. We are in most danger of this sin in times of need, for then it is that we are apt to fall into unbelief, and to demand a change in those arrangements of providence which are the transcript of perfect holiness and infinite wisdom. Not to acquiesce in the will of God is virtually to tempt him to alter his plans to suit our imperfect views of how the universe should be governed.

Proved me. They put the Lord to needless tests, demanding new miracles, fresh interpositions, and renewed tokens of his presence. Do not we also peevishly require frequent signs of the Lord's love other than those which every hour supplies? Are we not prone to demand specialities, with the alternative secretly offered in our hearts, that if they do not come at our bidding we will disbelieve? True, the Lord is very condescending, and frequently grants us marvellous evidences of his power, but we ought not to require them. Steady faith is due to one who is so constantly kind. After so many proofs of his love, we are ungrateful to wish to prove him again, unless it be in those ways of his own appointing, in which he has said, "Prove me now." If we were for ever testing the love of our wife or husband, and remained unconvinced after years of faithfulness, we should wear out the utmost human patience. Friendship only flourishes in the atmosphere of confidence, suspicion is deadly to it: shall the Lord God, true and immutable, be day after day suspected by his own people? Will not this provoke him to anger?

**Spurgeon quoting Henry Melville** - Though God cannot be tempted with evil he may justly be said to be tempted whenever men, by being dissatisfied with his dealings, virtually ask that he will alter those dealings, and proceed in a way more congenial to their feelings. If you reflect a little, you will hardly fail to perceive, that in a very strict sense, this and the like may be called tempting God. Suppose a man to be discontented with the appointments of providence, suppose him to murmur and to repine at what the Almighty allots him to do or to bear; is he not to be charged with the asking God to change his purposes? And what is this if it is not tempting God, and striving to induce him to swerve from his plans, though every one of those plans has been settled by Infinite Wisdom?

Or again, if any one of us, notwithstanding the multiplied proofs of Divine lovingkindness, doubt or question whether or not God does indeed love him, of what is he guilty, if not of tempting the Lord, seeing that he



solicits God to the giving additional evidence, as though there was a deficiency, and challenges him to a fresh demonstration of what he has already abundantly displayed? This would be called tempting amongst men. If a child were to show by his actions that he doubted or disbelieved the affection of his parents, he would be considered as striving to extract from them new proofs, by asking them to evince their love more, though they may already have done as much as in wisdom and in justice they ought to do. And this is clearly tempting them, and that too in the ordinary sense of the term. In short, unbelief of every kind and every degree may be said to tempt God. For not to believe upon the evidence which he has seen fit to give, is to provoke him to give more, offering our possible assent if proof were increased as an inducement to him to go beyond what his wisdom has prescribed. And if in this, and the like sense, God may be tempted, what can be more truly said of the Israelites, than that they tempted God in Massah? ... We are perhaps not accustomed to think of unbelief or murmuring as nothing less than a tempting God, and therefore, we do not attach to what is so common, its just degree of heinousness. It is so natural to us to be discontented whenever God's dealings are not just what we like, to forget what has been done for us as soon as our wishes seem thwarted, to be impatient and fretful under every new cross, that we are scarcely conscious of committing a sin, and much less one more than usually aggravated. Yet we cannot be dissatisfied with God's dealings, and not be virtually guilty of tempting God. It may seem a harsh definition of a slight and scarcely avoidable fault, but nevertheless it is a true definition. You cannot mistrust God, and not accuse him of want either of power or of goodness. You cannot repine, no, not even in thought, without virtually telling him that his plans are not the best, nor his dispensations the wisest which he might have appointed in respect of yourselves. So that your fear, or your despondency, or your anxiety, in circumstances of perplexity, or peril, are nothing less than the calling upon God to depart from his fixed course -- a suspicion, or rather an assertion that he might proceed in a manner more worthy of himself, and therefore, a challenge to him to alter his dealings if he would prove that he possesses the attributes which he claims. You may not intend thus to accuse or to provoke God whenever you murmur, but your murmuring does all this, and cannot fail to do it. You cannot be dissatisfied without virtually saying that God might order things better; you cannot say that he might order things better without virtually demanding that he change his course of acting, and give other proofs of his Infinite perfections. --Henry Melvill.

**Spurgeon quoting John Calvin** - Your fathers tempted me. There are two ways of interpreting the words which follow. As tempting God is nothing else than yielding to a diseased and unwarrantable craving after proof of his power, we may consider the verse as connected throughout, and read, They tempted me and proved me, although they had already seen my work. God very justly complains, that they should insist upon new proof, after his power had been already amply testified by undeniable evidences. There is another meaning, however, that may be given to the term "proved", -- according to which, the meaning of the passage would run as follows: -- Your fathers tempted me in asking where God was, notwithstanding all the benefits I had done them; and they proved me, that is, they had actual experience of what I am, inasmuch as I did not cease to give them open proofs of my presence, and consequently they saw my work.

**John MacArthur** makes the point that "Most people do not need more proof that God is real or that Jesus is His Son and the Savior. They need to hate and repent of their sin and to commit themselves to Him. A God who is continually tested will never be accepted. The one who tests God today does so for the same reason as did the Israelites in Moses day—to put Him off, because they love their sin, their own way, their own plans too much to give them up for God's." (MacArthur, J. Hebrews. Chicago: Moody Press)

**Wuest** - The Greek words translated "**tried**" and "**testing**," are *peirazomai* and *dokimazo* respectively. They are an interesting contrast. *Peirazomai* means "to put to the test to see what good or evil may be in a person." *Dokimazo* means "to put to the test for the purpose of approving the person if he meets the test." The Greek here is "put Me to the test to see what evil or good there is in Me when they put Me to the test for the purpose of approving Me should I meet the test." What crass unbelief is shown in such a procedure. What an insult it flings into the face of an all-loving, all-powerful God. The first-century readers of this letter are warned not to take that attitude toward God. They were being bitterly persecuted because of their professed faith in Messiah and the New Testament. But they should trust God in the midst of it all and not harden their hearts against Him.

#### AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS: eidon (3PAAI) ta erga mou tesserakonta etc:

- **And saw** - Exodus 19:4; 20:22; Deut 4:3,9; 11:7; 29:2; Joshua 23:3; 24:7; Luke 7:22
- **Forty years** - Numbers 14:33; Deuteronomy 8:2,4; Joshua 5:6; Amos 2:10; Acts 7:36; 13:8
- Hebrews 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**And saw My works for forty years** - Moses records "Your eyes have seen what the LORD has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, the LORD your God has destroyed them from among you." (Dt 4:3) **Moses** reminds the Israelites that for forty years "the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. (Exodus 13:21) And they saw manna from heaven (Exodus 16:4-5) and water from a rock (Exodus 17:6) **Moses** records God's words to Israel declaring that 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. (Exodus 19:4)

The old saying is seeing is believing, but that was definitely not the case with Israel (and often not the case in my life!) They perceived and understood and even personally experienced God's works over the 40 years of wilderness wandering! Despite God's miraculous works and His faithfulness to them, the people still failed to commit themselves to Him in faith. The heart of their problem was their heart! As Jeremiah 17:9 says "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" Indeed, who? Ultimately, only the omniscient God!

**THOUGHT** - Is this verse not dripping with divine grace? Wandering in the wilderness because of their sin of unbelief and yet God still demonstrated His power, provision (manna, shoes not wearing out) and glory (guiding them by day and protecting them by night) to them during this time! This is a good reminder for all of us because we all sin daily and yet God does not reflexly jettison His grace from our lives (praise God)! Yes, He might discipline us but even that is a manifestation of His grace that we might share His glory and experience the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:5-11). But God's heart tends toward grace. Where sin abounds, grace super-abounds!

**Spurgeon** comments on **saw My works** - They tested him again and again, through out forty years, though each time his work was conclusive evidence of his faithfulness. Nothing could convince them for long.

"They saw his wonders wrought,  
And then his praise they sung;  
But soon his works of power forgot,  
And murmured with their tongue."

"Now they believe his word,  
While rocks with rivers flow;  
Now with their lusts provoke the Lord,  
And he reduced them low."

Fickleness is bound up in the heart of man, unbelief is our besetting sin; we must for ever be seeing, or we waver in our believing. This is no mean offence, and will bring with it no small punishment.

**Shortly before his death** "Moses summoned all Israel and said to them,

**"You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes** in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land; 3 the great trials which your eyes have seen, those **great signs and wonders**. 4 "Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know (HERE IS THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S FREE WILL - JUST KNOW THAT GOD IS ALWAYS GOOD AND NEVER UNJUST!), nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. 5 And I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot." (Deut 29:2-5)

It may be no coincidence that God gave Israel 40 years to repent after Christ's crucifixion before sending the Roman army under Titus (AD70) to destroy Jerusalem.

**John Owen** (quoted by Spurgeon) comments on forty years noting that...

Forty years. To understand this passage we must bear in mind the event referred to. The same year in which the people of Israel came forth from Egypt, they were distressed for water at Rephidim, (Exodus 17:1); and the place had two names given to it, Massah and Meribah, because the people tempted God and chided with Moses. The Lord did not swear then that they should not enter into the land of Canaan; but this was in the following year, after the return of the spies. (Numbers 14:20-38.) And God said then that they had tempted him "ten times"; that is, during the short time since their deliverance from Egypt. It was after ten temptations that God deprived them of the promised land.

Bearing in mind these facts, we shall be able to see the full force of the passage. The "provocation" or contention, and "temptation" refer clearly to the latter instance, as recorded in Numbers 14:1-45 because it

was then that God swore that the people should not enter into his rest. The people's conduct was alike in both instances.

To connect "forty years" with grieved, was the work of the Punctuists, and this mistake the Apostle corrected; and it is to be observed that he did not follow in this instance the Septuagint, in which the words are arranged as divided by the Masorites. Such a rendering as would correspond with the Hebrew is as follows, --

"Today when ye hear his voice, 8. Harden not your hearts us in the provocation, In the day of temptation in the wilderness. 9. When your fathers tempted me, they proved me And saw my works forty years: 10. I was therefore offended with that generation and said, Always do they go astray in heart, And they have not known my ways; 11. So that I swore in my wrath, `They shall by no means enter into my rest.'"

The meaning of the ninth verse (**Psalm 95:9 quoted here in Hebrews 3:9**) is, that when the children of Israel tempted God, they proved him, i.e., found out by bitter experience how great his displeasure was, and saw his works or his dealings with them forty years. He retained them in the wilderness during that period until the death of all who disbelieved his word at the return of the spies; he gave them this proof of his displeasure. -- John Owen, of Thruxington, 1853.