



April 19, 2026

Anchored in the Desert. (Hebrews 3)

- Hebrews 3:7–19 (NIV)

Warning Against Unbelief

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did. 10 That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’

11 So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ”

12 See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. 15 As has just been said: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”

16 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Abraham. Moses. Joseph. David. Elijah. Noah. Jonah.

- Abraham's wife Sarah. Jacob's wife Rachel. Elkana's wife Hannah. Elizabeth, wife of the Priest Zechariah.
- John the Baptist. Paul. Each one of the disciples. The Apostle John. And Jesus himself.
- The thing all these people have in common: men and women and prophets and priests and kings and apostles and even our Savior himself, is they spend hard time in a desert.
- Sometimes the desert is really a desert. A desert can take other forms as well. It's also barrenness. It's a boat in a flood, it's a land you're called to that you've never seen before. A desert can even be the dark belly of a whale. It's still a desert.
- It's still a place of desolation. Of isolation. God seems distant. Maybe absent altogether. The desert is whenever life gives you pain, trouble, heartache. That's a desert.

Everyone will spend time in a desert.

- If Moses, Abraham, David, and Jesus himself were not exempt from time in a desert, then we shouldn't be shocked today when we find ourselves in times of hardship and isolation.
- Hebrews recognizes this reality.
- The people that are probably the most famous for having to go through the desert is the nation of Israel...God's people...they wandered through a desert.
- In their desert, they begin to grumble. *Where's the water Moses? Where's the food Moses? We were better off in Egypt as slaves Moses!*
- The people hardened their hearts and put God to the test. And as a result, Israel was forced to wander in the desert for forty years. It took that long for the offending generation to die off.
- Psalm 95 recounts all of this, and it's Psalm 95 that the Hebrews writer quote at length in chapters 3 and 4. He doesn't do this to give a history lesson. He does it to give a warning.
- Just like Israel before them, these people have seen God do amazing things in them and through them. They've been made holy. They've been set free. They are no longer slaves to sin and death. In Jesus they had been saved.
- And yet, they are struggling. Maybe they feel isolated. Alone. Like God doesn't care anymore. They want to give up and quit. They feel like they've been rescued right into a desert.
- The preacher of Hebrews draws a line from Israel wandering in the desert right to the suffering people he's dealing with. And he says: *Don't be like them. Don't be like the people who were in the desert and decided to turn from God. They gave up. Don't do that.*
- The result of a desert can be that we give up. What do I do with that?

The desert is never meant to be our home.

- No matter how we get there, the desert is not our home.
- When you look closely at all these people who spent time in a desert, a pattern surfaces:
- Moses' time in the desert was a time of preparation to rescue people
- David's time in the desert was a time of preparation to lead people
- Jonah's time in his dark watery desert was to prepare him to preach to people

- Jesus' time in the desert with Satan was a time that prepared him to publicly minister to people.
- And Israel's time in the desert was to prepare them to be God's people in his promised land.
- Regardless of what led us into the desert, it seems like there's something pretty necessary about being there.
- And that's not something we really want to hear. We would never intentionally choose a desert?
- Yet, if Jesus himself needed the desert so he could be prepared, then who am I to think I don't?
- The main message of Hebrews is Endurance. Keep going!
- The brutal reality is that this kind of endurance is mostly grown in the soil of trial and trouble in the desert.
- *"We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."* (Hebrews 3:14)
- We were not made for the desert, but the desert is often where we're made.
- In verse 12 is the warning. It says **12** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*
- One of the inevitabilities of a desert, is doubt. Doubt about God. Doubt about faith. Doubt about yourself. And when those doubts come, what do we do with them?
- How do we keep our doubts from becoming full blown unbelief that will leave our bodies in the desert?

Understand that some doubt is natural and normal for believers.

- It is our nature to doubt. It is an inevitable thing. Not a thing to be crushed.
- Doubt is a part of man as God made him.
- The key with doubt is to...

Learn the difference between good doubt and bad doubt.

- Doubting in a good way is simply this: Ask, *Am I after the truth?*
- Here's bad doubt: It's when I'm being overcome by the doubt I'm entertaining. If I'm consumed by my doubt, and it's all I can see, then it's doubt gone wrong.
- Good doubt ends in truth and growth. Bad doubt ends in despair, and discouragement.

Doubt well: Name your doubts.

- Pause and really reflect on what this doubt really is. Identify it specifically.
- If your doubt is about some aspect of following Jesus, it's helpful to identify what kind of defcon level you're on.
- Defcon 1: is any issue that is fundamental to my faith.
- Defcon 3: might be the level where we're doubting some particular practice of the Christian life.
- Identifying your doubt level will keep things in perspective.

- Don't let every doubt automatically become a full blown crisis of faith.

Doubt well: Identify the source.

- Very few of our doubts are purely intellectual. LOTS of our doubts come from an emotional response we've had to some negative experience.
- Doubts also can spring up from persistent, unconfessed sin in my life. A stagnant faith is also a breeding ground for all sorts of doubts.
- There are some really good questions to identify the source of your doubts.
- Where is this doubt really coming from? (Intellectual or emotional?)
- Is the source of my doubt a trustworthy guide into the truth? (Is my absent father really the best source to consult when I'm weighing whether God loves me or not?)
- Is this doubt the result of some deeper spiritual reality or conflict? (Do I have some sin I need to deal with that might make sense of the doubt?)
- When you identify the source, you can address the cause and not just the symptom.

Doubt well: Doubt your doubts.

- If you're skeptical of something, be a skeptic of your skepticism.
- Be diligent about questioning yourself about how your emotions and feelings and experience might be fueling your doubt.
- Feelings are absolutely real. Don't automatically dismiss them. But at the same time we need to recognize that feelings aren't the strongest guides to the truth.
- Doubt your doubts so that you know that your feelings are really telling you the truth.

Doubt well: Share your doubts.

- It's very common for people wandering for a season in a desert to think, *I'm the only one here! It's just me. No one else has ever experienced this.* And we conclude that we have to navigate the desert by ourselves. We don't. And it's never true that no one else has ever experienced our thing we're in...
- Because that's true, the community of believers around you becomes one of your greatest resources for dealing a desert and with doubts.
- Pro tip: let them. Just let them help.
- Going it alone is usually the fast track to being overwhelmed by our doubt.
- If you're in the desert, let someone help you that's walked there before you.
- And if you're that person that's already gone through the desert and come out the other side? Our text says **13** *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.*
- Exhort means to walk alongside somebody that needs help. So if you were struggling in a desert, but you're not now, help someone who is.

Doubt well: Honestly seek answers.

- It does no good to doubt and not do something with your doubt.
- Doubting well is to continually seek answers. To open the mind up and then shut the mind again on something solid.
- The search for answers should take you to established guides: to scripture, to books, to Bible studies, and most importantly, to more experienced disciples.
- Care about your faith enough to ask questions of it, but then also care enough to find answers to those questions.

Doubt well: Don't demand certainty as a requirement of faith.

- There's a father in Mark 9:24 who is desperate for Jesus to heal his son. His memorable line to Jesus is, "*I believe! Help my in my unbelief!*"
- He's an honest doubter. Here is real faith, but it's mixed with great uncertainty.
- And he's an example for us, that if we wait for certainty, we'll never come to faith.
- Every true believer has questions. If we had waited for certainty with them, we never would have believed.
- The desperate father in Mark 9 teaches us that Jesus doesn't reject us, even in our doubts.
- As I learn that more and more: the depression may come, but I trust God more than the depression. The feelings may come, but I choose to trust God more than the feelings. Troubles will come. But I choose to believe in God more than I believe in my troubles.
- Don't be surprised when Jesus takes you into the desert. Know it's always with purpose.
- Endurance to the end doesn't require doubtless certainty.
- It requires patience in the midst of trouble. A patience grown in the desert.