

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם יְהוָה וְכָרְתִי

אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוּדָה בְּרִית

חֲדָשָׁה: חֲדָשָׁה

אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵם בְּיוֹם הַחֲזִיקִי בְיָדָם לְהוֹצִיאֵם

מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר־הָמָּה הִפְרוּ

The Book of Hebrews

יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרַי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם נְאֻם יְהוָה

נָתַתִּי אֶת־תּוֹרָתִי בְּקֶרֶבְכֶם וְעַל־לִבְכֶם

אֶכְתָּבָנָה וְהֵייתִי לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְהָמָּה

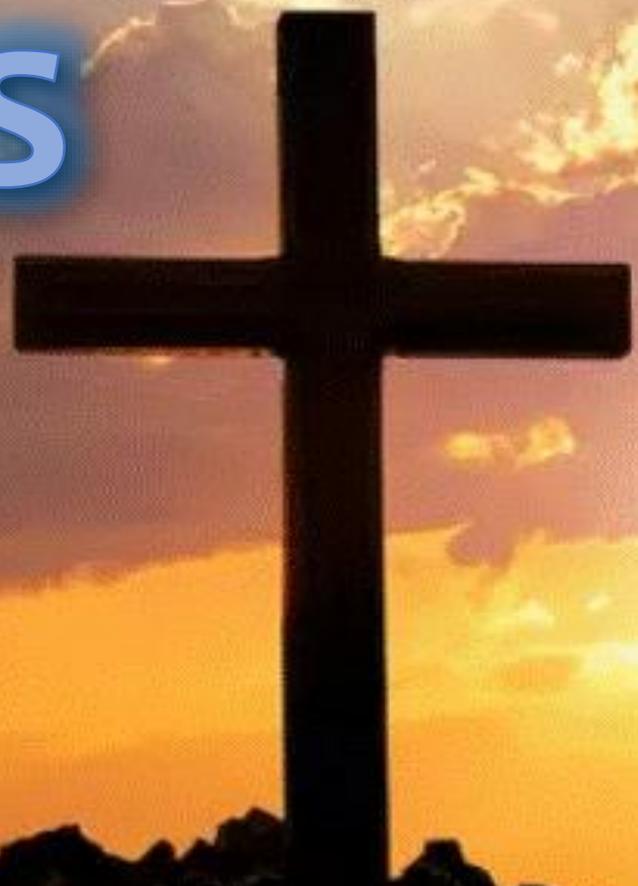
יְהִיוּ־לִי לְעָם: וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד אִישׁ

אֶת־רַעְתּוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו לֵאמֹר דַּעוּ

אֶת־יְהוָה כִּי־כֹלָם יֵדְעוּ אוֹתִי לְמַקְטָנָם

וְעַד־גְּדוּלָם נְאֻם יְהוָה כִּי אֶסְלַח לְעוֹנֵם

וְלֹחֲטָאֲתָם לֹא אֶזְכֹּר־עוֹד: ס



Outline of Hebrews

- I. We Have a Definitive and Final Revelation in the Son (1:1-4)
- II. **Don't Abandon the Son Since He is Greater Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)**
 - A. The Son's Nature and Reign Show He Is Greater Than the Angels (1:5-14)
 - B. Warning: Don't Drift Away (2:1-4)
 - C. The Coming World Subjected to the Son (2:5-18)

Warning: Don't Drift Away (2:1-4)

- ¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*
- ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,*
- ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,*
- ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

Warning: Don't Drift Away (2:1-4)

- Having established the supreme authority of the Son of God in 1:5–14, the author builds on that truth by confronting his readers with the *responsibility* implied by that truth.
- There are three parts to this exhortation:
 - A Warning Against Drifting Away (**2:1**)
 - The Certainty of Punishment If They Drift Away (**2:2-3a**)
 - The Certainty and Trustworthiness of the Gospel Message that They Have Received (**2:3b-4**):
 - First Proclaimed by the Lord
 - Confirmed By:
 - The Original Apostolic Witnesses
 - God's Acts of Signs, Wonders, Miracles, and Gifts of the Spirit.

A Warning Against Drifting Away (2:1)

¹ *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*

- The readers are exhorted in this first warning passage to “*pay much closer attention*” to the gospel message proclaimed to them so they don’t “*drift away*”.
- The idea of “drifting away” is a probably intended as a nautical metaphor that brings to mind a ship that is not firmly anchored, slowly drifting out to sea.
- The word “*therefore*” links this text with the preceding argument (given in 1:5-14).
- So, the logic is as follows: in Hebrews 1:5-14 the author demonstrated that Jesus, as the divine Son and Davidic king, is **greater** than the angels, “*therefore*” the readers must “*pay much closer attention*” to this gospel message they have heard concerning Jesus and not “*drift away*” from it.

A Warning Against Drifting Away (2:1)

¹ *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*

- In this gospel message they “*heard*” how Jesus the God-man, after making purification for their sins, sat down of the right hand of God where he now reigns (1:3).
- Furthermore, this message they “*heard*” is **the** final and definitive word that God had spoken by his **Son** (1:2).
- Yet, in spite of all this, the readers are failing to pay heed to this authoritative word and seem to be slipping away from the truth.
- The remainder of the letter, especially the warning passages, clarifies that the drifting away described here is **not a temporary** defection from the truth.
- Drifting away is another way of describing **apostasy**, the **denial** and **rejection** of the gospel.

Certain Punishment If They Drift Away (2:2-3a)

² *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,* ^{3a} *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*

- The word (“*for*”) indicates that the author is about to give his readers a reason **why** they shouldn’t defect from the gospel message they have heard.
- The reason given here uses a classical form of logic in which he argues from the lesser to the greater.
- The lesser reason (given in verse 2) involves the “*message declared by angels*” which was binding on its hearers so that those who violated its provisions were justly punished.

Certain Punishment If They Drift Away (2:2-3a)

- ² *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,* ^{3a} *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*
- You may recall that **angels** played a strong role in chapter 1 of this letter, which emphasized the Son's **superiority** to angels.
 - The connection between the mention of "**angels**" here to the discussion of angels in the first chapter should not be missed.
 - The "**message declared by angels**" is a reference to the **Mosaic law**, an idea stated elsewhere in the NT:
 - *you who received **the law as delivered by angels** and did not keep it."* (Acts 7:53)
 - *Why then **the law**? It was added because of transgressions... and it was put in place through angels...* (Gal 3:19)
 - This idea was articulated on the OT as well, though perhaps not as often:
 - *The LORD came **from Sinai** [where the law was given] and... he came **from the ten thousands of holy ones** [= angels]...* (Deut. 33:2)

Certain Punishment If They Drift Away (2:2-3a)

² *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ^{3a} how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*

- The idea of the angels as mediators of the divine revelation on Mount Sinai had gained special attraction to Judaism in the Greek-speaking synagogues of the Mediterranean world.¹
- For example, Josephus wrote, “*And for ourselves, we have learned from God the most excellent of our teachings, and the most holy part of **our law by angels.***”¹
- We see from the link between angels and the Mosaic law **why** the author spends so much time on angels in chapter 1.²
- The readers were not interested in angels because they were entranced by angels in some kind of mystical way.²
- Instead, the reference to angels has to do with the readers’ desire to live under the old covenant and find forgiveness in the Levitical sacrifices.²
- So, the superiority of the **Son** to **angels** demonstrates that Jesus is superior to the **old covenant mediated by angels.**²

¹ Guthrie, George H. – *The NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews*; pp. 84-85

² Schreiner, Thomas R. – *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary - Hebrews*; p. 80

Certain Punishment If They Drift Away (2:2-3a)

² *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ^{3a} how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*

- There is no thought, however, that the word conveyed by angels (i.e., the Mosaic Law) was **flawed**. No, it was “*reliable*” and therefore legally binding on its hearers.¹
- Dealing with sin was never taken **lightly** by God, but “*every*” violation received a just punishment.²
- The words translated in the ESV as “*transgression*” and “*disobedience*” speak of a **conscious rejection** of God’s will.²

¹ Schreiner, Thomas R. – *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary - Hebrews*; p. 80

² Guthrie, George H. – *The NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews*; pp. 84-85

Certain Punishment If They Drift Away (2:2-3a)

² *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ^{3a} how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*

- In verse 3a, the author now **completes** the argument from lesser to greater.
- If the word spoken by angels was sure and those who violated it were punished, then those who neglect the **greater** revelation given through the Son will not escape.
- Indeed the readers would be **foolish** to reject the word spoken by the Lord, for there is **no doubt** about its truthfulness since it is a word from **heaven**.
- The apostles heard the message **directly** from Jesus, and those apostolic eyewitnesses confirmed the message for the readers.

Certain Punishment If They Drift Away (2:2-3a)

² *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,* ^{3a} *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*

- The readers will not “*escape*” if they turn away from such a “*great salvation*”.
- The salvation is “*great*” because it represents God’s ***final word***.
- Jesus’ sacrifice has accomplished the cleansing of sin ***once for all*** (1:3; 7:1-10:18) and he now sits at God’s right hand (1:3; 1:13; 8:1), triumphant and reigning over all.
- Those who ***repudiate*** such a salvation will face ***certain*** judgment.
- In the OT the punishments were ***earthly***: Israel suffered ***exile*** for its sin.
- But the revelation through the son is ***heavenly*** (12:25-27), so that those rejecting him will receive a more intense punishment, a final and ***eternal punishment*** from which there is no “*escape*”.

The Certainty of the Gospel Message (2:3b-4)

^{3b} *It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

- The Author of Hebrews now shows why it is **utter folly** to neglect the salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ.
- First of all it is an **authoritative word**, for “*It was declared at first by the Lord.*”
- The “*Lord*” here refers to Jesus Christ himself. He is the:
 - Son of God by Whom God has Spoken His Final Word
 - Creator and Sustainer of the World
 - Heir of All Things.
- He has entered into history and spoken to human beings through both word and deed.
- Jesus Christ has revealed finally and definitively who God is to human beings.

The Certainty of the Gospel Message (2:3b-4)

^{3b} *It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,* ⁴ *while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

- Secondly, ***not only*** was the word spoken ***personally*** by the Lord himself in history, this word was also “*attested to us*” by “*those who heard*” (i.e., the apostolic ***eyewitnesses*** who heard and saw Jesus).¹
- The word “*attested*” carries the sense of firm assurance or guarantee.²
- So, although the author and his hearers had not heard the message of salvation from the mouth of Jesus himself, it was nevertheless something they could count on with absolute certainty.²

¹ Schreiner, Thomas R. – *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary - Hebrews*; p. 82

² Guthrie, George H. – *The NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews*; pp. 85-86

The Certainty of the Gospel Message (2:3b-4)

^{3b} *It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

- Incidentally, verse 3b gives strong evidence against Pauline authorship of this letter.
- Even though he wasn't an eyewitness, Paul ***nowhere*** describes himself as ***dependent*** on others for the gospel he proclaimed.
- Instead, he ***emphasizes*** that Jesus called him on the Damascus Road and his knowledge of the gospel was ***not dependent*** on other apostles (Gal 1:11-17)

The Certainty of the Gospel Message (2:3b-4)

^{3b} *It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

- The author now gives a third reason for putting their trust in their great salvation – “*God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles.*”
- The miracles performed by God’s spokesmen in the NT period ***authenticated*** the revelation given by those same men, demonstrating it was genuinely given by God.
- According to the NT writers, Jesus’ miracles authenticated his ministry (John 10:37-38; Acts 2:22).
- God also granted signs and wonders to the ***apostles***, demonstrating ***they*** were truly his messengers (Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12).

The Certainty of the Gospel Message (2:3b-4)

^{3b} *It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

- The Apostle Paul, for example, emphasizes the validity of **his** apostleship by appealing to “signs and wonders” in his ministry (Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12)
- These miracles and signs and wonders demonstrate that God has put his seal of approval on the message that the readers of Hebrews received initially.
- Also verifying the truth of the gospel are the “*gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*”
- In other contexts the gifts of the Spirit are said to **edify** believers (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-31; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Pet 4:10-11), but here the author appeals to the gifts of the Spirit to support the **veracity** of the gospel.

Summary of 2:1-4

- The New Testament **never** teaches that an initial acceptance of the gospel message is sufficient **without** perseverance in faith.
- We **must not drift** from the faith or neglect our great salvation.
- If the people of God received **earthly** punishments for transgressing the **Mosaic Law mediated by angels**, then those who repudiate the **heavenly revelation given by the Son** will not escape **final judgment**.
- Nor can we say revelation spoken by the Son is **uncertain**, for the Lord himself came to earth to speak the word.
- It was then **confirmed** by the apostolic eyewitnesses who heard the Lord firsthand, and then passed it on to us.
- Finally God attested to the truth of the revelation through miracles, signs, and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Therefore, apostasy on the part of the readers would constitute a **brazen** rejection of a clear word from God.

Class Discussion Time



***Class Discussion Time**

- In the 1989 movie Star Trek V: The Final Frontier, Spock's brother, a renegade Vulcan very much in touch with his inner feelings (and determined to help everyone else get in touch with their inner feelings) hijacks the Enterprise and leads the crew in a search for the ultimate frontier—the place where God lives. Passing through the great barrier that stands between known space and “heaven,” the searchers find the world for which they have been seeking; and they find “god.” This god manifests himself as “one god, many faces” (he is the god of the Klingons, the Vulcans, humans, etc.), and then, being doubted by Captain Kirk, proceeds to zap everyone in sight. One of the last standing, crusty old “Bones,” the ship's doctor, is confronted by the deity: “Do you doubt me too?” Bones replies, “I don't believe in any god who inflicts pain for his pleasure.”*
- This theologically loaded statement, made in context with regard to an evil, alien being, reflects a common misconception of the God of the Bible. For God to be a God of punishment, the thought goes, must mean that he gets joy from administering pain. Contemporary cultural wisdom suggests that we must do away with any conception of divine punishment. (Guthrie, George H. — The NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews; p. 91)*

*Class Discussion Time

- In our passage today, the author ***strongly affirms*** that God takes sin very seriously and sees those who reject God's commandments as ***willfully disobedient*** and ***worthy of punishment***. One of the motivations that the author gives for his readers to stop their drift away from the gospel message is to avoid inescapable divine punishment for doing so.
- What are your thoughts on the contrast between the ***contemporary view*** of divine punishment and the view put forth in scripture by the author of Hebrews?
- While you may not have bought into it wholesale, do you think that the contemporary view of the appropriateness of punishment for sin might have, in some ways, corrupted your thinking – perhaps in the area of parenting or perhaps some of your political views?

*Class Discussion Time

- A commonly held belief in our society and even in many Christian circles today is the idea that the God of the Old Testament was harsh and severe, while the God of the New Testament is a God of Love and Grace.
- Does the passage we looked at today speak to this idea – and, if so, does it **support** this kind of contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New – or does it utterly **contradict** such an idea? Explain your answer.

*Class Discussion Time

- It is common in evangelical Christianity today – especially in Baptist circles – to teach the idea of “once saved, always saved”. I do believe the scriptures teach that a person who is **truly** saved will persevere to the end and will go to heaven when they die. But for many, “once saved, always saved” means that anyone who **seems** to understand the gospel and **claims** to believe it at some point in their life will go to heaven when they die – even if at some later point they end denying (by their life or their doctrine) the very gospel they claim has saved them.
- How does our passage today fly in the face of the idea that someone can walk away from the gospel (by their life or their doctrine) and still be assured of salvation?