

## **"Today, If You Will Hear His Voice ..."**

*"Today if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation ..."* (Psa. 95:7ff; Heb. 3:15). This is the second time this passage from Psalms 95:7ff is found in Hebrews three. This provocation resulted with God telling Israel that they *"shall not enter into my rest."*

Five questions follow this citation to establish the warning: *"We are become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end"* (3:14). The first question was, *"For who, when they heard, did provoke?"* The second question, *"Nay, did not all they that came out of Egypt by Moses?"*, is the answer to the first. Two observations are appropriate just here. First, the provoking and then God's words, *"they shall not enter my rest,"* occurred after they left the land of Egypt. God had earlier decreed they should be delivered from Egyptian bondage. He sent Moses to them with the message that He would fulfill the promise He had given to Abraham that He would make of him a great nation and would give a land unto his posterity. God did not promise them rest in Canaan all the while knowing they would never reach it. LESSON FOR US: We may begin our journey to God's rest for us with the same assurance as these, having God's promise of eternal salvation. Yet, the exhortation must not be forgotten: we must hold fast to be a partaker of Christ.

A second observation is that the phrase *"did not all of them provoke him that came out of Egypt"* illustrates that this "all" was not universal. There were two exceptions (Joshua and Caleb) but by and large, there was wholesale displeasure toward them on the part of God. The third and fourth questions constitute another question answered by the following question. *"And with whom was he displeased forty years? was it not with them that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?"* (3:17). The final act of provocation of Israel (thought many provocations had preceded it) that caused God to swear they should not enter his rest, was their believing the report of the ten spies: *"We are not able to take the land"*. This constituted unbelief on their part and brought about God's irreversible decree, *"Ye shall not enter my rest,"* that they should wander in the wilderness for forty years until all that generation was dead. Of course, their provocations continued again and again during those forty years of wandering and many died, not of natural causes, but of calamities visited upon them by their continual provocation of God. One consideration is appropriate. While we may not enter God's rest, that fate will not be determined until we die. So long as we live, even though we may have sinned, we can return, confess our sins and have hope of heavenly rest God has promised us. That was not true with Israel. For forty

years many of these wandered, knowing they would never enter the promised land, no matter how much they plead with God.

The fifth question contains both question and answer: "*And to whom sware he that they should not enter his rest, but to them that were disobedient?*" (3:18). And as the writer concludes, "*and we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief*" (3:19). Why did Israel not enter Canaan? Because of disobedience. Why did Israel not enter Canaan? Because of unbelief. Notice how disobedience is equated as unbelief. Why is it that men do not discern that if disobedience equals unbelief; then obedience must equal true belief?

A lesson is to be learned right here. While one may obey and yet disbelieve; none can disobey and be regarded as a believer. Words from James are appropriate: "*Shew me that faith apart from thy works and I, by my works, will show thee my faith*" (James 2:18). NEXT: "Let Us Fear ..."

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