

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 181**

**Hebrews 3**

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Hebrews 3 is the reader's first introduction to what will be a familiar tension in the book: conditional statements about the believer's salvation status. This episode focuses on this tension, pointing out that conditional statements in Hebrews are not attached to breaking the laws of Torah, or any sins of commission or omission. The conditional statements are not about works in any regard, as though believers could lose salvation when they sin. Rather, the focus is on how a believer can fall into unbelief—how they can choose to not believe the gospel. The end result is that believers are eternal secure if they believe (do not reject the gospel), but no one who rejects the gospel and therefore does not believe it has eternal life.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 181: Hebrews 3. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Mike, it feels so good to get back into the Bible! [laughter]

**MH:** Yeah, really! That is why we have a podcast. You know... "Naked Bible." So we might want to throw some Bible in there. Yep. I agree.

**TS:** We kind of got away from it. We didn't plan it, but some of these interviews were scheduled so we had to get away from the Bible. But it's like coming home.

**MH:** They're still important.

**TS:** Absolutely. But it feels good to get back into it.

**MH:** We're doing Hebrews 3—finally back to the book of Hebrews. People didn't vote for interviews, they voted for the book of Hebrews. Judging from the reaction, though, I think people enjoyed the interviews and got a lot out of them, but here we go back into this New Testament book that has a lot of stuff in it. This is going to be no different. I think this one will be a frequently listened-to episode, just because of the nature of some of the things we're going to discuss

here—this whole "losing salvation" thread that runs through Hebrews (or at least some people think it does). We're going to get our first exposure to that here in Hebrews 3.

I'm going to start off by reading the whole chapter. It's not too long. Then we'll jump back in and hit a few things that really need some attention.

**Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, <sup>2</sup>who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. <sup>3</sup>For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. <sup>4</sup>(For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) <sup>5</sup>Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, <sup>6</sup>but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.**

**<sup>7</sup>Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,**

**"Today, if you hear his voice,**

**<sup>8</sup>do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,**

**<sup>9</sup>where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.**

**<sup>10</sup>Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;  
they have not known my ways.'**

**<sup>11</sup>As I swore in my wrath,  
'They shall not enter my rest.'"**

**<sup>12</sup>Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup>But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup>For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup>As it is said,**

**"Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**

**<sup>16</sup>For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?<sup>17</sup> And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup>And to**

**whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.**

5:00 That's the end of the chapter. There are several instances in this chapter where the problem that the writer is talking about is unbelief—an "unbelieving heart." We're going to return to that and it's going to be sort of a focus point as we go through this chapter. Really, we're going to spend most of our time on that because I think there's sort of a fundamental confusion with this question that arises about salvation—can I lose salvation and that sort of thing. We tend to associate it with specific acts of sin—sins of commission or omission. The focus in Hebrews here in chapter 3 (and it's not going to change—it's going to have this focus through the rest of the book) is not *behavior*. It's not perfection. It's "do you believe or not." Belief versus unbelief. Let's go back to verse 1. Hebrews 3:1 starts off with the phrase:

**Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling...**

He's speaking to believers. And, by the way, I don't want to sound childish here, but "believers" actually sort of means something. "Believers" means people who are believing. A believer is one who is believing. It's not someone who prayed a prayer twenty years ago and now believes something altogether different or nothing at all. So we're going to get into this belief versus unbelief thing.

The writer here is talking to people he considers brothers in the faith who "share in the heavenly calling"—people who are believing. They're believers/believing. I think we need to think of this heavenly calling as a destiny. That might be a good way to start off the chapter: "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in this common destiny that we have." What's the destiny? Well, the destiny is eternal life—the promise of eternal life. We just got done with Hebrews 2, where there were people who were described as being part of the family of God through the incarnation and the atonement—the work of Christ. This is the destiny—this is the calling—that the writer is veering off into now. He's just told us about the supremacy of Christ, he's going to remind us of that again (that Jesus is superior to Moses) here in chapter 3. He's been sort of strumming that thing for a long time—two chapters worth. He talked about how human beings are going to be joined to the family of God. This is the destiny that awaits us.

I think it's really helpful at this point to sort of bring up a little expression that we've used a lot here on the podcast, typically when it comes to the Kingdom or when it comes to eschatology. That is the "already but not yet." As we get into this chapter and this whole thing about the writer speaking to believers—and we're going to get into this whole question about how we're God's house (verse 6) if we hold fast our confidence and our boasting and our hope... In other words, there are conditions now set to it. People read that and they think, "Well, am I

meeting the conditions? Am I performing well enough? Am I doing this? Is God still happy with me? Am I going to make it?" and all that sort of thing, as if there's some striving to do to have eternal life. That would be very contrary to the gospel—to faith. We need to think of salvation... To use the writer of Hebrews' terminology here in verse 1, we need to think of our heavenly calling—our heavenly destiny—as something already but not yet. The question is going to be that this is how God looks at us and we believe and he speaks about us as his children and that we're grafted in, we're adopted, we're sons of God, daughters of God, children of God... we have all this language. But there is a condition that's attached to this, and the condition has nothing to do with performance. The condition is "do you believe or not?" You have to keep believing. This isn't a work. This isn't a striving. This isn't performance. This isn't merit. In order for our "already" to transition to the ultimate consummation—our ultimate destiny... In order for our destiny to be fulfilled that God looks at as a done deal if you believe... But do you catch that? You have to *believe*. That's all that God asks—and he does ask something. He asks for us to believe in the gospel and to keep believing it—to not throw our believing loyalty to another god or no god at all.

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I'm sort of telegraphing all this up-front, as we're going to go through this chapter and look at some of the language. You can't lose your salvation, as though it's something taken from you or that you sin away—that you commit some sin and now God just takes it away—God doesn't want you to have it anymore because he's angry. That is false doctrine. You can reject it. You can choose to not believe. You must believe. You are eternally secure if you believe. It is a done-deal. God will do it. You will have eternal life if you believe the gospel. You are eternally secure if you believe. If you do not believe, you're not. This is why I answer these kinds of questions that way. Because, frankly, that's where scripture puts it. You must believe. None of this has anything to do with moral performance. You've heard me say it many times: "That which cannot be gained through moral perfection (in other words, the gospel—you don't merit salvation) cannot be lost by moral imperfection." It has nothing to do with works, with merit. It has everything to do with belief. You must believe the gospel. And if you do, you are eternally secure. If you don't, then by definition, you are not a believer. If you don't believe, you're not a believer. That's how we need to think about these things.

Getting back to this, he begins this thing with our heavenly calling and our heavenly destiny. Look at what awaits us. We just read in chapter 2 that God is going to introduce us to the Council and he's going to introduce the Council to us. There's going to be this meeting in the congregation and Council—all this neat stuff! That's what awaits us. That is the heavenly calling—the heavenly destiny. Then he gives us a few reminders. He begins to contrast Moses and Jesus. He makes the explicit point "for Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses." Again, it wasn't that Moses was a bad guy. Moses was "faithful in all God's house

**...as a servant, to testify to the things that were spoken later.**

Okay? *Later!*

**<sup>6</sup> but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.**

I've commented on it in each installment of the podcast when it comes to the book of Hebrews. I don't know how you could be comfortable with the Hebrew Roots theology (the extreme forms of that) and the book of Hebrews. Because here we go again. The writer will just throw that in: Christ is superior to Moses. And he means it! This is scripture.

I'm not going to go into that again because we've had a lot of that in Hebrews 1 and 2 (the superiority of Christ). I want to orient ourselves here beginning in verse 5. Let me read through 6a.

**<sup>5</sup> Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, <sup>6</sup> but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.**

I'm going to stop there. We're going to spend a lot of time on the second half of verse 6. I kind of like the way Guthrie summarizes verse 5 and the first part of verse 6. He says:

The word for servant here is not the usual term *doulos* used elsewhere in the New Testament, but *therapōn*, which occurs only here. [MH: So the word for "servant" here is a bit of a different term.] It refers to a 'personal service freely rendered.' It is a more tender word than *doulos* and does not imply the latter's overtone of servility. Even so the personal attendant cannot share the same status as the son. In Moses' case the servant had an important task to perform, to bear testimony to what was to follow. In other words, what Moses represents in Jewish history is not in itself complete. It was pointing forward to a fuller revelation of God at a later time, i.e. it concerns *things that were to be spoken later*, which must point to the time of Christ. The mission of the servant, great though it was, prepares the way for the far greater mission of the Son.

The faithfulness of Christ is repeated to bring out its superiority over Moses' by virtue of his Sonship. *As a son* echoes the main theme of the opening part of the epistle. The writer is impressed by the thought that our high priest is none other than God's Son.

Again, I kind of like the way Guthrie deals with that. It's not the denigration of Moses. The writer of the book of Hebrews here is not picking on Moses. He's

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not beating Moses over the head. He doesn't have a low view of Moses. He just has a higher view of Jesus. Again, in thinking about the old economy and the new economy, the Old Testament and the New Testament, Moses and Jesus, Hebrews stuff, Jesus stuff, the whole thing about Messianic congregations and what-not, those things aren't bad. What's bad is when we elevate the law, we elevate Moses, we elevate the Old Testament in terms of its theological approach in such a way that we end up denying or denigrating Christ—the son. The reverse is actually true. The son is the one that's superior to the other—not the other way around. Moses, the Torah, the law, is not superior to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It leads to that. It alerts people to the fact that you have this need of what's going to happen on the cross—the atonement and the gospel and so on. They have their respective places and they're both good. One isn't bad and the other good. One is just lesser and inferior to the other in these sorts of ways. So I kind of like the way Guthrie put that because the whole point is not to pick on Moses, it's to elevate Jesus.

As far as the latter part of verse 6 (and this is where we're going to spend most of our time), what the writer says in verse 6 is really going to affect everything else in the chapter and involve everything else in the chapter. Let me just read the second part again. We've just heard in chapter 3 that he has referred to these people as holy brothers, "you who share in the heavenly calling" and this heavenly destiny that we have, and the context for that is the first two chapters. He's reminded us again of the gospel's superiority to the Torah—all this stuff. Then he says:

**And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.**

We are God's house because of Christ. Now there's a conditional statement here. There's the "if" word here. This is a little bit of Guthrie again:

The conditional statements in this epistle are significant. The writer wishes to make it clear that only those who are consistent with what they profess have any claim to be part of the 'house.'

Notice what he said there: "the conditional statements in this epistle are significant." This is not going to be the only one. We're going to see this kind of talk through the rest of the book of Hebrews, where the writer will be talking to believers and he'll be talking about believers (people who understand the gospel and have embraced it and they have chosen to follow Christ over against the Torah—the Old Testament system—all that kind of stuff). We know who he's talking to. And then you will get these conditional statements.

Where I want us to fix our minds is on the fact that the conditions are not going to be oriented around behavior or performance. There is no merit. The conditions are always going to be fluttering around the issue of "do you believe or not?" Right now. Do you believe? That is the thing that matters. That is the only condition that has to be met: Do you believe?

Here we get our first one. Yep, we are God's house. We sure are—IF:

**...if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.**

If you've had a little Greek grammar, I planned a little sidebar here. There are different kinds of conditional statements in Greek, and we have one of those kinds here in the book of Hebrews. So a little grammar lapse here for people who might either expect to hear this or if they don't hear it they're going to think, "Mike skipped that Greek grammar stuff!" Nope, we're well-aware.

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You get if/then statements in scripture a lot, and there are different ways to express if/then statements in Greek. The New Testament is written in Greek. Those different expressions sort of imply or suggest different things. The way that academic grammarians talk about this is they use terms like *protasis* and *apodosis*. You can impress your friends with some vocabulary here. The *protasis* is the "if" statement and the *apodosis* is the "then" statement. If/then, *protasis/apodosis*. In our case here in Hebrews 3:6, the *protasis* is the if statement, which is:

**...if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.**

And then the *apodosis* is the "then." If we do that, *then* we are part of God's house. Notice what it doesn't say. Notice what the writer doesn't say. He doesn't say, "If we do X, Y, Z *work*, then we are part of God's house." "If we do X, Y, Z wonderful thing..." "If we have enough merit..." "If we are on the way to moral perfection..." "If we do X, Y, Z *work*, *then* we are part of God's house." He doesn't say that. He also doesn't say, "If we avoid X, Y, Z sin, then we are part of God's house." Works is nowhere in the picture here. What's in the picture here is if we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope—if we keep being confident in our hope. If we do that, then yes—absolutely sure we are part of God's house.

Now, in Greek, this verse can be assigned to something called a "third class condition." There's some variability with the classes and so somebody might argue for one. Dan Wallace talks about five of these, but he actually only has sections in his syntax book for four of them, so I don't know why he abandoned the fifth, as far as a discussion. But there are more than just this one. This one is a third class condition. That's typically where the grammar here is going to fall. And you identify one of those by the fact that the *protasis* has the Greek word



ἐάν, which is present here. And then it's followed by a subjunctive verb—that is, a verb in the subjunctive mood. That's what you also have here. The subjunctive in grammar is the mood of unreality. That is, a writer would put a verb into the subjunctive mood to communicate the idea that the action I'm describing here is contingent on something. It's not yet realized. It's not yet actualized. It's just still out there. It hasn't happened yet. It's, therefore, not real yet. The mood of unreality is the subjunctive mood. To quote Wallace here—what we've got going on here in this particular situation—he talks about the third class condition and the subjunctive and what-not, and he says this:

The third class condition often presents the condition as *uncertain of fulfillment, but still likely*.

If you look at the verse ("if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in hope"), it's not fulfilled yet. There's a contingency here, but the third class condition doesn't portray this as "Boy, this is really probably not going to happen." No, it's actually the opposite. It gives a *positive* flavor to it. It's still a likely thing. The people that the writer is writing to are mostly Jewish believers who have abandoned the Mosaic system and have chosen to believe that Jesus is the messiah. They're under persecution; they're under duress. But the writer is still communicating the idea that he's confident that they're going to endure here. "You're going to keep believing." He's not saying, "I'm confident that you're going to keep doing worse. I'm confident that you're going to pile up enough merit so that God looks at your life and says, 'Oh, you were good enough!'" That is not what he's saying. He's not saying, "I'm confident that you're going to avoid sinning and falling enough times so that God will still be happy." That is not what he's saying. He's saying, "I'm confident that you're going to keep believing—that you're going to stay in the faith. You're not going to reject him. You're not going to go back to a different gospel. You're not going to abandon your faith." The issue is *always* "do you believe?" It's none of this other stuff. Back to Wallace here:

The third class condition encompasses a broad semantic range: (a) a *logical connection* (if A, then B) in the present time (sometimes called *present general condition*), indicating nothing as to the fulfillment of the protasis; (b) a mere *hypothetical* situation or one that probably will not be fulfilled; and (c) a *more probable future* occurrence...

The *third* class condition encompasses a broad range of potentialities in Koine Greek. It depicts what is *likely to occur* in the *future*, what could *possibly occur*, or even what is only *hypothetical* and will not occur. In classical Greek the third class condition was usually restricted to the first usage (known as *more probable future*), but with the subjunctive's encroaching on the domain of the optative in the Hellenistic era, this structural category has expanded accordingly.

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What he means by that is that in New Testament Greek, the use of the subjunctive verb form (that mood) sort of starts to subsume some of the duties of the third class conditional statement. When you combined this particular Greek particle (ἐάν) with the subjunctive, that is kind of the new way to formulate the idea that we have something out here that yes, we'll admit, is still contingent. It's not a realized condition yet. But most likely, this is going to happen, this is going to occur. So it's actually an expression of confidence and not pessimism on the part of the writer. For our purposes, that's what we need to take away. Here the writer is saying:

**...if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.**

If we keep hoping... We're confident in our hope. That is a statement of optimism, not of pessimism. So we need to keep that in mind.

The word for "confidence" here in "if we indeed hold fast our confidence" is significant. Sometimes in the New Testament, this gets translated as "boldness." If you did a concordance search on it, you're going to hit a lot of occasions where that is how a typical English translation would have chosen to render it. That's useful to know because it helps convey the idea of optimism and not pessimism. "Holding fast our confidence"... We don't just sort of casually believe. It doesn't require a casual commitment. No, this is something we sincerely believe and we're committed to it in sort of a tenacious, bold way. That's what the writer is trying to convey by using this term "confidence." That's what we need to do. When he says "we need to hold fast our confidence" it means that we need to believe boldly. We need to be not just confident (kind of a neutral term), it's this term *parrēsia*—we need to believe boldly. We need to be daring. We need to believe something that is spectacular and outlandish. In other words, God has promised this to us. What's our promise? That we would be members of the family of God and we will have eternal life. We need to believe that boldly. It needs to move us. It needs to affect the way we think and behave. We need to believe boldly.

"Hope" is also an interesting word. Guthrie says:

The New Testament word for 'hope' is much stronger than the normal English use, in which it almost means no more than a pious wish that may have no real basis in fact. That kind of hope would hardly provide a satisfactory basis for pride. No-one is going to boast in a thing which is not certain to happen. [MH: Unless you're an idiot.] The writer is sufficiently convinced of the certainty of Christian hope to use a strong expression (*to kauchēma*, exultant boasting) to describe the Christian's attitude towards it.

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So again, when the writer says, "if indeed we hold fast our confidence" (if indeed we believe boldly), and if we boast in this hope... In other words, we exult in it, we are moved by it, this is not just a pious wish but it's something... "Sincere" doesn't capture it. It's something tenacious. It's an active, believing, confident, bold faith. Maybe we could say it like this: You really believe and you're really committed to this where there's no other option—it doesn't mean you never have a question, it doesn't mean you're never shaken by life, it just means at the end of the day you believe that *this* faith, this promise of eternal life in Christ, is the only one that matters. There are no others. You will not trade it for anything, even though you don't understand what's going on in life, even though you could be shaken, even though you could be troubled, even though you could be enduring persecution and hardship like these believers he's writing to were. Despite all that, you wouldn't trade this for anything. There is no other option. There's no superior option. This is where you're at. At the end of the day, this is what you believe. That's what he's trying to describe here—that kind of belief.

Unfortunately, when we put this in a condition form, a lot of people are going to be reading this... I remember a time in my own Christian life as I'd read these conditional statements and I'd be a little worried about them. I could articulate the gospel, I could spit it back to people, and I understood it intellectually, but it hadn't really gripped me. The reality that... you know what? Performance is thrown out the window. Even if I could perform perfectly (which, of course, is impossible because I'm not God—we're even dealing with thoughts and motives and the intents of the heart and there's no way to do that)... Even if I could get sort of near that in terms of my behavior, my track-record, that is not the basis of salvation. Romans 5:8... we keep going back to this sermon:

**<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

He's not checking in to see our progress in perfection. It's not even on the table. While we were yet sinners, while we were contemptible sinners, while we could have cared less about doing anything God would have approved of (much less, perfection)... While we were in that circumstance, Christ died for us. That is the gospel. That is what needs to be believed. You can go back to the example of Abraham who believed before he was circumcised. This is why Romans does this! This is why the New Testament does this so frequently—to convince you, to convince me, to convince all of us that the gospel has nothing to do with merit and human performance. It is all about believing in what Christ has done. That's it. That is it. And so we need to take that and that needs to be our filter—that needs to be our orienting point—for what Hebrews says here and what Hebrews says elsewhere. Frankly, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear because he starts talking about believing versus not believing. It's actually pretty clear.

So the confidence that the writer wants us to have here is about this promise of eternal life. What is this confidence? What's the writer talking about? It's the promise of eternal life. It's the promise of access to the presence of God—membership of the family of God. It's not that hard to discern if we just read the whole passage instead of just pulling this one verse out and then worrying about it. The writer uses this term elsewhere in Hebrews 4. He says:

**<sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

What's the confidence about? Access to God. This thing about being part of the family of God—the promise of eternal life. Hebrews 10:19 uses the same term for “confidence that we have back in Hebrews 3:

**<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus...**

It shows up again in Hebrews 10:35.

**<sup>35</sup> Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.**

35:00 "Throw away our confidence?" He's saying not to throw away your belief. Don't throw away your faith. Instead, hold fast your confidence. Exult in the hope that is set before you. Believe it. Performance doesn't factor into this at all. I'm harping on this because I realize that for a lot of Christians, they'll read things like this and other things in the book of Hebrews, and that is immediately where the mind goes. How am I measuring up? How am I performing? If you gave somebody a pop quiz on "what's the gospel," they could write it out. They could give you the answer. But what's going through their mind and heart is "How do I measure up?" Honestly, you have to look at what's being said and stop filling in stuff that isn't being said. This is not about performance. This is about belief. Belief.

Think of it the alternative way: the threat to having eternal life and to failing the contingency—the "if" statement... What's going to overturn the "if" statement? "If we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in hope" then we're God's house. Well, what would undermine that? What would destroy it? What would get in the way and what would defeat it? What's the enemy? The threat to that isn't a specific sin of commission or omission. There's no sin mentioned here. The threat is unbelief. It's *not believing* that undermines confidence. Not believing is what undermines confidence. I understand how we can feel conflicted when we read this stuff, but the writer doesn't insert any specific sin in there. We impose that stuff on the passage and then we worry about our performance. We worry about how we're doing. That is *not* biblical thinking about salvation or about this

passage. That which cannot be gained by moral perfection cannot be lost by moral imperfection. Merit is not what's required for eternal life. Belief is. Confidence in the promise of God. We are confident that if we believe, God will do what he has promised. He will give us eternal life. We will meet the Council. We will be in the family of God. Not because of anything we have done, but because of his son. His son is the one who built the house. We are God's house. We are the Body of Christ. We are united to him. This has nothing to do with how I'm doing. It has nothing to do with that. Everything is about whether or not you are believing. Do you believe or not?

The rest of the passage actually bears this out. Let's take a look at it, in light of all that set-up. I'm harping on this deliberately because I think people need to hear it and they need to hear it more than once. Lord willing, those who are really struggling here will let this sink in. Do not impose your worries about your performance on the passage. That's not what's in there! Don't put it in there. Don't change the message. Go to verse 7. In light of all this:

**<sup>7</sup>Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,  
"Today, if you hear his voice,  
<sup>8</sup>do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion...**

Now you notice there that their hard hearts are connected to this rebellion thing. What's he talking about? What's the rebellion thing? We'll get to that!

**<sup>8</sup>do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,  
<sup>9</sup>where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.  
<sup>10</sup>Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, 'They always go astray *in their heart*;  
they have not known my ways.'  
<sup>11</sup>As I swore in my wrath,  
'They shall not enter my rest.'"**

That line—that thing about not entering into my rest—helps us define what the day of testing is. It's singular—the day of testing. There's something specific going on here. When did God say this kind of thing in the Old Testament? And, by the way, what is "my rest?" I would suggest to you that God's rest is where he lives. It's where he is. It's his home. In the Old Testament context, that was the promised land—the place where he planned to dwell. He wanted Israel to be his people and he would be their God. This is why "rest" in Hebrews 4 (and things we're going to hit later on in Hebrews) is going to be associated with the

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presence, the dwelling, the place where God is. This goes back to the Old Testament. "They will not enter my rest" is another way of saying that they're not going to live where I live. They're not going to go into the land. It helps us orient this language—the context of this Old Testament thing that's being referred to. This is actually when the spies returned to Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 13). This is the failure when Moses sends the spies into the land and they see the Anakim and they fail to believe. They didn't violate any point of the law. They had the law. They got that back in Exodus 20—back at Sinai. Read Numbers 13 and then Numbers 14. We're going to talk about Numbers 14 here in a moment. This is the moment where God says, "They're not going into the land. They are not entering into my rest." Their flaw—their crime—the thing that kept them out was not a violation of the law. It was that they didn't believe God. They didn't believe. They just didn't believe. They turned away. "Let's go back to Egypt." They turned away. This is the crucial moment in the Old Testament.

I'll just read a couple verses from Numbers 14 (I'm not going to read the whole chapter). Numbers 13 is when the spies come back and they say, "This place is great, but we've got a problem! The Anakim are in the land, and there's no way we're pulling this off." Caleb and Joshua, of course, say, "What are you talking about? Don't you remember the Red Sea? We can do this! God is on our side." And ten of the spies say, "Nah, it ain't gonna happen." They didn't believe. And so God gets angry in Numbers 14. It leads to a rebellion. The people raise a loud cry when they hear the spies say they can't do it.

**<sup>2</sup> And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup> Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" <sup>4</sup> And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt."**

This is the straw that breaks the proverbial camel's back. God gets angry, and in verse 11:

**<sup>11</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? <sup>12</sup> I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you [Moses] a nation greater and mightier than they."**

And then Moses intercedes.

**<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, <sup>14</sup> and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face...”**

He's afraid that God's reputation is going to be tarnished. He's afraid they're going to say:

**<sup>16</sup> ‘It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.’ <sup>17</sup> And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, <sup>18</sup> ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression...’**

Moses has this famous prayer. And then we hit verse 20:

**<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, “I have pardoned, according to your word.**

In other words, I'm not going to annihilate them! [laughs]

**<sup>21</sup> But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, <sup>22</sup> none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, <sup>23</sup> shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. <sup>24</sup> But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.”**

This is the moment where God decides, "Enough." This wish to go back to Egypt is turning away from God. In part of Numbers 14 that I didn't read, they're read to stone Moses and Aaron with stones. This turning against Moses—this rebellion—was rooted in and propelled by unbelief. It was not a transgression of the law. It was unbelief. And this is what the writer of Hebrews is drawing on in Hebrews 3. He's writing to the *Hebrews*! They know this story. They know what he's talking about, and they know what he's not talking about. So let's go back to Hebrews 3, verse 11:

**<sup>11</sup> As I swore in my wrath,  
‘They shall not enter my rest.’**

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**<sup>12</sup>Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.**

You turn around and go a different direction. You abandon your believing loyalty. You abandon your faith. It's not a violation of the law. It's not a sin of commission or omission. "Did I pray enough today? Am I in church often enough? Do I read enough of my Bible? Do I do enough of this? Do I avoid this sin often enough?" That is *not* what's in view. The issue is, "Don't have an unbelieving heart."

I hope it's clear. The unbelief here is defined as, "Do I believe in God's promise to give me eternal life through Christ or not?" It's not that you don't believe enough to get a particular prayer answered. "God's going to judge me. He doesn't like me now because I prayed for that job and I prayed ten times, but I should have prayed fifteen. I should have fasted. I, I, I... I should have done this, this, this this..."

Again, I understand where some believers are at here because I went through this, too. You have got to stop substituting faith in the gospel and in what happened on the cross with your performance. It's an easy trap to fall into. It's not "I, I, I, I... Am I doing this and avoiding that enough?" That is not the gospel. And this is the concern of the writer of Hebrews. He doesn't want them to abandon their confidence. Confidence in what? Their performance? No! Confidence that God—God!—will do what he said he will do. "If you believe, you will be part of my family. If you believe, you will have eternal life." You either believe that or you don't. The temptation—the subconscious temptation—is how we can take that idea and turn it, twist it, pervert it into something about our performance. You need to be aware of that propensity and you need to combat it with the example that he gives right here.

Again, what is the issue? Why did God say they would not enter into his rest? Because they just didn't believe him. They just didn't believe that God was going to do what he said he was going to do. What did God say he would do? He said, "I will fight for you. You will conquer these people and go into the land. It is yours." They just didn't believe it. No violation of the law—it was about their belief. Back to verse 12:

**<sup>12</sup>Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup>But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup>For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup>As it is said,  
"Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**



In other words, don't fall into unbelief. What's the "deceitfulness of sin?" What is this "hardening of the hearts, as in the day of the rebellion?" He just defined it for you. If you go back to Numbers 14, they don't believe. That is the focus. That's what he's talking about. Verse 16:

**<sup>16</sup> For who were those who heard and yet rebelled?**

What did they hear back in Numbers? They heard God promise that it was their land and he was going to fight for them. "Go in and take it?" Who were those who heard that and yet rebelled? They didn't believe and they turned on Moses and Aaron and said, "Let's go back to Egypt?"

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**Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? <sup>17</sup> And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?**

Well, what is this sin? What is this disobedience? What is he talking about? Verse 19:

**<sup>19</sup> So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.**

There it is, point blank. Hebrews 3:19. So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. When they made the decision to reject their faith, then they started doing things like, "Hey, let's stone Moses and Aaron." This is rooted in unbelief. The issue is unbelief. They were not allowed to enter because of unbelief. The writer really can't be any clearer than this. He doesn't say, "So we see that they were unable to enter because they didn't observe the Sabbath, because they didn't pray often enough, because they were immoral, because..." He doesn't say any of that. The issue is unbelief.

The point here, again, is that this whole discussion about the conditionality of realizing eternal life is not about works. It's about belief versus unbelief. I said it toward the beginning of the episode and I'll say it again: If you believe, you are eternally secure. Why? Because it's God! God promised. He is the guarantor of what he says. He will deliver. If you believe, you are eternally secure. In other words, you can be confident. You're trusting God. That's a good thing to trust! That's a good basket to put all your eggs in! If you believe, you are eternally secure. If you don't, you're not. Because if you don't, then by definition you are an unbeliever. Here's my plea: could we please stop basing our salvation on performance? Christians who claim to understand and embrace the gospel (and we might have it really good in our heads), would you please stop basing your security on your performance? Why would the security of your eternal life be

performance-based when getting the promise given to you in the beginning had nothing to do with performance?

<sup>8</sup> ... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Where's the transition to performance? You know where it is? It's in your head. It's in your heart. It's in your emotions—those sorts of things. We need to stop basing our security on performance. The question is really simple: Do you believe? If the answer to that question is yes, then you have eternal security. You have eternal life, because that is the only thing that God wants to hear. It's the only thing that matters.

What about doubt? Having questions is not unbelief. Wondering what God is doing isn't unbelief. It's not throwing your believing loyalty away altogether, believing nothing or believing in some other god, some other message, or some other means of salvation. Having questions isn't that. That's a separate thing. That's a separate decision that's made. Having questions is not unbelief—wondering what in the world God is up to. "Why are you doing this, Lord?" That's not unbelief. Wondering why God did or didn't do something isn't unbelief. Refusing to believe God's promise of eternal life through Christ—refusing to believe that is true—that *is* unbelief. Rejecting the gospel in favor of some other gospel—that is unbelief. Choosing to believe nothing at all is unbelief. The contrast should be clear.

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What if I or someone does that? Another question always comes up: "What if a year from now (or ten days or six months), I just bag it and just say I don't believe this stuff anymore? Can I come back to faith?" There are some who would go to Hebrews 6 and say, "No, you're done. It's a done deal. You're going to burn in hell!" Look, that is not what Hebrews 6 says. It's not what it's about and it's not what it means. There's a simple way to assess that—to assess the consistency of that. The question is actually answerable from the Old Testament (that three-quarters of our Bible that we tend to forget about). What if I or somebody else betrays our faith? We go and worship another god or nothing at all. We fall into unbelief. We choose unbelief. What happens then? Well, the question is answerable from the Old Testament. What did God do to his people who turned away from his covenantal promise to worship other gods? What did he do in the Old Testament? You say, "Well, he judged them! That's the exile!" Well, yeah—he did judge them. But what did he do before that—for *decades*, in some cases? What did he do before that? He used the prophets to call them back to faith. Now, God wouldn't send the prophets to say, "repent and return to me" if it wasn't possible. Of course you can believe—you can turn from unbelief to belief. Of course you can. There's no cosmic rule that says you can't. The Old Testament is very clear. You had people who were worshipers of Yahweh who turned away and God looked at them and said, "Come back." He knows the human heart. He knew their hearts. And we just went through Ezekiel and there are passages in

there where God says, "Look, I know it's not going to happen." God knows when this person or that person has crossed the point of no return. People harden their hearts in that way and they're just not going to... God knows that. That is not in our job description. We're not omniscient! Of course God knows when that happens to some people because he's *omniscient*! He can't *not* know that. The point is that God extended the offer for people to come back. It is a misreading of the prophets to suggest that nobody ever did. The door is always left open. In every prophet, no matter how hard he rails against the people of God (and they do quite a bit of railing), there are people who were spared. There are people who hear the message of the prophets. They go off into exile and they know why they're there. They own what they and their countrymen have done. But they're going to believe. They're going to trust God because that's all they have. Of course you can come back to faith. In the Old Testament, it's the analogy to this. People know that. People understand that—the audience of the writer of Hebrews. God knows every heart; he knows where everybody is at. We don't. The point that we're trying to hammer away at here is that, yes—you can choose to believe. God leaves it up to you. It's the only thing that's required. It's the only contingency. It has nothing to do with morality; it has nothing to do with that. Do you believe or not?

Hebrews 3 is where we sort of start. It's our beginning point into this discussion. We're going to see other passages like this. I just want to try to fix in our minds that what the writer is trying to target in these passages—what his fear is... His fear is not that somebody is going to break a Torah law. His fear is not, "Oh, you're not going to pray as much as you could have this week. You're not going to memorize as many Bible verses as you could have this week. You're going to get mad at somebody this week. You're going to show that you're flawed in some way this week." That is not what he's worried about. What the writer is worried about is that people will turn to unbelief. That is the question.

I'll end the episode saying it again: If you believe, you are eternally secure, because God is good for that. If you believe, you are eternally secure. If you don't, you're not. We don't sin away salvation. We either believe or we reject it. The decision is ours.

**TS:** All right, Mike. Again, it feels good to get back into the Bible. I agree with you that it's going to be one of the more listened-to episodes, as I guess salvation is the topic, right?

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**MH:** It's a hard lesson to learn. Because when you become a believer and you want to be serious about your faith, you do evaluate yourself. It's just a human thing to do. You want to feel like you're making God happy. You want to feel like you're holding up your end of the bargain, and all these clique kinds of things. We want to feel that we're worth God's investment, his time. We deserve... When we start thinking that way, you see how our thoughts drift into performance. It becomes about our contribution. It becomes about us in some way. It's a very

hard thing to sort of see what you're doing and then remember that before you could have brought anything to the discussion at all, Christ died for you. If he didn't care about it then, why would he care about it now? It's just very hard to see that because we're sensitive, we want to do the right thing as believers, but it's so easy to have that turn into some sort of performance trap. I get it. I understand it. It has been part of my Christian experience, as well. I remember going through that. But hopefully we can prevent ourselves from imposing our own worries—our own desire to feel a certain way—onto the text. Hopefully we can avoid doing that.

**TS:** How would you respond to somebody that has turned away from their faith, I guess, and then gets into a car wreck and dies in that period before maybe they would have come back? It's just bad luck?

**MH:** Ultimately, we don't know where the person was at, even in the immediacy of it. But if that person had faith and forsook it and they tell us that, then that's what we have to go on. We don't know the innermost thoughts of that person's mind, but God can decide in his knowledge (because he's omniscient)... He may have known that's where that person's at and this is where it ends for them. We don't know that. We don't know the behind-the-veil machinations or thinking or what's going on, either in that person's heart or with God himself. We just can't know that. So we shouldn't beat ourselves up about that. We can hope that maybe in the last moments of life they had a thought about their faith or they were even thinking about it in the two or three seconds before they got hit by the car. We just don't know. We can hope that, but that's about all we can do. If they died in a state where they were willfully rejecting the gospel, then the result of that is they're not going to have eternal life. But we ultimately don't know that. I've known people in that situation/circumstance and it's like, "I sure hope this is the way they left this world, thinking about the gospel that I know that they understood—that they knew and heard and had once said they believed. I hope that, but I just don't know."

**TS:** All right, Mike. Next week we're into Hebrews 4. What are we going to learn in Hebrews 4?

**MH:** Hebrews 4 is a little bit more of this kind of thing, because we go back into the "they shall not enter my rest" language. So we're going to get a little bit more of this language, but it's also going to transition to Jesus and his role as high priest. So we're going to start moving into that whole section of the book of Hebrews. So we'll have a little bit of nuancing (not necessarily repetition) of this, or maybe some other illustrations of it. And then we'll transition into some of the heavier theological/Christological stuff that Hebrews is known for.

**TS:** Okay, looking forward to it! Again, if you haven't gone and left us a review on iTunes or wherever you consume our podcast, please go rate us and leave a review and let us know how we're doing. Get in that Facebook group and have

some great conversations. I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.