

Zechariah 7:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.

Analysis

But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder (וַיִּמָּאֲנוּ לְהִקְשִׁיב וַיִּתְּנוּ חֹתֵף שׁוֹרֶרֶת סִנְרֵת, vayma'anu lehaqshiv vayitnu chatef soraret)—Israel's response to prophetic warning was deliberate defiance. The verb ma'en (מָאֵן) means to refuse stubbornly, reject willfully. Haqshiv (הִקְשִׁיב) means to pay attention, give heed—they actively chose not to listen. The idiom natan chatef soraret (gave a stubborn shoulder) pictures a draft animal refusing the yoke, pulling away from the load (Nehemiah 9:29; Hosea 4:16). It suggests rebellious resistance to divine instruction, shrugging off God's authority like an ox refusing to plow.

And stopped their ears, that they should not hear (וַיִּצְנְהוּ הִיכְבִּידוּ מִשְׁמוֹעַ, ve'oznehem hichbidu mishmo'a)—The verb kavad (כָּבַד, to make heavy, dull) describes deliberate deafening. They made their ears heavy/insensitive so they wouldn't hear. This wasn't accidental misunderstanding but intentional ignorance. Isaiah received similar commission: preach to those who hear but don't understand, see but don't perceive, lest they repent and be healed (Isaiah 6:9-10, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13:14-15). Paul warns that people suppress truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18) and eventually God gives them over to reprobate minds (Romans 1:28).

This verse diagnoses the pathology of spiritual rebellion. Unbelief isn't primarily intellectual confusion but moral rebellion—refusing to hear, pulling away from God's yoke, stopping up ears against His voice. The problem isn't that God's Word is unclear but that rebellious hearts actively resist. This explains Jesus's repeated

formula: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15)—the issue isn't auditory capacity but willingness to submit.

Historical Context

This describes pre-exilic Israel's response to the prophets whom God sent repeatedly to call them to repentance (2 Chronicles 36:15-16). Isaiah prophesied for 40+ years to increasingly hostile audiences. Jeremiah endured beatings, imprisonment, and death threats for delivering God's unwelcome message. Amos was expelled from Israel's royal sanctuary for announcing judgment (Amos 7:10-13). The people's consistent pattern was to reject prophetic calls to social justice and covenant faithfulness, preferring comfortable lies from false prophets who promised peace when there was no peace (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. In what areas of your life might you be 'pulling away the shoulder' from God's yoke—resisting His clear instruction?
2. How can you cultivate soft-hearted responsiveness to Scripture rather than hardened selective hearing that accepts only comfortable truths?
3. What warning does this verse give about the cumulative effect of repeatedly ignoring God's voice?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּמָּאֲנוּ ו	לִהְקִשׁ יב	וַיָּנֻחַ ו	כַּתִּיף	סֶכֶל כַּת
But they refused	to hearken	and pulled away	the shoulder	
H3985	H7181	H5414	H3802	H5637
וְאֶזְנוֹתָם	הִכָּבּוּ יָדוֹ	מִשְׁמֹעַ:		
their ears	and stopped	that they should not hear		
H241	H3513	H8085		

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 9:29 (Parallel theme): And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear.

Jeremiah 8:5 (Parallel theme): Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.

Hosea 4:16 (Parallel theme): For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.

Acts 7:57 (Parallel theme): Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

Jeremiah 35:15 (Parallel theme): I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.

Zechariah 1:4 (Parallel theme): Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.

Ezekiel 3:7 (Parallel theme): But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.

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