

2. Pay Careful Attention and Do Not Drift Away (Hebrews 2)

Hebrews 1 established statements of fact that Hebrew Christians should accept at face value. The first statement was that God has spoken at the end of these days through his son. To people familiar with the early history of the church, the jailing of early Christians and the martyrdom of some of the apostles and Christians like Stephen attested to these Hebrew Christians that the statement in Hebrews 1:1 is true beyond doubt. Hebrew Christians would know of Peter's defense after being jailed, accounted in Acts 5:29-32. As a Grecian Jew himself, Stephen would have been a hero to them in his preaching and his martyrdom recorded in Acts 7.

The second statement of fact, found in Heb 1:2-3, is that everything that God does and has done is through and in Christ:

He has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

The third statement of fact marshaled evidence from the Old Testament, that the son was God himself and superior to the angels. The statement begins in Heb 1:4, "4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." It concludes in Heb 1:14: "14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

Based on these indisputable statements of fact, Hebrews 2 begins with the conclusion: Pay attention to what we have heard.

Warning to Pay Attention and Not Drift Away (Hebrews 2:1-4)

2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

As stated, the first verse (Heb 2:1), draws a conclusion based on the factual evidence of the first chapter. Here the key word is *therefore* which means *for the reason that* or *consequently*. From all the evidence in chapter one, the point is that we are to pay more careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away from it. Revelation makes the same point on hearing and doing in Rev 1:3: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." James was even more descriptive of what the response of Christians should be to God's word given through His son. James 1:22-25 reads:

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says . . . 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

In verse two, the writer turns again to the truths of the first chapter. When God spoke through angels (God spoke through the prophets at "many times and in various ways."), two things were certain. The message was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment. The words introducing these two certainties were *for* and *if*. Something must follow as true beyond a doubt, and that something is the rhetorical question of verse 3: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

This is the same salvation first announced by the Lord when he gave his commission to the apostles in Mark 16:16: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." In this same passage, the Lord described the confirming of the word:

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. Mark 16:17-20.

The "those who heard him" in Heb 2:3 are the apostles, who were present at the time the Lord announced salvation to all men. That "God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" is evident in Paul's listing of the spiritual gifts that were in the early church. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 12:7-11:

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

This salvation announced by the Lord and confirmed is the only salvation available to man. Peter preached in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." That salvation is the one that God has spoken in His son, and is, according to Paul, the word of truth, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Eph 1:13.

The World to Come Not to Be Subjected to Angels (Hebrews 2:5-9)

5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6 But there is a place where someone has testified:

"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? 7 You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor 8 and put everything under his feet."

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

God is mindful of man and He cares about the son of man (Christ). God has not subjected the world to come to the angels. In fact, the angels are now ministering spirits who serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:14). In Rev 22:8-9, the angel revealing the Revelation to John claimed only to be a fellow servant:

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me.
9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

The scripture quoted in Heb 2:6-7 comes from Psalms 8:4-6 and illustrates two important points: God made Christ a little lower than the angels; but then He also crowned him with honor and glory and put everything under his feet. Nothing was not subject to him. However, there remain some things left to be subject to him. For example, death is not yet subject to him. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:22-28:

22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

The Lord's forms when in heaven and later when on the earth was first equality with God and then on earth a being fashioned after man. Paul described these forms in Phil 2:5-11:

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death –
even death on a cross!
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The object of the humiliation of Jesus was so that, by the grace of God, he might taste of death for everyone. The world to come will not be subject to angels but to the son of God and to those of us who are joint heirs with him. It is in this way that God brought many sons to glory.

God Brought Many Sons to Glory (Hebrews 3:10-13)

10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says,

"I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."

13 And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again he says,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me."

God chose to make Christ who is the author of our salvation perfect through suffering. By suffering the humiliation and pain of the death upon the cross, Jesus was the originator of our salvation. Peter described the circumstances of that suffering 1 Peter 2:21-25:

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

22 "He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The family of God is composed of the One who makes men holy (Christ) and the ones who are made holy (Christians). As members of the family of God, the Lord calls us brothers. No longer is the family of God the Jewish nation. It is now to the Christians, that the Lord declares the name of God and it is in the presence of these brothers in the congregation that the Lord sings God's praise. Christians are the children of God, brothers of the Lord Jesus. Paul conditioned this wonderful status on our suffering together with him in Rom 8:13-17:

. . . if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Christ, a Merciful and Faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:14-18)

14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are

being tempted.

The preceding paragraph established that Jesus was the author or originator of our salvation. This paragraph describes the Lord as a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. The children of God, just as you and I, are flesh and blood. In sharing this humanity, in death, the Lord destroyed the devil who has the power of death. The consummation of this destruction will come at the end of the last days. John records the end of the devil in Rev 20:9-10, "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." In Rev 20:13-15, he also recorded the end of death:

13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Thus, man is free of death through the death of the Lord. Having offered this supreme sacrifice, he became a merciful and faithful high priest. He made atonement for the sins of the people, by his death, and now he can help us who are now being tempted. Salvation is freedom from sin and death, but it is also the overcoming or temptation and suffering. Christians have an author of salvation and a great high priest in their brother Christ Jesus, the Lord.