

Text: Heb 3.11

If you are following the Discipleship Journal Bible reading plan that I am, two additional “hardening” passages might have caught your eye this week.

- Psalm 95 (of course quoted in our passage)
- 2 Cor 3.12-18

It seems that the Lord wants us to keep thinking on this theme.

We’ve talked about the possibility of hardening, as evidenced by the quotation from Psalm 95 and the ancient example of Israel.

We also talked about who you harden yourselves against when your heart is hardened: we harden ourselves against the very voice of God, specifically the Holy Spirit, as seen in our text.

Today I want to focus on the consequences of hardening. Our title is:

Rest Prevented

We see the term “rest” at the end of our passage. Watch for it as we read:

Read Heb 3.7-11

So, you see that God in his wrath prevented Israel from entering his rest. That might seem simple enough to explain as we consider the parallel passages in Psalm 95 and Numbers 14.

Ps 95.11 “Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My **rest**.”

Num 14.20-24 ¶ So the LORD said, “I have pardoned *them* according to your word; ²¹ but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. 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. ²⁴ “But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.

At first glance, it looks like “rest” means “the land.” Since Ps 95 is a meditation on Numbers 14.

But Psalm 95 is written in the land, and long after the conquest of the land by Joshua. What is the Psalmist driving at?

And more importantly for us, what is the writer of Hebrews driving at?

Proposition: The hardened heart risks the life of rest, if not the ultimate arrival at rest.

I. Defining “rest”

A. Rest is a big theme of Heb 3-4, which refers to three ideas¹

1. God’s rest following the Creation: 4.4, 10b
2. The Israelites’ rest in Canaan: 3.11, 18; 4.3b, 5, 8
3. The Christian’s rest in all that God has promised for us in heaven: 4.1, 3a, 6, 9, 10a, 11

In terms of how “rest” is used in these verses, this is essentially correct. But the study of the concept in Scripture reveals more than this.

B. The root of the concept of rest is God’s rest from creation (Gen 2.3)

Gn 2.3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

1. The Edenic existence of Adam & Eve saw man enjoying God’s rest, but the fall saw man expelled from rest
2. When God made a Covenant with Abraham, three main things were promised
 - a. A seed
 - b. A land
 - c. A blessing (for the whole world)
3. Paul connected that blessing with the gospel: Gal 3.8

Gal 3.8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.”

¹ Adapted from Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Heb 3.7.

C. We already saw in Num 14 how that generation was prevented from the land (Ps 95 from the rest)

1. Moses promised the next generation a time of rest (Dt 12.9-10)

Dt 12.9-10 for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you.¹⁰
 “When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around *you* so that you live in security,

2. There came a time under Joshua when they experienced a measure of this rest (Josh 21.44-45)

Josh 21.44-45 And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand.⁴⁵ Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.

3. However, not all enemies were completely subdued, see the period of the Judges and even into the reign of David (2 Sa 7.1)

2 Sa 7.1 ¶ Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies,

a. Note: this is the chapter where Nathan reveals the Davidic covenant.

b. And even so, David still had enemies to fight: his rest wasn't a final rest

D. Psalm 95 speaks of something more than merely Num 14:

Consider Ps 95.1-6 again, and then consider Ps 96, through 97.1

1. Walter Kaiser, in an article connecting the promise to Abraham with the “theology of rest” says of these psalms

“This psalm is one of a series of Psalms (93–100) variously designated as ‘Apocalyptic Psalms’ or ‘Theocratic Psalms’ (Delitzsch), ‘Millennial Anthems’ (Tholuck), ‘Songs of the Millennium’ (Binnie), ‘Group of Millennial Psalms’ (Herder), ‘Second Advent Psalms’ (Rawlinson), ‘Enthronement Psalms’ (Mowinckel) and ‘Royal Psalms’ (Perowne). Whatever title is used, there can be no mistaking that the theme is eschatological and that it depicts a time when the Lord alone is King reigning over all peoples and lands (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1).”²

- a. Kaiser’s article is full of information, but I don’t want to get too technical
 - b. Notice that he joins with many putting these Psalms into a Kingdom context (*i.e.*, the Millennial Kingdom) when God reigns on the earth
2. Psalm 95 calls for kingdom worship, and warns against imitation of wilderness hardening: Sing to the Lord, 1-7a; Do not harden your hearts, 7b-11

- a. The message of Psalm 95 is a very present message: in the “today” time, don’t harden your hearts
- b. The message of Heb 3 is also a very present message: the Spirit *is speaking*, “Today, do not harden your hearts”

The point is this: there is rest in Christ. Don’t harden your hearts.

Ultimately, that rest is eternal fellowship with God in heaven, but spiritually, that rest is present fellowship with God through Christ in the Spirit.

² Walter C. Kaiser, “The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest,” *Bibliotheca Sacra: Dallas Theological Seminary* 130, no. 518 (1973): 142.

II. How God prevented rest

A. The striking prohibition of the wilderness generation from the land

1. The land, we will agree, is a part of God's rest for Israel, but only a symbol of ultimate rest
2. God prevented that generation from entering the land
3. For them, that meant forty years of wandering in the wilderness, waiting for people to die
 - a. Consider the futility of this: suppose you were born in the camp that year
 - b. You would grow up, perhaps marry, perhaps start a family
 - 1) Have no permanent home
 - 2) Eat only manna
 - 3) Have no hope of fulfilling normal life ambitions (other than your family) until after you were forty years old
 - c. The condemned generation had nothing to look forward to but wandering
 - 1) Eating manna every day (which was good, but...)
 - 2) The end of all personal ambition
 - d. We noted that Moses himself became part of this generation
 - 1) Enduring the complaints
 - 2) Surviving rebellions
 - 3) Waiting for the rest to die
 - 4) Then finally breaking near the end, and God kept him out of his rest also

In a word: condemned to *futility*

We might look at Moses with sympathy, for all he did was get angry with this ungrateful nation — who could blame him?

God could, and did: his standard for leadership is higher, but the incident revealed a hard spot in Moses' heart.

4. In other words: hardening the heart brought futility

B. Now let's think about the warning in Hebrews

1. Given to people who were considering turning back on Christ in favor of the old ways
2. It might make life easier, it might be safer
3. What were they risking? Hardened hearts, and *Masada*

C. Now let's think about what prevented rest would mean for us

1. Sometimes you see professing Christians go back on their profession

Now, perhaps they were never believers, but what if they are believers?

2. You see people start pursuing worldly ways and worldly solutions
3. They become estranged from Christian brothers and even sometimes from immediate family
4. They experience a lifetime of spiritual frustration

Isn't this a kind of wilderness wandering?

III. Considering what disturbs rest

A. Another passage about rest: 2 Cor 3.12-18

2 Cor 3.12-18 ¶ Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech,¹³ and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.¹⁴ But **their minds were hardened**; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.¹⁵ But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart;¹⁶ but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty.¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

1. The glory of God shone in Moses' face: so that Israel would not look at it (by their request)

2. God's evaluation: "their minds were hardened" (14)
3. Their minds continue to be hardened "until this very day" as they cannot understand the Scriptures
4. The veil is lifted only when a person turns to the Lord "it is removed in Christ" and "whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away"

What disturbs rest? When you turn away from the Word and from the Lord and trust in your own solutions.

- B. During the Christian life, there are many opportunities for hurt
1. Someone in the church hurts you personally, a word, a deed
 2. Or someone gets in a fight with you over theology (even on small points)
 3. Or some event causes you great pain: loss of a loved one, sickness, business failure, or sometimes seemingly smaller pains

"Smaller" in the eyes of others, but not in your eyes, perhaps

When we fail to turn our hearts over to the Lord, and respond in faith, and start growing hard, we are headed for the wilderness.

Conclusion:

I want to tell you a story. It is a hard story to tell, because it involves a beloved hymn which you know and we all love.

A man suffered a great tragedy. He suffered a great loss. He responded in faith and produced this hymn.

Life went on. He had several children, including a beloved son.

At the age of four, this son developed scarlet fever and died.

"This final tragedy, after a decade of financial loss and personal grief accompanied by a lack of support from their church community, began [his] philosophical move away from material success toward a lifelong spiritual pilgrimage. [He] soon left the Presbyterian congregation he had helped build..."³

³ "Horatio Spafford," in *Wikipedia*, April 12, 2023,

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Horatio_Spafford&oldid=1149428937.

- Taught Universalism, that all would eventually be saved, even Satan⁴
- Moved to Israel
- Set up a settlement, a sort of colony, called “the Overcomers”
- The colony required celibacy of its members, all children were separated from parents, bizarre behaviours ensued

The man’s name? Horatio Spafford. Their hymn: It Is Well With My Soul

We are going to sing that hymn as we close. It is the corrective for a hardened heart, when you hurt, when someone hurts you, when you are troubled: trust in God. Turn it all over to Jesus.

And remember, the writer of our hymn let his heart get hard when he suffered one trial too many. We’ll sing all the verses.

⁴ “Horatio Spafford: Not Well With His Soul – CPRC,” accessed May 6, 2023, <https://cprc.co.uk/articles/spafford/> (Note: this article extremely negative, well deserved, but partly motivated by anti-dispensationalist views.).