

Shadows of the Church: Israel's Failure to Enter God's Rest

(Num. 13:17–14:4)

INTRODUCTION:

1. Today I want to conclude our series on the types and shadows found in the O.T.
 - A. Throughout the year we have studied the O.T. shadows of God's mercy and judgment, redemption, and the Christ
 - B. And today we will conclude our thoughts on the shadows of God's people.
2. To do that I want to examine Israel after the *Exodus* when God delivered them from Egyptian bondage with the intention of *bringing them into the Land of Promise*, into Canaan.
3. I'm doing this because Israel's failed opportunity to enter God's rest in the Land provides both warnings and exhortations for God's people today who desire to enter God's rest, or heaven.

BODY:

I. Shadow: Israel's failure to enter the Land:

- A. Israel was redeemed by God that they might receive the Promised Land of Canaan.
 1. The opportunity to receive it took place about a year and a half after God had delivered them from Egypt with a show His power through great plagues and wonders.
 2. These wonders of His might witnessed by Israel included parting the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13-14 – “And Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. ¹⁴ **The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.**”).
 - a. The Lord did fight for them, parting the sea and allowing Israel to cross over on dry land, while the pursuing Egyptians perished when God released the waters on them!
 - b. The summation (Ex. 14:30-31 – “So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Thus Israel **saw the great work which the Lord had done** in Egypt; so the people **feared** the Lord, and **believed** the Lord and His servant Moses.”).
- B. Along their way to Canaan's borders Israel continued to experience God's power in His providing of food and drink for them *despite* their lapses into faithlessness and the grumbling (Ex. 16:6-8 – “Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, “At evening you shall **know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt.** ⁷ And in the morning you shall see the **glory of the Lord**; for He hears your complaints against the Lord. But what are we, that you complain against us?” ⁸ Also Moses said, “This shall be seen when the Lord **gives you meat** to eat in the evening, and in the morning **bread to the full**; for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him...”).

 1. It is hard for me to comprehend how God had to keep proving Himself as their deliverer.
 2. They had witnessed His power like no others, seeing amazing events!

- C. At Mt. Sinai Israel's redemption from Egyptian bondage was the foundation upon which God would establish Israel as His special nation (Ex. 19:3-6 – “And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ⁴ You have seen what **I did to the Egyptians**, and how I bore you on eagles' wings **and brought you to Myself.** ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a **special treasure to Me** above all people; for all the earth is Mine. ⁶ And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”).
- D. Despite being delivered from Egypt and sustained in their travels by God's *mighty* hand, Israel refused to trust God to enter the land He had promised them (Num. 13:25–14:4).

1. Despite Joshua/Caleb exhortation to stand strong in the Lord so He could give them victory, they listened to the 10 faithless spies and refused to go forward.
2. In doing so, they forgot two very important things, which doing so always lead to apostasy.
 - a. They forgot what God had done for them in delivering and sustaining them.
 - b. They forgot how bad it was in their bondage that God delivered them from.

II. Substance: Israel's failure serves as a warning to the church (Heb. 3:7-19).

- A. If we fail to heed the warning found in Israel's failure, that failure will be a shadow of our failure to enter God's rest (3:7-11 – "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit **says**: "**Today**, if you will hear His voice,⁸ Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness,⁹ where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years.¹⁰ Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.'¹¹ so I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest.'").
 1. This is quoted from David's words in Ps. 95:7-11, which was written around 1000 years before Hebrews.
 - a. Yet, the writer speaks of this in the *present*, that the Holy Spirit **says**, not *said* (3:7)!
 - b. What this tells us is that God's truth is **timeless**. For, David used the Exodus (440+ years earlier) to exhort his people, which Hebrews uses to warn his readers (1000+ years after David), and which we must take as a warning today (almost 2000 years after Hebrews)!
 2. Note how David and Hebrews applied this warning to "**Today**"—their day!
 - a. Both David and the Hebrew writer saw application of Israel's failure to their day, which includes our day, the Christian age, today, some 3400 years after the event!
 - b. So, there are vital lessons to be learned from these shadows.
- B. So, we must face the timeless truth that unbelief is the great enemy of God's people (Heb. 3:12-19).
 1. Beware! Unbelief results in departing from God (3:12-13 – "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of **unbelief** in departing from the living God;¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be **hardened** through the **deceitfulness of sin.**").
 - a. Apostasy is a real danger for the child of God!
 - b. Strengthening our faith is vital to maintaining our relationship with God, which means our studies together, studying at home, etc., must be a high priority for us, seeing "**faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**" (Rom. 10:17).
 - c. Time in study helps us to **avoid being hardened by sins deviousness** (Heb. 5:12-14 – "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who **by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**").
 2. We must persevere, or continue, with *confident faith* (3:14-15 – "For we have become partakers of Christ if **we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,**¹⁵ while it is said: "**Today**, if you will **hear** His voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion."").
 - a. God holds us responsible for our faith and actions.
 - b. We make the choice whether we remain faithful or harden our hearts. No blaming others!
 3. Again, as proof we are reminded of how Israel, the shadow, heard God's word, lost faith, disobeyed, and became the subject of God's anger (3:16-19 – "For who, having **heard, rebelled?** Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?¹⁷ Now with whom

was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who **sinned**, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who **did not obey**?¹⁹ So we see that they could not enter in because of **unbelief**.”).

- a. Israel, God’s redeemed people, rejected God in their rebellion, sin, and disobedience and failed to enter the Land.
- b. Why, because rebellion, sin, and disobedience are *unbelief*. So, they failed to *obey* because they failed to *believe*! Without obedience, there is no belief!
- c. So, I must not fool myself into thinking that I am a believer, that I am persevering in the faith, if I am not obeying Christ.

III. Substance: Israel’s failure does not negate God’s rest for us today (Heb. 4:1-13):

- A. A rest remains today for God’s people to enter (4:1-5 – “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.”² For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.³ For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: “So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’” although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.⁴ For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And **God rested** on the seventh day from all His works”;⁵ and again in this place: “They shall not enter **My rest**.”).
1. Since a rest remains for God’s people **today**, we must *fear Him* and continue in faith lest we come short of this rest (4:1-2)
 - a. The word preached to Israel didn’t profit them because it didn’t produce lasting faith and fear of God—they griped and refused to trust Him!
 - b. It will no more benefit us than it did Israel if we lose faith and do not fear God!
2. It is believers, or the faithful, who enter **God’s rest** (“My rest”), the one He entered after completing his works at creation (4:3-5).
 - a. We can enter **God’s rest** though Israel did not, seeing that His rest has been available since creation—it is the rest He entered.
 - b. Rest with God Himself in heaven remains for the people of God!
- B. If we, the church, desire to enter God’s rest, we must hear and obey (4:6-10 – “Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of **disobedience**,⁷ again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said: “**Today, if you will hear His voice**, Do not harden your hearts.”⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.⁹ There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”).
1. **Since God’s rest awaits to be entered**, and Israel didn’t enter because of disobedience, we must listen to God with open hearts (3:6-7).
2. Answering an objection (4:8-10).
 - a. The writer addresses a likely objection centered in the fact that Israel eventually entered the land of rest under Joshua’ leadership. So, the Land of Promise could be God’s rest.
 - b. So, the writer argues that if Joshua had given Israel the true rest of God, David, who lived in Zion, would not have spoken in Psa. 95:7-11 of another rest (3:8).
 - i. Joshua gave Israel a physical, earthly place of rest that would pass away.
 - ii. This land of rest did not fully satisfy, seeing Israel still had to labor and toil to live.
3. For the people of God today, the church, God has a rest reserved for us (3:9-10)!
 - a. This rest is real, and this rest is satisfying.

- b. For, the rest offered by God *through Christ* is a rest that will be like an eternal, heavenly Sabbath rest, one where we can truly cease from our labors and be with God!

CONCLUSION:

1. If you are tempted to leave Christ, to return to your past life, to Egypt, if you will, I hope you will remember Israel and their failure to gain God's rest through unbelief and rebellion and know what you will be leaving behind—eternal rest with God—and what you will be returning to—loss of hope, life, and loss of your soul!
2. As we conclude our series on types and shadows of the O.T., I hope you have come to appreciate how much they have to say to us, as well as how much better we have it than did they.
3. Everything that they had, that they were taught, that they experienced in their worship, devotion, observance, etc., was but a *shadow*, a dim outline of the far greater things we have in Christ.
4. What a shame it would be for any of us to follow Israel's example and allow our hearts to become hardened through sin's deceit and lose faith in Christ and depart from God.
 - A. For, we would not lose a physical land or even our physical lives, but our eternal souls.
 - B. On the other hand, if we will heed the warning exemplified in faithless Israel and stand firm to the end in our faith in Christ, we stand to gain eternal life, an endless rest with God in heaven!
5. That rest is offered to you today in Christ, and it begins with God's grace to forgive provided for all who will trust God and obey.
6. Will you come and begin your life of hope and joy in Christ's rest by F-R-C-B?