

Hebrews, Part 2

Do Not Neglect Salvation

The writer of Hebrews has begun presenting his defense of the faith to his fellow Jews who are contemplating abandoning their faith in Christ as their Messiah and returning to their ancestral religion, the Law, with all that is associated with it, including the animal sacrifices. He has argued that God may have indeed spoken through the Prophets and angels in times past, but Jesus is the final word. He will also argue that the Law was merely a shadow of what was to come, and they should not return to the “shadow” when they now have the reality. The author will warn there are consequences if they continue along this path. Let’s realize that this is also a warning for every child of God in our day, a warning that there is a danger of drifting away from the true faith and into apostasy. Do not, for one moment, ever think you are immune to such failure.

In chapter 1 we saw the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 2 we will see the humiliation of Christ. In chapter 1 we saw that Christ was higher than the angels. In chapter 2 we will see Him lower than the angels. Here we will see His humanity and two things about Christ.

1. He reveals God to man
2. He represents man before God

There are six danger signals in the Epistle to the Hebrews, warnings to the people of Israel that they risk failing to enter into the full blessings provided through Christ.

1. Peril of drifting, 2:1-4
2. Peril of doubting, 3:7-4:2
3. Peril of dull hearing, 5:11-14
4. Peril of departing, 6:1-20
5. Peril of despising, 10:26-39
6. Peril of denying, 12:15-29

Figuratively speaking, there are two places where the believer can live: He can live in the desert and have a wilderness experience, or he can enter into the blessings of God by spiritually crossing the Jordan River. God

warned Israel at Kadesh-Barnea that they would miss their full blessings if they failed to enter the land.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

The Peril of Drifting

The writer paused in his exposition to address the readers with the first in a series of urgent warnings. This one is the briefest and most restrained of all of them but is nonetheless solemn.

First note that the writer used the pronoun “we” in verse 1, thus including himself in the warnings, implying that they are believers as he is, and he, like them, is also capable of this same error.

The “therefore” of verse 1 shows that this admonition arose directly from the preceding material. Since the Son is so supremely great and is destined for final triumph over His enemies, the readers “must give the more earnest heed,” that is they would do well to pay more careful attention to the “things we have heard”. The danger is that, if they would not do so, they might drift away (*pararyōmen*) and implied is from the truth. The word means to slip past or escape. It suggests neglect.

The author tells us that the Old Covenant was instituted through angelic ministration. In verse 2 “the word spoken through angels” is a reference to the Law (Acts 7:53 “who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”). The Law declared that “every transgression and disobedience received a just reward.” There were severe penalties for infractions of its demands. The author asked, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” “Neglect” is *ameleo* and means to make light of, be careless, or ignore. “How shall we escape if we make light of so great a salvation?” To walk away from their salvation is akin to neglecting it,

making light of it, and ignoring it and all its benefits. What these Hebrews are anticipating doing is an offense to God – a sin, and the readers could not assume there would be no penalties for this act. If there were penalties under the Law, which was inferior to this “so great a salvation,” how could you possibly expect there would be no consequences for “drifting away”?

“Salvation,” of course, is not referring to salvation in the past tense, that of being delivered from the fires of hell. It is the same as that just mentioned in 1:14 and alludes to the readers’ potential share in the Son’s triumphant dominion (the Kingdom), in which He has “companions” (1:9). The Lord Jesus Himself, while on Earth, spoke much of His future Kingdom and the participation of His faithful followers in that reign (Luke 12:31-32; 22:29-30).

The Lord Himself has “born witness to this, and we have witnessed its truth through “signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.” After what we have seen as proof, how can you walk away from that truth? If you do, just as under the Law, you can expect discipline. The ESV translates “just reward” as “just retribution”. The word “just” means according to right or righteous. And “retribution” means wages due. What it means is it’s gonna hurt, probably a lot, a lesson Israel had to learn several times when they abandoned their faith and entered into idolatry.

But this salvation experience, which was first announced by the Lord had also received confirmation through the various miracles and manifestations of the Spirit, which those who heard Him were empowered to exhibit. The writer is here speaking of the miracles first manifested at Pentecost and demonstrated by the Apostles and others during the early Apostolic Age. He regarded these miracles as a demonstration of the powers of the coming Age. The gifts confirmed the message to whom? To the nation Israel.

The writer is arguing that the readers of this epistle, as born-again believers, have themselves been witnesses to the truths of the promises of the coming Kingdom. They have seen with their own eyes the miracles of Pentecost and following that clearly demonstrated the power and fidelity of God. They have seen the evidence. To “drift away” from this truth is to call Christ a liar, to say He cannot fulfill His promises. This is a sin, and based

on their experience with the Law, they know full well that sin has consequences. Therefore, they should not expect to “escape” those consequences. It’s gonna hurt!

Heb. 6:5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come

“Have tasted” does not mean to have just barely sampled something. The word is *geuomai* and means to taste, to eat, to partake of, to experience. They have experienced the “goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come (miracles)”.

In harmony with the early Christians in the Book of Acts, he saw these miracles as expressions of the sovereignty of the One who had gone to sit at God’s right hand. The author was thinking of this future “world to come”. This is made clear in Hebrews 2:5.

The Son Made Lower Than Angels

Heb 2:5 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. 6 But one testified in a certain place, saying:

“What is man that You are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that You take care of him?

7 You have made him a little lower than the angels;
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And set him over the works of Your hands.

8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”

For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

The author returned to his main train of thought, the destiny of Jesus in the world to come. But now Jesus’ intimate involvement through His Incarnation with those who will share that destiny was brought to the fore. The humanity of Christ needs to be emphasized as well as His deity. He brought deity down to earth and took humanity back to Heaven.

The Destiny of the Captain

It has been claimed that the Dead Sea Scrolls show that the sectarians of Qumran believed that the coming age would be marked by the dominion of Michael and his angelic subordinates. The statement here in verse 2:5 forcefully refutes this view. "He (God) has not put the world to come ... in subjection to angels." People will be awarded this dominion in the world to come. Some believe the "world to come" refers to this present dispensation of the Church Age. Others believe the "world to come" in verse 5 is Heaven, but the word translated "world" is *oikoumene* which means the inhabited Earth and refers to the Messianic Kingdom. The Kingdom will not be ruled by Michael and angels but will be ruled by man – the God-man.

In verses 6-8, a portion of Psalm 8 is quoted.

Ps 8:4 ... what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? 5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. 6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,

While the psalm is often read as a general statement about the role of man in God's Creation, it is clear in the light of Hebrews 2:5 and the application that follows in verses 8b-9 that the author of Hebrews read it primarily as messianic and eschatological. He saw Psalm 8 speaking of Messiah and specifically the "God-Man" who was made lower than the angels and yet "crowned Him with glory and honor".

"You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet" (Heb 2:7-8). However, in the view of the writer, those words do not describe the actual state of affairs now. In verse 8b "But now we do not yet see all things put under him," the writer affirmed this. In other words, He is supposed to have dominion over everything created, but at present, we do not see everything as subject to Him. He is acknowledging to his readers, "True, we have not yet seen the Kingdom (all things under his feet) and the return of the King." The key word is "yet". You don't see this complete dominion now but you will in the future.

Heb 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

That little word “see” is *blepo* and means to discern mentally, observe, perceive, discover, understand. The idea is not just visual acquisition but seeing with full understanding. “With an understanding of who He is, we see Jesus...”

Obviously, the writer was thinking here primarily of Jesus, but the emphasis should be on the term “little lower”. The word is *brachus* and the emphasis of the word is on time. We might say, “He was made *for a little while* lower than the angels.”

“For the suffering of death” might be better translated as “because of the suffering of death” Christ alone could redeem man, and He could do it only by dying on the Cross.

The writer then asserted, while total dominion over the created order is not yet His, Jesus is seen as crowned with glory and honor because He suffered (tasted) death. Remember, the word “tasted” is *geuomai* and means to taste, to partake of, to experience. He didn’t “taste” death as in nibbling at it and almost dying. He experienced its full impact exactly as we do. “By the grace of God,” He did all this – that God could be gracious to you and me today to save us.

The One so crowned was made for a little while lower than the angels for the very purpose of dying, that is, by the grace of God, He might taste (experience) death for everyone. This last statement in verse 9, “... for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone,” is best understood as the purpose of the Lord’s being made lower than the angels in His Incarnation. Despite its reference to Jesus’ present glory, the focus of the statement is on the fact that He became a man in order to die.

Bringing Many Sons to Glory

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Christ took humanity to Heaven, and now in Heaven is not only as a Man in glory, but there is a glory in that Man which was not there before.

“It was fitting for Him” means it was harmonious and consistent with His Person and the purpose to bring many sons to glory in this way. He made all things and all things were for Him.

In this section the writer of Hebrews used, for the first time, the Greek word *archēgos* of Jesus (his other use of the word is in 12:2). The word suggests such concepts as Leader, Originator, and Founder and is almost equivalent, in some respects, to the English word “Pioneer”. It is here translated “Captain”. The familiar rendering “Captain” (KJV) seems a bit superior to “Author” used in some translations. The writer will try to show that the Lord Jesus is the Captain (leader) of that loyal band of people whom God is preparing for glory.

The author continued to think of Psalm 8. The glory he mentioned here is also the glory referred to in the psalm, that is, the glory of dominion over the created order (Heb. 2:7-8). Even the expression “many sons” is inspired by the psalmist’s mention of “the Son of Man” and suggests that for the writer of Hebrews, the messianic title Son of Man probably had a corporate aspect. Jesus is the Son of Man, and His brothers and sisters are the many people who are linked with Him in both suffering and future glory. They will be the King’s “companions” who share His joy in the world to come as referenced in 1:9.

In 2:9 the writer mentioned Jesus’ death for the first time. Now he affirmed that such suffering was appropriate for the One who was to serve as the Captain of the many sons. Before He could fittingly lead them to the salvation experience that God had in mind for them (“to glory”), Jesus must be made perfect for this role “through suffering”. “Perfect” is the Greek word *teleioo* and means to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end.

Since His brethren must suffer the temptations, trials, and tribulations of life, so must He, only more so, if He is to be the kind of Captain they need. By having done so, He can give them the help they require. (Heb 2:18 “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”).

His perfect life did not save us. His teachings did not save us. His virgin birth did not save us. His miracles did not save us, nor does His example save us. It was the imputation of our sins to His person, His being judged in our stead, and His death on the Cross that saves us – if we believe in that. He was made complete; He reached that completeness on the Cross.

Because He suffered on the Cross for me and what He has done for me and all lost mankind, I am prepared to love Him.

Jesus’ humiliation accomplished two things:

1. It brought glory and honor to the person of Christ.
2. It procured man’s salvation by making it possible.

Heb 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.” 13 And again: “I will put My trust in Him.” And again: “Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.”

In 2:11-13 the author tells us there is a deep unity between the Son and the many sons (v. 11 “those who are being sanctified are all of one”). By His death, He makes them holy, and those who are thus made holy are of the same family. Sanctification does not mean God has made you a perfect little boy or girl. Sanctification when used in connection with the Holy Spirit has to do with the work of God within us. The word means simply to be set apart and, in this case, set apart as God’s own. It is in one sense possessive and in another characteristic. We belong to God and God sets us apart through the Spirit-filled spiritual life we live through His calling and enablement. We are God’s own, and He makes us special – set apart from the rest of the world. However, when used in connection with the person of

Christ, as here in Hebrews, is not a condition but a position that we have “in Christ”.

That the writer thought of the sacrifice of Christ as making the many sons holy in a definitive and final way is clear from 10:10 and 14. He sanctified us by bringing us into the family of God as brethren because we all become sons of God in the most literal sense. I am referring to the divine creation of a human spirit in each believer at salvation. As a literal son of God, He can no more deny us as His children than our human parents can deny the DNA link with their own children.

Heb 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Heb 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Thus as Psalm 22:22 (quoted in Heb. 2:12) predicts, Jesus can call them brothers. He can also speak to them of His own trust in God (v. 13a, quoting Isa. 8:17) and can regard them as the “children God has given Me” which is quoting Isaiah 8:18. Like an elder brother in the midst of a circle of younger children, the Captain of their salvation can teach them the lessons of faith along the pathway of suffering.

Heb 2:14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

These children, however, were once held in servitude by their enemy, Satan. Since they were human, in order to rescue them, their Captain had to become human and die for them. And by doing so, He was able to destroy the Devil. The author did not mean that Satan ceased to exist or ceased to be active. Rather the word he used for “destroy” (*katargēsē*) means the annulment of his power over those whom Christ redeems.

In speaking of the devil as wielding the power of death, the writer meant that Satan uses people's fear of death to enslave them to his will. Often people make bad moral choices out of their intense desire for self-preservation. The readers are reminded that they are no longer subject to such slavery and they could face death with the same confidence in God their Captain had.

Heb 2:16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

Whatever their needs or trials, their Captain is more than adequate to help them since He, not angels, ministers to Abraham's descendants (literally "Abraham's seed"). God gave hints of the identity of Christ all along the way. At the very beginning, God said Christ would come as the seed of a woman. Then God said He would be the seed of Abraham, and a little later He said He would be born of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, of the nation Israel, He was to be born of a virgin. It should have been very hard to miss the hints. Everyone should have found their way to Bethlehem when Jesus was born. All that points to the Jewishness of the writer's primary audience, and now even Gentile Christians could claim to be the "seed of Abraham" in a spiritual sense.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

The help which the Captain gives to His followers is again predicated on the fact that He was made like His brothers in every way, that is, both in terms of becoming incarnate and by virtue of suffering.

Heb 2:17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The Lord Jesus came down to Earth in the likeness of men.

Phil 2:7 made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

“... In the likeness of men” – it was a real likeness. He was born in a stable behind an inn and experienced real poverty, temptation, and a violent and unmerited death. Why? So He could know something of the effect of sin on humanity. You see it in poverty. You see it in temptation. You see it in the violence often associated with man. The Lord Jesus came to Earth and took on a human body. He is able to sympathize with you and me. He understands us not because He is God but because He became a man. In emphasizing the deity of Christ there is a danger of underestimating the value of His humanity.

Here, for the first time, the writer introduced the thought of His priesthood, which he will elaborate on later. For now, he is content to affirm that this identification with “His brothers” had made possible a priesthood characterized both by mercy and fidelity in service to God. This included, as its basis, atonement for the sins of the people. The author will also have much to say on this later, but he chose to conclude the section on the profoundly hopeful thought that the Captain, in His role as Priest, is able to aid his readers who are being tempted (v. 18) because of the experience of temptation which His own sufferings entailed.

Though the discussion of these themes is far from over, the author has already suggested that the Captain has indeed been made perfect for His role in leading them into participation in His future glory.

Heb 2:18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted

The word “tempted” should be translated as “tested”. The Greek is *peirazo* and means to tempt, try, prove, or test. Could Jesus have been tempted to sin? Yes, of course, He could be tempted and often was during His life here on Earth. Could He have fallen? No and not because He was God. Jesus Christ set aside His deity and came and lived with us as a man.

Phil 2:5 ...Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

“Emptied” is *kenoo* and means to make empty, deprive of force, render vain, useless, of no effect. The Second Person of the Trinity rendered useless His deity and came to Earth to live here for 33 years as a man and suffered all the emotions, pains, trials, and tribulations that we suffer. He lived His life on Earth, not in the infinite power of His deity, of which He “emptied” Himself, but as a man like us depending on the power of the Holy Spirit to see Him through everything He endured. He offers us access to the very same power source that He used while here on Earth – the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16). It is said Jesus test-drove the prototype spiritual life, proved it worked and left it here for us to use. How well are we using it?

Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, and Satan, knowing how hungry He was, challenged Him, “Why don’t you turn these rocks into bread?” His human body surely screamed for nourishment. All the pain of the hunger was there and real for Him just like for us. He easily could have turned the stones into bread; that is the test. But He did not. He didn’t resist because He was God; He had rendered useless that power. He used the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to resist the temptations He faced.

Bob Thieme put it this way, “With reference to His deity, Jesus Christ is said in Latin to be NON POSSE PECARE, i.e., not able to sin. With reference to His humanity, Christ is said to be POSSE NON PECARE, i.e., able not to sin. Of course, deity cannot sin (not able to sin). And because His humanity relied upon the filling of the Spirit ... He was able not to sin.”

The Lord Jesus Christ knows you and He understands you—not only because He is God, but because He became a man. He was tested to prove He was who He claimed He was, but that testing helped Him identify with you and me on an intimately personal level.

Heb 2:18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.