

**Text: Heb 3.12**

Today we move forward one verse in our passage, but we find we are still dealing with the same basic theme.

Our topic today sounds more serious than what we've said so far:

*An Evil Heart of Unbelief*

The words come from a more literal translation of our text than we have in our version, so let's read that now:

Read Heb 3.7-15, text 12

The way the author of Hebrews describes certain hearts here grabs my attention.

We've suggested in our recent messages that it is possible for Christians to harden their hearts, just as the ancient Israelites did, to the word of God.

We've suggested that hardened hearts produce a wilderness kind of life.

Now, what about this heart? — An Evil Heart of Unbelief — is that the same as a hardened heart?

As we move along from the author's quotation of Ps 95, we are getting his application of the passage. He is speaking to these Hebrew Christians who seem to be thinking of pulling back into Judaism, likely due to persecution from unbelieving Jews.

If we can have a hardened heart, can we have An Evil Heart of Unbelief? If we can't, why does the author make this his first application after quoting Ps 95?

**Proposition: There is a greater danger than a hardened heart.**

**I. Great concern for a specific kind of heart**

A. The first thing to note: the opening words

1. "Take care, brethren" (NAU)
2. "See to it, brothers" (NIV)

Other English versions have some variation of these two

The Gk word is literally a word of seeing, in the imperative

3. Commentaries note this expresses deep concern

- a. “an urgent warning...”<sup>1</sup>
- b. “deep anxiety mixes with the warning.”<sup>2</sup>
- c. “a sharp warning.”<sup>3</sup>

## B. The word order

1. Modern translations treat “unbelief” (noun) as a participle
  - a. an evil, unbelieving heart – NAU
  - b. an evil, unbelieving heart – ESV
  - c. an evil, unbelieving heart – NIV
2. KJV gets it right: “an evil heart of unbelief”
  - a. evil = adjective, modifying heart
  - b. heart = noun
  - c. unbelief = noun in genitive case, describing quality (what kind of heart? A heart of unbelief)

See 3.10: “They always go astray in their heart”

## C. The idea of unbelief

1. This element isn’t part of the quotation from Ps 95
2. The thought, though, rests on Numbers 14 and the refusal to enter the land
  - a. Consider what Joshua said to the people in Num 14.9

Num 14.9 “Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.”

<sup>1</sup> David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 260.

<sup>2</sup> F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 62.

<sup>3</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 86.

## b. Compare the faithfulness of Moses and Jesus

Heb 3.2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.

1) Faithful is πιστός, faith

2) When used like this it means “full of faith” as Jesus and Moses were

Jesus and Moses did what the Father told them to do (Jesus perfectly, Moses almost perfectly)

## 3. The idea isn't just unbelief: it is disbelief

“Ἀπιστίας [*Apistias*] is more than mere unbelief, here rather disbelief, refusal to believe, genitive case describing the evil heart marked by disbelief which is no mark of intelligence then or now.”<sup>4</sup>

a. The refusal to enter the land was rebellion

b. The rebellion meant refusing to believe God's word

## 4. The rebellion flows from the evilness of the heart: human nature refuses to believe God

This description is startling, but there is more

## II. Greater concern about a definite consequence

### A. Falling away and rebellion

#### 1. The Gk translation of the Hebrew in Num 14.9 uses the same word (different form)

Num 14.9 “Only do not **rebel** against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, For they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.”

#### 2. The idea is active, not passive

<sup>4</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Heb 3.12.

- a. Not “trips and falls”
  - b. But “deliberately turns away”
3. The Hebrew Christians might excuse their turning back to Judaism
- a. Well, we are still worshipping the true God
  - b. We are just quieting down about the Jesus bit

Leon Morris: “But to reject God’s highest revelation is to depart from God, no matter how many preliminary revelations are retained. A true faith is impossible with such a rejection.”<sup>5</sup>

## B. The one you are rejecting: the living God

1. The people feared “the living God” at Sinai as Moses recounted it in his Dt sermon (Dt 5.26-27)

Dt 5.26-27 ‘For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we *have*, and lived?’<sup>27</sup> ‘Go near and hear all that the LORD our God says; then speak to us all that the LORD our God speaks to you, and we will hear and do *it*.’

- a. The living God made that revelation (the people couldn’t take it; they wanted a prophet)
  - b. Recall the beginning of Heb: In these last days God has spoken in his Son — the living God
2. David fought Goliath in the name of the living God (1Sa 17.26)

1 Sa 17.26 Then David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?”

## C. The great danger of this apostate heart

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1981), 36.

1. The evil heart of unbelief
2. Will fall away from the Living God

Many people are very dismissive of the living God: he isn't real to them, they find his church boring and a pain

If you reject the living God, where will you get eternal life?

### III. Greatest concern for an individual in spiritual trouble

#### A. Note the opening assumption of the warning

1. Take care, brethren: the author writes to people he considers "brethren"
  - a. That would mean that he accepts their testimony of faith in Christ
  - b. He issues a warning to this group of professing Christians:

Look closely and make sure that there not be ...

2. What does this mean? He treats them as believers
  - a. We believe in "regenerate church membership" – Baptists insist on scrutinizing membership applications to ensure it
  - b. If I were to write to our church as a church, I might address you as "brothers and sisters"
  - c. Would that mean every person in the church (even among members) would be a believer?

Despite our best efforts it is possible that someone could become a member without real faith.

#### B. Notice the particular focus of the warning "take care ... that there not be **in any one** of you..."

1. The possibility of an evil heart of unbelief is real in any congregation
2. In Israel, there were many who heard the voice of God, experienced the miracles, saw the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day

Jude 1.5 Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe.

3. It is one thing to have a hard heart
  - a. A hard heart will chip away at your relationship with God (and others)
  - b. A hard heart will lead you into wilderness wanderings

4. But what about an evil heart of unbelief? Where will that lead?

Scenario we are suggesting for audience of Hebrews

- a. Jewish people professing faith in Christ
  - b. They are experiencing antagonism and pressure from fellow (non-Christian) Jews — maybe even family members
  - c. They are thinking about (some may already have) going back to Judaism [easier, safer]
  - d. The author is calling them “brethren” — some of them at least were no doubt truly brethren
5. If they were to fall away from the Living God, what would that say about their profession?
- a. We don’t know
  - b. But I do know if they held in their hearts “an evil heart of unbelief,” falling away would reveal it

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** There is a greater danger than a hardened heart.

Suppose we could see into the hearts of everyone in our congregation today. We might see some hard spots where the heart is calcifying and not listening to God.

We might see some hearts that are evil hearts of unbelief.

There is no pressure right now, no persecution that tempts us to turn away.

But remember this: it is the evil unbelieving heart that falls away.

In what condition is your heart?