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Hebrews 3:14-19

14. “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

15. while it is said, ‘TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.’

16. For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?

17. And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

18. And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

19. So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.”

In this New Testament passage, God’s word uses the nation of Israel, when they came out of slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses, as an example for us today. According to the book of Numbers, out of the 603,550 numbered men 20 years old and older, who came out of Egypt, only 2 entered the promised land.

According to Hebrews 3:17, the ones who did not make it, those “whose bodies fell in the wilderness,”

failed because they sinned. Verse 18 declares, “And to whom did God swear that they should not enter His rest, but those who were disobedient?” In these two verses the words “sin” and “disobedience” are used interchangeably.

Then in verse 19, the Scriptures go on to conclude: “And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.” Note here that the word “unbelief” is used as the reason why the men were not able to enter the promised land. So the word “unbelief” is also used as a synonym for sin and disobedience. In this passage, God uses the terms “sin”, “disobedience”, and “unbelief” interchangeably.

When we use God’s word to define His own terms, we often get a different picture than what is often drawn by man on his own. Take for instance the concepts of belief and obedience as they are used interchangeably here in Hebrews and apply God’s definition of these same words as used in John, chapter 3.

The NAS version correctly translates John 3:36 as: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Notice the term “believes in” is functionally the opposite of “does not obey”. Therefore the two words used here “believe” and “obey” can Biblically be used interchangeably.

Now let’s see what this does to Jesus’ statement earlier in chapter 3 in verse 16. Everybody knows John 3:16, using the verb “believes”. “For God so loved the

world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” But what about the parallel usage, of the synonym “obeys” which shows God’s concurrent meaning here? God’s word also says in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever obeys Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

Reads a little differently than what is supposed by most people today, doesn’t it? In summary, you do well to believe, but are you failing to enter in because of disobedience?

Jesus says, “The gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.”