

Hebrews 006

Blessings Flowing from Justification

Hebrews 2:1-4

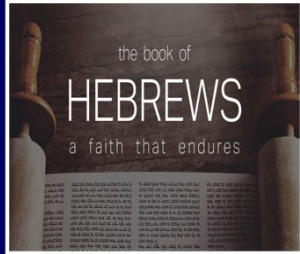
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Let's take our Bibles today and open them to Hebrews 2:1. We are not in Hebrews 1 anymore. We are moving. Here is what we have studied thus far in the Book of Hebrews. We went over these introductory matters.

INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Authorship
- Audience
- Date
- Occasion
- Purpose
- Message
- Outline



Probably the main takeaway is that you are dealing with an audience that is living in close proximity to the temple. They are Jewish, a Hebrew Christian audience, born again, second generation Christians. So this is the group that followed the apostolic generation.

The unbelieving Jews were putting the Jewish Christians under tremendous persecution. "How dare you leave Judaism and embrace Yeshua?" When these Jewish Christians got baptized, they were making a public statement that national Israel was wrong in its rejection of the Messiah, and the newborn church that started in Acts 2 was right. That got them cut off from family synagogue, the temple, and their business contacts.

The temptation for the Jewish Christians was to lapse backward into the temple system, which was still up and running at this time, just to get the persecutors off their backs. So it is in that spirit that the author of the Book of Hebrews says, "Do not do that, because what you have in Christ is so much higher than anything the temple system, which was just a foreshadowing of things to come, has to offer."

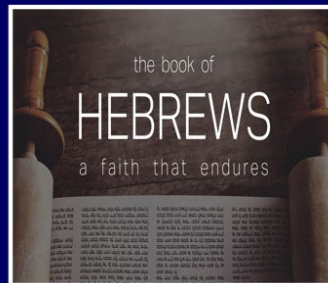
OUTLINE

- I. **Doctrinal section (1:1–10:18)**
 - A. **Christ's attributes (1:1-3)**
 - B. Christ is superior to the angels (1:4–2:18)
 - C. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1–4:13)
 - D. Christ is superior to Aaron (4:14–10:18)
- II. **Practical section (10:19–13:25)**
 - A. Exhortations and pastoral reminders (10, 12, 13)
 - B. Hall of faith (11)
 - C. Benediction (13:20-25)

From there we went into Hebrews 1:1-3, where the author of Hebrews (and we really do not know who wrote Hebrews; some people think they know, but nobody knows because the book is anonymous) starts off by giving Christ's attributes. He basically says, "Old Testament revelation is indirect, incomplete, and temporary. Yet what you have now in Christ is direct, complete, and permanent. So why would you relinquish that and go backwards to a mere shadow?" He does that in Hebrews 1:1-2a.

CHRIST'S 7 ATTRIBUTES SHOWING HIS FINALITY (1:2B-3)

- Heir of all things
- Maker of all things
- Brightness of the Father's glory
- Express image of the Father
- Upholds all things
- Made complete purification for sins
- Sat down at the Father's right hand



Then when you get to Hebrews 1:2b-3, the author lays down some incredible attributes of who Jesus is. Who is Jesus? He is the heir of all things. He is the Maker of all things. He is the brightness of the Father's glory. He is the express image of the Father. He is the one that is upholding all things. He has made complete purification for our sins, something the Old Testament system could never do.

Unlike a priest, whose work was never done because there was always the next round of animal sacrifices that had to be administered, Jesus, when He ascended to the Father's right hand, sat down. His work was complete. What a way to start the Book of Hebrews by explaining that. "Why would you leave this and go back to that?"

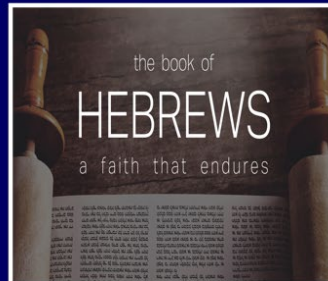
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Now the author of Hebrews starts the next major section of the book, Hebrews 1:4-2:18, where he starts to explain that Jesus is higher than the angels. That seems kind of strange. Why would you talk about that, unless you understand what the angels did in Old Testament times? They were the messengers of God. It was through angels that the law of Moses at Mount Sinai was mediated.

B. **Hebrews 1:4–2:18** **Christ is Superior to the Angels**

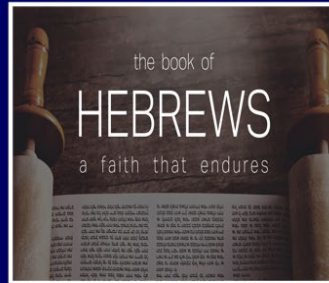
- 1. **Seven OT Citations (1:4-14)**
- 2. **Warning Against Drifting (2:1-4)**
- 3. **Why God Became Man (2:5-18)**



If the author of Hebrews can show that Jesus is higher than the angels, he can show that the message of Jesus is higher than the message that you find in the Old Testament, because the message of the Old Testament was mediated by angels, and yet Jesus is higher than the angels. That is the author's point. It is a logical argument.

1. 7 OT CITATIONS DEMONSTRATING CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO THE ANGELS (1:4-14)

- a) vs. 5a – Ps 2:7
- b) vs. 5b – 2 Sam 7:14
- c) vs. 6 – Ps 97:7
- d) vs. 7 – Ps 104:4
- e) vs. 8-9 – Ps 45:6-7
- f) vs. 10-12 – Ps 102:25-7
- g) vs. 13 – Ps 110:1



So as we saw last time, as we studied Hebrews 1:4-14, the author of Hebrews weaved together some amazing Old Testament passages showing who Jesus is. When you get through with that list, obviously Jesus cannot be compared to an angel. He is better than an angel. He is higher than an angel. He is bigger than an angel. So therefore, His message must be superior in comparison to Old Testament revelation, which was mediated by angels.

Then we run into (this is where we are today) Hebrews 2:1-4, our first warning passage. This is what the author does five times in this book. He stops his train of thought, which is very logical, and gives a very strong warning against lapsing backwards. In other words, "If you lapse away from the full revelation of Christ and go back to that temple system, there will be a very severe negative consequence." Then when he is finished with his warning, he gets right back on the hiking trail and starts going back to his subject matter about angels.

So with all that being said, notice this first warning passage. It is in Hebrews 2:1-4, and I am going to, as I am reading it, highlight the parts of it that I think are most important towards interpreting it. Hebrews 2:1 says,

"For this reason WE..." (Hebrews 2:1).

Did I put enough emphasis on that? In other words, the writer is equating his spiritual status with the audience, and nobody doubts that the writer was saved. If the writer is not saved, we have a big problem because we have an unregenerate person writing a major book of the New Testament, which would be absurd. So when the author of Hebrews says "we" and "us," he is identifying with the saved status of his audience.

Now, this will become a big deal, because a lot of people want to convert this paragraph to unsaved people, because the logic is that this is so severe it could not apply to a saved person. But when you look at "us" and "we" the repetition of those terms, it is very clear that you are dealing with saved people.

"For this reason WE must pay much closer attention to what WE have heard, so that WE do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels..." (Hebrews 2:1-2).

You notice the author is continuing his thought on angels. He is bringing in this warning as part of the big subject matter of the angels. He says,

"For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will WE escape if WE NEGLECT so great a salvation?..." (Hebrews 2:2-3).

So the audience had salvation. Their danger was not, "You do not have salvation." Their danger was, "You are neglecting your salvation."

"how will WE escape if WE NEGLECT so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to US by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Hebrews 2:3-4).

So what is this? This is your first warning in the Book of Hebrews. "If you drift backwards, something bad is going to happen to you."

WARNINGS

- **2:1-4 – Warning against drifting**
- 3:7-4:13 – Warning against disobedience
- 5:10-6:20 – Warning against immaturity
- 10:26-39 – Warning against despising the truth
- 12:25-29 – Warning against denying the truth

We have five such warnings in the Book of Hebrews. We have a warning against drifting (Hebrews 2:1-4). Then there will be a warning against disobedience (Hebrews 3:7-4:13). Then there will be a warning against immaturity (Hebrews 5:10-6:20). Then there will be a warning against despising the truth (Hebrews 10:26-39). And then at the very end of the book, there is a warning against denying the truth (Hebrews 12:25-29).

So we have a warning against drifting, a warning against disobedience, a warning against immaturity, a warning against despising the truth, and a warning against denying the truth—all of which this group was in danger of doing because they were pressured to drift backward.

Now, this whole idea of drifting...those of you that grew up in Southern California get it, because it is like if you go to the lifeguard on the beach and you say, "I am going to go out and do some boogie boarding." You say to the lifeguard, "Here is my towel. Here are my car keys. I am going to go out in the water. Can you just keep an eye on these? I will come back and retrieve them." So you go out and you do your thing. And these lifeguard stations all look the same unless you have memorized the number ahead of time.

So you do your thing out in the water and you climb out and you go back to the lifeguard and you say, "Okay, I am here to pick up my towel. I am here to pick up my car keys." And he says, "What are you talking about? I never talked to you before." So what happened was the current caused you to drift, and it was so subtle that you did not even know you were drifting. So that is why you show up at the wrong lifeguard station that you think is the right lifeguard station.

It is not that you did anything intentional to make the mistake. It is just that you drifted without really knowing it. That is the kind of thing that happens to Christians constantly, because we are living in the devil's world. We can drift back to things that God told us to move on from a long time ago. So that is what this audience of Hebrews was in danger of experiencing.

So this warning passage is an interruption, a parenthetical break, in the author's argument about angels. If you go back to Hebrews 1:4, you will see the word *"angels."* That is how this section starts. If you go to Hebrews 1:13, you should see there *"angels."* There it is. Then this warning is given. Hebrews 2:5 says *"angels"* again. So Hebrews 2:1-4 is obviously contained in the author's argument concerning the angels.

If you look right in the middle of the warning passage, in Hebrews 2:2, it says *"angels."* The angels did something in Old Testament times. This warning passage is part of the argument about angels, showing that Jesus is higher than the angels, but it is an interruption in the argument to say, "If you drift, something bad is going to happen to you." This interrupting to warn the audience is so common in the Book of Hebrews that it happens five times.

By the way, it is very difficult for me to deny that these are Christians being addressed in Hebrews 2:1-4. First of all, the repetition of "we" or "us," to my mind, proves the audience is saved, just as the author is saved, meaning that it is completely possible for a Christian to drift backwards. Then the word *"neglect,"* which you see in Hebrews 2:3, also proves the audience is saved.

"how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?..." (Hebrews 2:3).

You cannot neglect something that you do not possess. It is like someone saying to you, "Hey, you are neglecting your wife." Well, that means you have to have a wife to neglect, right? You cannot neglect something that is not there.

Paul would write to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:14, and he would use the same word.

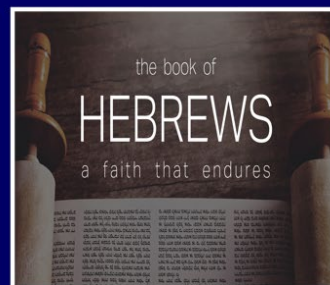
"Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14).

When Paul says to Timothy, "Do not neglect your spiritual gift," he is assuming that Timothy has a spiritual gift to neglect. You cannot neglect a spiritual gift that you do not possess.

So that is the significance of the word "*neglect*" and "*salvation*" (Hebrews 2:3). The audience had salvation. They were just neglecting their growth in the salvation that they possessed, by leaving the full revelation of Christ and sinking, drifting backwards into the temple system.

WARNING AGAINST DRIFTING (2:1-4)

- Parenthesis in argument about angels
- From the lesser to the greater (*a fortiori*)



So what the author does in this warning (Hebrews 2:1-4) is he offers an argument from the lesser to the greater. That is an argument in logic, which in Latin we call an "a fortiori" argument. You are arguing from the lesser to the greater. "If neglect of lesser revelation brought discipline, do you think you are going to escape the disciplinary hand of God if you neglect higher revelation?" The author is moving from the lesser to the greater. That is called an "a fortiori" argument.

So what is the author's point? Here is his point: "If drifting away from Old Testament Judaism—which, by the way, was mediated by angels at Mount Sinai (Hebrews 2:2)—was punishable, meaning if it brought into effect the disciplinary hand of God, how much more will drifting away from the full revelation of the Son of God be punishable by the disciplinary hand of God? Divine discipline clearly happened to the nation of Israel. All you have to do is read the Old Testament to see it. God brought His nation under discipline many, many times because they drifted away from His law."

So the point is arguing from the lesser to the greater. If drifting away from Old Testament Revelation was punishable, or brought the disciplinary hand of God, how much more will drifting away from the full revelation of the Son of God be punishable

and bring the disciplinary hand of God, especially since the full revelation of God, the full revelation of His Son, was confirmed to the recipients of this letter through apostolic signs and wonders?

Signs and wonders are a very interesting study in the Bible. I want to be clear: I believe God can do miracles today if He wants to. If I did not believe that, I would not pray for people to get well, right? But having said that, signs and wonders have a tendency in the Bible to cluster around time periods when God is starting to work. So today we do not have confirmatory signs and wonders like we see in the Book of Acts.

But signs and wonders were very dominant in the Mosaic time period because God was bringing in a new age of time, Israel under the Law. So when you study the Book of Exodus, as we are studying in the main service, you see all of these signs and wonders.

Signs and wonders in the Bible will cluster around the Elijah/Elisha stories, because God is doing something totally new there. He is raising up a new office called a prophet, to call Israel's wayward kings back to the law. That is something that did not happen routinely prior to that. The kings would start to go evil—and there were a lot of evil kings. The North had nineteen kings. Every single one of them was evil. The South had twenty kings, and only eight of them were good.

Kings of Israel had a tendency to just put themselves over the Law. That is why in the Book of Kings, it keeps saying "good king," "bad king," "bad king," "good king." Why does it keep saying, "This guy was bad." and "This guy was good."? Is it because one guy got inflation under control better than the others? No. It is because the kings of Israel were evaluated based on whether they were going to submit to the Law of God as given at Mount Sinai, or were they, like Solomon, going to put themselves over the Law?

So what do you do with the king who puts himself over the Law? Well, you raise up a prophet to call the king back. And that is why most prophets had a very short career span, right? Most of them were killed very fast, because the king had the political power. Who wants some guy on talk radio causing problems for him, right?

I think to a large extent, we have modern-day prophets today in this sense—there are all kinds of people out there that are calling wayward government back to its Constitutional roots. It is interesting how they get canceled, defunded, thrown in prison with the J-6-ers. I am just drawing a modern-day parallel.

How would you know that these prophets speaking are from God? Well, God confirmed it through signs and wonders, beginning with the Elijah/Elisha stories. So that is why miracles are clustering around that time period.

Then miracles cluster around the ministry of Jesus, because Jesus, according to the Synoptics—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—was offering Israel the kingdom on a silver platter. Had they enthroned the King on His terms, hypothetically, the Millennial Kingdom would have started. So how do we know this was an authentic offer? The signs and wonders confirmed it.

Then signs and wonders cluster around the Book of Acts. What is God doing in the Book of Acts? He is raising up a new man called the church, that we are a part of. We are not at the foundational stage of the church anymore. I would argue that God is putting on the roof of the church, not relaying the foundation. In the Book of Acts, it was something that was new, a new dispensation called the Age of the Church, so miracles and signs and wonders clustered around that time period.

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, because there are a lot of people out there that are looking for a Signs and Wonders movement today. The next Signs and Wonders movement on the horizon, according to Bible prophecy, is the kingdom of the Antichrist through counterfeit signs and wonders. So if your whole belief system is, "I have to see a sign; I have to see a wonder; I have to see a miracle; for Christianity to be true." you are almost a sitting duck for the coming Antichrist.

Then when the Kingdom, which will last a thousand years, is inaugurated at the end of the Tribulation Period, Revelation talks about the mute speaking and instantaneous healings taking place, and the Dead Sea coming to life biologically. That is a new age of time, and to authenticate it, God provides various signs and wonders.

So where are we in the Book of Hebrews? We are in the signs and wonders Age of the Church, which had just started at the time Hebrews was written. As the message went from Jesus to the apostles, to the second generation that is receiving the letter of Hebrews, they actually had it confirmed to them through various signs and wonders.

So what the author of Hebrews is doing is arguing from the lesser to the greater, and he is saying this: "If drifting away from Old Testament Judaism was punishable, how much more will drifting away from the full revelation of the Son of God be punishable, especially since the full revelation of Jesus Christ was confirmed to the recipients of this letter through various signs and wonders? How do you think you are going to escape divine discipline?"

The author is bringing this in to get the audience to rethink what they are doing. They had not crossed the point of no return yet, but they were getting close to the line of no return, where God was going to have to discipline them. And as the Book of Hebrews says, "Whom the Lord loves the Lord chastens" (paraphrase, Hebrews 12:6). The chastening hand of God is actually a sign that you belong to God.

God is saying, "If My covenant nation was disciplined nationally, do you think you are going to get away with not being disciplined since you are rejecting a much bigger, higher revelation?"

When God took the nation of Israel to Mount Sinai, He put them under what is called the suzerain-vassal treaty structure. This is part of what we call form criticism, where you study books of the Bible according to the literary forms that were common in that time period. There was something common in that time period called a suzerain-vassal treaty.

The suzerain was the superior, the vassal was the inferior. The superior would come to the inferior and say, "If you come under my authority and you obey the covenant text, I

will bless you. But if we enter into this structure and you disobey the covenant text, then I will curse you." The suzerain-vassal treaty was very, very common in Abraham's time period and in Moses' time period.

That is how the Book of Deuteronomy is laid out according to form criticism: just like a suzerain-vassal treaty. In a suzerain-vassal treaty, there was always a preamble and a prologue tracing the historical development of the parties. Then there were the covenant obligations—this is what the vassal had to do to make the suzerain happy. Then the covenant text had to be read publicly so that both parties understood what they were getting into. It also had to be stored somewhere and there had to be witnesses.

In every suzerain-vassal treaty there were blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. So what God did at Mount Sinai was He took Moses and the nation of Israel after they had been emancipated from Egyptian bondage, and He put them under a suzerain-vassal treaty. The suzerain-vassal treaty is an odd thing in our minds, but in that day it was extremely common.

Six Parts of a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty in Deuteronomy

- Preamble (1:1-5)
- Prologue (1:6–4:40)
- Covenant obligations (5–26)
- Storage and reading instructions (27:2-3; 31:9, 24, 26)
- Witnesses (32:1)
- **Blessings and curses (28)**



The whole Book of Deuteronomy is laid out like a suzerain-vassal treaty. There is a preamble (Deuteronomy 1:1-5). There is a historical prologue between the two parties, God and Israel (Deuteronomy 1:6-4:40). Then there is the covenant text—this is what the vassal has to do (Deuteronomy 5-26). The covenant text begins with the Big Ten, the Ten Commandments. Everything in that section revolves around those Ten Commandments. "Here is how the Ten Commandments apply to daily life as you are entering the land"—613 commandments total. They are all organized around the Big Ten, which you find in Deuteronomy 5.

Then the Big Ten and the covenant text had to be read publicly. So there are reading instructions in Deuteronomy 27:2-3; 31:9, 24, 26. Then the covenant text had to be stored somewhere. So where was the covenant text stored for Israel? In the ark of the covenant. And then there were witnesses. Now, how can you witness for God? Does God need an expert witness or an eyewitness? No one can witness for God. So God, in Deuteronomy 32:1, calls heaven and earth as His witness.

Then you have the spine of the Old Testament, quite frankly, the blessings and curses section. "Here are the blessings if you obey the Ten Commandments and its application (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). Here are the things I am going to do for you." God says. "Your crops are going to produce bountifully. You are going to go out and fight your battles, and although you are outnumbered, you are going to win. You are going to lend to the nations of the earth and not borrow." So that is in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. But then in Deuteronomy 28:15-68, God lists the curses for disobedience.

See, the blessings are only fourteen verses. The curses are Deuteronomy 28:15-68. So it is almost like God knew what was going to happen. "Here is what is going to go wrong for you nationally, if you disobey the covenant texts. Number one, you are going to go out and you are going to fight your battles and you are going to lose, even though you might have superior armaments.

"Number two, your crops are going to fail. They are going to be consumed by locusts. Number three, you are not going to be a lending nation anymore. You are going to be a borrowing nation. You are going to get plunged into debt nationally, which cannot be paid off."

Does that sound familiar? I know this is about Israel, but it is interesting to look at this structure and compare it to the United States. I am not making the direct parallel. The United States is not Israel. But it is interesting that the very things that God said would happen to wayward Israel are happening to our country, right down to debt and the foreigners within our borders increasing. It is eerie when you think about it. But anyway, I do not want to draw the connection too tightly. I just want to focus here on Israel.

So there are blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. That—Deuteronomy 28—becomes the spine of the Old Testament. If you understand that, you will understand the whole Old Testament, because the whole rest of the Old Testament is a record of how what God said in Deuteronomy 28 happened in real time. The rest of the Old Testament is a record of the different prophets that God raised up at different times in the midst of national disobedience and curses to call wayward Israel back.

If you understand this suzerain-vassal treaty structure, you will understand every single Old Testament prophet, because what they are saying is, "Come back to the Big Ten. If you do not, the curses that you are experiencing are going to keep moving and rolling up like a snowball. If you come back to the covenant text, God will bless you."

By the way, there is a parallel passage in Leviticus 26 outlining—just like Deuteronomy 28, both given at Mount Sinai, part of the Mosaic package, we might call it—the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. If you were to go home today and you were to read two chapters of the Bible, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, you would understand everything in the Bible. You would understand why everything is happening the way it is happening in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 28 is pivotal. It is what we call the spine of the Old Testament.

The way these curses work is they keep rolling up like a snowball until they get to a point where they cannot be reversed. That is why a lot of the prophets late in the game

are saying, "It is too late to turn around." Ezekiel is saying stuff like, "We are going to be in this captivity for a while, so get comfortable." But the curses would roll up like a snowball with the cycles of discipline, and they would climax in a foreign nation whose language they did not know coming and evicting the Israelites from their own land, mistreating them, and incarcerating them.

You look at how Babylon took the Southern Kingdom of Judah into the Babylonian captivity, and you read about it in the end of 2 Chronicles, it is just unbelievable how poorly the Jewish people were mistreated. Rings were put through their noses—kings of Israel and Judah. They were yanked around in chains. In fact, we went on one of our trips to the Titus Arch there in Rome. And there is an actual piece of archeology there—I wish I had brought it in—of the Jewish people in subjugation. You can see them there as slaves. It is carved in stone.

You can Google this and look it up: Titus Arch. It is interesting that you take a tour of the Roman Colosseum, and the tour guides do not even mention this, but to me, it is such a big deal. When we had our group there, we made a big deal of it: "Look at that. It is etched in stone. It is the Jewish people in a state of bondage underneath chariots and in chains, so to speak—under Roman authority." You go around the Roman Colosseum, and you ask yourself, "Well, who built this thing? How did this thing get built? This is a big edifice."

You know how the Colosseum in Rome was built? It was built with the money from the temple, which was quite an edifice, that Titus of Rome destroyed. So people today want to talk about reparations. My goodness, maybe we should take money away from the Italians and give it back to the Hebrews, because that is how that Colosseum was built. This is all an outworking of the cycles of discipline that go all the way back to the Mosaic Covenant.

These curses would roll like a snowball, and they would climax in a nation whose language the Israelites did not know nor understand which would come and enslave them, and in some cases, evict them from their land. That is Deuteronomy 28:49-50. "How bad is it going to get for you, Israel? It is going to get bad, because you are going to get up in the morning and you are going to say, 'I wish it was evening.' And then at evening you are going to say, 'I wish it was morning.'"

All of this is predicted in this suzerain-vassal treaty. It says in Deuteronomy 28:49-50,

"The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, [this is 1,500 years before the time of Christ] as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young" (Deuteronomy 28:49-50).

That is how you always monitor a civilization. How do they treat those that are defenseless, like an older person or someone very young? We might even talk about a child in the womb of their mother. How does a nation treat the elderly? How does a nation treat the very, very young? That is how you determine how pagan a nation is. If

they have no respect for the young and no respect for the old, and they are going after defenseless people, it is obviously a nation that does not fear God at all.

Those are some things I am a little bit concerned about as I watch our elderly, in some cases, being pressured to die early, in the euthanasia movement. Just Google "MAID Canada" and you will see how the Canadians on our northern border have made it almost a policy of the elderly needing to die in the name of euthanasia. In fact, more Canadians have died—did you know this?—through MAID in Canada than were killed in World War II.

This nation (Deuteronomy 28:49-50) would show no favor to the old, and it would show no favor to the young. My goodness, look at our abortion on demand policies in this country. Even with Roe vs. Wade overturned and the issue being sent back to the states, there have been more abortions more than ever, despite the fact that Roe vs. Wade has been overturned. I think America is drifting in a pagan direction according to this standard.

God is very clear that a pagan nation was going to come and kick the Israelites out of the land, either enslave them or kick them out. That was announced 1,500 years before the time of Christ, at Mount Sinai, in a suzerain-vassal treaty. This is part of the curses.

ISRAEL'S JUDGMENTS

- Division of the kingdom in 931 B.C. (1 Kgs. 12)
- Assyrian judgment in 722 B.C. (2 Kgs. 17)
- Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 25)
- Rome *Diaspora* in A.D. 70 (Luke 19:41-44)



So did that happen? Yeah. It happened over and over again. To quote the great theologian Yogi Berra, "It's déjà vu all over again." It is almost as though Solomon, at the end of his life, got up in the morning and read Deuteronomy 17 about what a king was supposed to do, and he did the opposite.

The king was not to multiply wives for himself (Deuteronomy 17:17). Boy, look at what Solomon did: he amassed seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines. The king was not to enter into treaties with foreign nations. How do you think Solomon got all those wives and concubines? He entered into all these treaties. Part of the deal was you get the princess or princesses as part of the package in terms of an international deal. So obviously Solomon completely transgressed God's standards there.

The king was not to multiply wealth for himself. Solomon multiplied wealth for himself. So what does God do? He says, "Well, the suzerain-vassal treaty, which you are a party to, Israel, is in effect." So when Solomon left the throne, the kingdom was divided into ten northern tribes headquartered in Samaria and two southern tribes headquartered in Jerusalem. The North took on the name "Israel." The South took on the name "Judah."

You would think that the nation, after seeing what happened in that division, would get its act together. But just read the Old Testament. You will see that Israel did not get its act together. They kept rebelling against God. So God, in 722 B.C., brought the Assyrians. That was the outworking of a nation whose language the Israelites would not understand.

The Assyrians were a diabolical people. Did you know that it was the Assyrians who invented the crucifixion? The Romans did not invent the crucifixion. They borrowed it from the Assyrians. The Assyrians—and we have all kinds of archeological evidence of this—would kill people by literally skinning them alive. If I described to you how people died under Assyria, the description would be so repulsive that I do not even know if I could bring it into a family church setting like this and explain it.

When you understand that, you understand why when God said to Jonah, "Go preach grace to the Assyrians, headquartered in Nineveh," Jonah said, "No way. Not those people." and he went the opposite way to Spain. We dogpile on Jonah when we read that. But put yourself in Jonah's shoes. It would be like God saying, "Go to the Nazis and preach grace to them." I would not want to do that, would you? It is like, "Lord, let them have it. Do not give them grace. I do not want those people in heaven with us."

Israel continued in disobedience, and God raised up the Assyrian Empire, which took the Northern Kingdom and scattered it. That happened in 722 B.C. You can read all about it in 2 Kings 17, just like you can read about the division of the kingdom after Solomon in 1 Kings 12.

The division of the kingdom happened in 931 B.C. The first three kings of Israel all reigned for forty years—number one, Saul (c. 1051-1011 B.C.), followed by David (c. 1011-971 B.C.), followed by Solomon (c. 971-931 B.C.). Solomon was the last king of the United Kingdom. After he left the throne, the kingdom was divided. That is why it is whiplash reading 1 Kings and 2 Kings, because it is constantly moving you from the North to the South.

"Here is a king in the North. Here is a king in the South. Here is a king in the North. Here is a king in the South." Why do we have to hear all that? Because the kingdom of Israel was divided. There were nineteen Northern kings and twenty Southern kings. How many good kings were there in the North? Zero. How many good kings were there in the South? Eight. That is a little bit better of a record, but not much of one. If your team goes eight and twelve, it is probably not that great of a season.

The North became more and more wicked and God brought the Assyrians to scatter the north. Why did He do that? Because that is what He said He would do, going back to Mount Sinai in the suzerain-vassal treaty. Now, you would think the South would learn

its lesson. You would think, "Wow, God really disciplined the North. We are going to get our act together and go back to the covenant texts, because we do not want to experience discipline like the North did." But the South was worse than the North.

The prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied during this time, talks about two sisters (Ezekiel 16, 23), Oholah and Oholibah. One represents the North; one represents the South. The older sister became a prostitute and she experienced all of the consequences of being a prostitute. Now, you would think the younger sister would say, "You know what? This life of prostitution is not for me. Look at what happened to my sister. But the younger became more of a harlot than the older sister."

Ezekiel is giving this message to the remaining Southern Kingdom, saying, "That is what you guys are like." Do you think that message played well with the leadership of the nation? This is why all these prophets were persecuted and mistreated. So the Southern Kingdom became worse than the Northern Kingdom. God brought discipline because He promised He would do that in the suzerain-vassal treaty.

This time it was through the hands of the Babylonians. Judah was taken into captivity in 586 B.C. If you want to read all about it, it is in 2 Kings 25. That is where Judah is treated horribly. Second Chronicles picks up a lot of that information and talks about the total mistreatment of Judah by the Babylonians.

Judah went into captivity for seventy years. Jeremiah, two times, tells us the captivity is going to be seventy years: Jeremiah 25:11-12 and Jeremiah 29:10. It relates to something I am going to bring up in the sermon today called the not allowing the land to have its rest, which is in our passage for this morning. So keep a tight grip on that seventy-year captivity. I will make reference to it a little later.

So the seventy-year captivity is over. The land has had its seventy years of rest. So the Israelites come back into the land under the empire of Persia, that had overthrown the Babylonians in the handwriting on the wall chapter, Daniel 5, in 539 B.C. Daniel, like Ezekiel, is prophesying during the exile.

So the Israelites come back and God says, "Rebuild the temple." And they decide that their houses are more important than the temple. So God raises up two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, whose names are mentioned in the Book of Ezra (5:1; 6:14). God raises them up to kick the returnees in the backside and get them to rebuild the temple, which they finally do. But their disobedience continues during the realm of Persia.

This is when the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther take place, and it is when we get the writings of the post-exilic prophets, Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi. Then the Old Testament record concludes; Greece comes to power, then Rome, trampling Israel down; and then Jesus shows up during the empire of Rome.

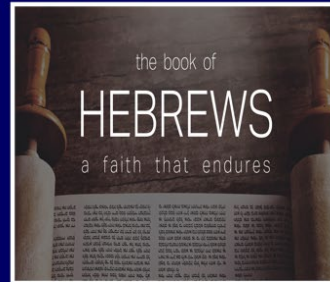
You would think with this whole history, the nation of Israel would say, "We have had enough. Let's embrace the King on the King's terms." But they said of Jesus in Luke 19:14 something to the effect of, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

So yes, there were some believers within Israel personally, but the nation as a whole rejected the Messiah. So what is God going to do? The Mosaic Covenant, given 1,500 years ago, is still in effect. So forty years after the time of Christ, God brings divine discipline in the form of Rome this time, in A.D. 70. That is when the Jews are pushed into the Diaspora. That is what the Titus Arch depicts, showing the Jews in enslavement, whose money was used to subsidize the Roman Colosseum.

So what is the author of Hebrews talking about? He is talking to people that know this history. He is saying, "Do you see a pattern here? If you drift away from God, there is severe discipline. Do you think you are going to escape discipline if you drift away from God, since you are drifting away from a completed higher revelation, confirmed to you by various signs and wonders?"

4 VIEWS ON WARNING PASSAGES

- Hypothetical
- Arminianism
- Calvinism/Reformed
- Loss of blessings



That is the first warning here. Now, unfortunately, this has become a great battleground—how to interpret this. There are four views in evangelicalism about understanding this warning passage. The first is the hypothetical view. That is the view espoused by one of my heroes, Dr. Charles Ryrie, who writes about the warning in Hebrews 6,

"It is impossible for a student, once enrolled in this course, if he turns the clock back [which cannot be done] to start the course over."¹

So his view of these warning passages is that it is a severe threat, but we all know—wink, wink, wink—God would never follow through with discipline. These are just empty threats to scare the audience. Can I ask you a basic question? Was what happened in 722 B.C. hypothetical? Was what happened in 586 B.C. hypothetical? Was what happened in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Romans as demonstrated in archeology by the Titus Arch, etc.—was that hypothetical? No. When God moves in discipline, it happens. It is not a veiled threat. It is not an empty threat.

¹ Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, pg. 1521.

But in Ryrie's mind, this threat is so severe that God could not treat a Christian this way, could He? So Ryrie turns it into a hypothetical. The next view that tries to handle this is Arminianism. They interpret this as concerning salvation. The Arminian is actually correct in this sense. They say the audience is saved. I say, "Well, you are right. The uses of 'we,' 'us,' and 'neglect' prove to me that the audience is saved."

But the Arminian says, "If they drift backward, they are going to lose salvation. They had it, but they lost it." So in Arminianism, that is how they handle these warning passages. It is all interpreted as salvation—loss of salvation. Obviously I cannot believe that because Jesus says, "Once saved, always saved." In John 10:27-29, Jesus says,

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish ["ou me...aion" (οὐ μή...αἰών)];..." (John 10:27-28).

You see in blue there the translation from the Greek: "ou me...aion" (οὐ μή...αἰών). The "ou me" (οὐ μή) construction is a double negative in Greek, meaning that it is the strongest negative you can possibly have. When your five-year-old says, "Can I have the keys to the car?" you are saying, "No! No! No! That will never happen!" That is what the "ou me" (οὐ μή) construction is.

And then if that were not enough, Jesus throws in "aion" (αἰών), which means "forever." Once you are saved, you are in the Father's hand. Absolutely nothing can take you out of it forever. The English translations just do such a poor job. They just say *"never perish"* (John 10:28), which is very strong, but it does not do the Greek justice.

If I was going to come out with the Woods Translation, I would say something like this: *"My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never! never! never! never! never! perish forever!!!"* That is what it is saying.

"...and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:28-29).

So you are in this double grip of grace, and you could not get out of it if you wanted to. So therefore, this idea that the warning passage in Hebrews 2:1-4 is aimed at people that had salvation—that part I agree with; "we" and "us" prove it—but they lost salvation, I obviously cannot buy into that.

Ephesians 4:30 says that we are sealed unto the day of redemption. John 14:16-18 says that the Holy Spirit is in us forever. You can grieve the Spirit. You can quench the Spirit, as a Christian. But you cannot lose the Spirit. So I cannot accept the Arminian view of the warning passages in Hebrews.

The view that has the dominant market share today is the Calvinist view. Almost everyone you hear teaches this from this angle. It is a view that I thought was true for a long time because I had not heard the fourth view. Calvinism, as you know from our series, functions according to the acronym TULIP. The "P" stands for the Perseverance

of the Saints. TULIP stands for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.

According to Calvinism, if you are saved, there needs to be automatic growth, automatic maturity. The idea of a backslidden Christian, a carnal Christian, an immature Christian—Calvinists will pay lip service to that, but their system has very little room for that idea. You get all this talk about "There are a lot of professors, but not all are possessors. We will just see who perseveres. We will see who shows up Wednesday night, because the same people will be here."

Bob Kirkland, in his book critiquing Calvinism, says,

"'P' stands for 'Perseverance of the Saints.' This is what Calvinists say gives them the assurance of eternal security, but in actuality 'the emphasis is upon the believer's faithfulness in persevering—not upon God's keeping power...uncertainty as to one's ultimate salvation is, in fact, built into the very fabric of Calvinism itself.'"²

So what Calvinists do with this is they say, "Well, the writer is aiming his remarks at the unsaved. He is saying 'saved,' 'saved,' 'saved,' 'saved,' as he is teaching, then he stops and there are some unsaved people there, and he aims the warning passage at them."

Now, why can I not accept that? Calvinists embrace that because in their minds, these warnings are given to people that are not persevering. They are drifting. So therefore they are unsaved. I cannot accept that interpretation because of "we," "us," and "neglect." The audience is clearly saved. Saved people can drift backwards. It is a possibility. And if you drift backwards, there is going to be a consequence. But it has nothing to do with heaven or hell.

If you read a commentary written by a Calvinist, they will take every single one of the warning passages in Hebrews as addressed to unsaved people. John MacArthur interprets Hebrews 5:11-6:8 as addressed to unsaved people, which is an interpretation that strains credulity in my opinion, because in Hebrews 5 it says this: *"by this time [some of] you ought to be teachers"* (Hebrews 5:12).

Would you ever say that to an unsaved person? Would you ever, in your wildest imagination, want an unsaved person to teach a saved person? So I do not think that these warnings are aimed at unsaved people, and after giving the warning passage, the writer gets back on the bunny path and continues his commentary for saved people.

By the way, if you believe that these warnings are for unsaved people, as the preacher is preaching through the warning passages, why would you even listen to him? "Oh, he has gotten to the warning passages. I can mentally check out, because that is for unbelievers." But if I tell you that these things can apply to a believer who drifts, I have your attention.

² Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 34.

So what is the right view of the warning passages in Hebrews? Probably at different times in my life, I have held all of these. But I do not hold to the hypothetical view anymore. Once I discovered you cannot lose your salvation I could not hold to the Arminian view anymore.

And although the Calvinist/Reformed view held sway over my mind for many years, once I started seeing the "we" and the "us," I could not hold to that anymore. I cannot just convert willy-nilly this morning to unsaved people because the audience of Hebrews are not persevering. That is more protecting a theological system than it is exegeting the text.

What I think is in play here is the loss of blessings view. This is not salvation. These are temporal blessings flowing from justification. That is why in Hebrews 3:7-11, Moses and that generation not entering the Promised Land are held out as an example. Are we going to say that Moses was not saved? That is crazy, because there is Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Moses drifted backwards. He struck the rock beyond what God said. He lost something. He did not lose eternity. He did not lose heaven. He lost Canaan, a temporal blessing that he could have had. That is what these warning passages are warning against. You will forfeit, as a Christian, temporal blessings not related to heaven or hell, flowing from your justification.

Like what? You will come under divine discipline (Hebrews 12:5-13). You will forfeit rest in the midst of tribulation (Hebrews 4:1-2). You will lose rewards at the Bema Seat (1 Corinthians 3:15). You will miss out on Millennial Kingdom authority (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

You will forfeit maturity. All the time you spend rejecting the full revelation and going back to an inferior revelation is a time that you cannot get back in terms of growth (Hebrews 5:11-14). You will forfeit fellowship with God, as did David, who sinned egregiously and hid his sin. The heavens became like brass all that time that he spent in rebellion. His fellowship with God was short-circuited, although we never doubt that David was saved.

That is what these warning passages in Hebrews are speaking of: a loss of temporal blessings flowing from justification not related to heaven or hell. Can a Christian experience this? Yes. Look what God did to Israel in terms of discipline, although they never forfeited their national status. How will you escape if you neglect a greater revelation? Then the author of Hebrews is finished and he goes right back on his chat about angels.