

SESSION NINE

THE FIRST WARNING

Heb 2:1-4

I. CONNECTION WITH CHAPTER ONE

- A. The opening words of chapter two (Διὰ τοῦτο = "For this reason") reflect a clear connection of Heb 2:1-4 with what has preceded. These words probably point back to all of chapter one, not just the final verse.

The author concluded chapter one by highlighting the prospect of "inheriting" a future eschatological salvation. Before continuing to elaborate this theme, he will pause to warn his readers of negative consequences that may await those who neglect the Son's revelation.

- B. The discussion about *angels* in chapter one continues throughout chapter two (note 2:16!).
- C. The Connection Elaborated:

The primary thrust of chapter one was to show that the Son was/is superior to the angels. His reason for bringing this out is to undergird his argument that the *revelation* which came through the Son is thus superior to the revelation which came through the angels (i.e., the Old Covenant Law).

- D. The Author's Plan for Chapter Two

1. To warn his readers of the failure to heed the superior revelation which has now come through the Son (2:1-4).
2. To clarify why the *superior Son* was temporarily "lower" than the angels (i.e., his humiliation):
 - a. In order to become a part of mankind, to whom all things were meant to be subjected.
 - b. In order to die for the sins of mankind, and deliver man from the bondage of death.
 - c. In order to be *perfected through sufferings* (a model for believers).
 - d. In order to experience temptation Himself, so as to be able to help those who are tempted.

II. THE DANGER OF FAILING TO "PAY CLOSE ATTENTION" (2:1)

- A. In verse one, the author initiates an *a fortiori* argument (arguing from the lesser to the greater).

The connection with 1:1-4 must not be missed. Those of us who have received the Son's revelation must pay *much greater attention* to what we have heard (than those who received the Old Covenant revelation).

- B. Why Such Attention is Needed

1. By not paying "much greater attention," believers may *drift away*.

Note the *KJV* = "lest at any time we should let *them slip*"¹

2. μήποτε παραρῶμεν = "that we might not drift away"

- C. What is the meaning of παραρῶμεν? [1-Pl, Aor. Subj. Pass. of παραρῶ]

INTRO: Should the *KJV* "slip" be preferred. Does the illustration of a ship drifting past the entrance to a harbor fit?

1. This is a NT *hapax legomenon* (only occurrence!)
 2. Derivation of the compound:

The compound verb παραρῶ is derived from ῥέω meaning "to flow" (*NIDNTT*, 1:682-83). Hence, ῥύσις is a flowing river. The compound would have the idea "to flow past."

3. LXX Usage (2x)

- a. Prov 3:21 [context dealing with *wisdom* and *understanding*]

(1) MT = בְּנִי אַל-יִלָּזוּ מֵעֵינַיִךָ [root = לָזַז = depart, turn aside]²

Trans.: "My son, do not let them depart from your eyes." (i.e., don't lose sight of them!)

(2) LXX = Υἱέ, μὴ παραρῶσῃς

¹Another possible nuance of παραρῶ is "slip" as mentioned by D. A. Carson: "AV, 'lest . . . we should let them slip', follows another sense of the vb., e.g., of letting a ring slip off one's finger [Plut. *Amatorius* 754a]" (*NIDNTT*, 1:683). Plutarch's dates are AD 46-120.

²There is a striking similarity of the Hebrew in Prov 3:21 with Prov 4:21 (עַל-יִלָּזוּ מֵעֵינַיִךָ), but in the latter case, the verb is translated by the Greek verb εκλειπω which means to "forsake, abandon" or to "fail."

- b. Isa 44:4

LXX = καὶ ὡς ἰτέα ἐπὶ παραρρέον ὕδωρ

Trans: "and as willows on *the banks of flowing* water."

4. Extrabiblical Usage:

- a. Clem. *Paed.* III.xi.58³

διὸ καὶ συστέλλειν χρὴ τὰς γυναῖκας κοσμίως . . .

μη παραρρῶσι τῆς ἀληθείας διὰ χαννότητα

Trans.: Wherefore also, it is necessary for women to cover up modestly . . . that they might not slip away from the truth through vain conceit.

- b. Westcott citing Origen (*c. Cels.* viii.23):

"The great mass of simple believers, who cannot keep every day as a divine festival, need sensible patterns in fixed holy days that they may not wholly drift away (ἵνα μὴ τέλεον παραρρῶν) under popular influences from the observance of regular religious duties."⁴

5. Conclusion

- a. παραρρέω has the idea of something *drifting by*, as though it were being carried away by flowing water. From Prov 3:21, it can be used in reference of *departing from* or *losing sight of*, and in Clem. *Paed.* III.xi.58 of *slipping away* from something. In the examples we have, however, the action is a gradual one.

- b. Ellingworth, however, discounts the analogy of a ship drifting past a harbor:

"Neither in Pr. 3:21 nor in Heb. 2:1 is there any suggestions of a ship drifting past the entrance to a harbor. This image is found in Philo (*Gig.* 13; *Quaest. in Ex.* 2.13), but without παραρρέω. [The examples quoted in LSJ are predominantly psychological, suggesting that the metaphor of flowing was dead or dying.] Barclay's translation 'shipwreck' thus seems unfounded."⁵

Point: Comparison should not be made to an unbeliever drifting by the harbor entrance (the offer of the gospel) and failing to believe while they had the chance.

³Moulton & Milligan

⁴Westcott, 37.

⁵Ellingworth, 137. Lane, however, affirms a ship analogy (though not a 'shipwreck' as Barclay has). He writes, "If it is proper to recognize . . . a nautical overtone in προσέχειν, 'to hold a ship toward port, or to fasten the anchors to the sea bed,' the image of a drifting ship, carried by the current beyond a fixed point, furnished a vivid metaphor for the failure to keep a firm grip on the truth through carelessness and lack of concern" (1:37).

Rather, the idea is of someone gradually drifting away from something. There is nothing in the meaning of the word that would not be applicable to true believers (i.e., they can neglect something and drift away from it). Lane concurs: "The language implies that the community had grown lax in their commitment to Christ and were neglecting the Christian message" (1:37). Since the author includes himself in the warning (ἡμεῖς = us), we can conclude that the danger he has in mind is for believers.

Despite the fact that nothing in the context suggests that the warning is for unbelievers or that the danger is loss of salvation, Ellingworth concludes:

"Here the context suggests that the readers 'must' pay attention, ultimately because if they do not do so, they will be lost; . . ."⁶

D. A Lesson For Our Life

Major defections from our Christian experience are possible, and they may come about as a result of *subtle drifting* rather than abrupt immediate change. There is usually a preceding drift or coldness toward spiritual matters. If not carefully checked, this can lead to disaster in the Christian life (his audience was already "dull of hearing" - Heb 5:11). The solution is not to be found in "heightened emotional experience" but in paying much greater attention to what God has revealed through His Son.

III. THE ANALOGY TO RECOMPENSE UNDER THE OLD COVENANT (2:2-3a)

In verse two, the author continues his *a fortiori* argument.

1. Consequences of disobedience under the Old Covenant
 - a. Under the Old Covenant, "transgression and disobedience received a just recompense."

The author is probably thinking of the divine arrangement whereby "curses" (discipline) were given by God for disobedience (Deut 28:15-68; Lev 26:1-46).
 - b. The consequences were primarily *temporal* in nature, and certainly included the true believers among the people (not eternal punishment in hell).
2. "How shall we escape?" (2:3a)
 - a. Note the logic of the argument
 - (1) The Old Covenant had consequences (discipline) for disobedience
 - (2) The Old Covenant was mediated through angels⁷

⁶Ibid., 135.

⁷On the role of angels as mediators of the Old Covenant revelation, see Acts 7:38, 53 and Gal 3:19. Apparently a tradition had arisen regarding the role of angels in the giving of the Law. In Jewish tradition, see Jub.

- (3) The Son is superior to angels
 - (4) Therefore: Consequences for disobedience to the New Covenant ought to be more severe.
- b. The Problem: "if we neglect so great a salvation"
- (1) Neglect

In verse one, the author had reminded his audience that they needed to pay much closer attention. Now he gives the flip-side: this can be *neglected* (ἀμελήσαντες - Aor Ptc - conditional circumstantial ptc.). ἀμελεω means to *neglect* (Mt 22:5) or *cease to be concerned about* something (note the use in LXX Jer 38:32 [=MT 31:32] in which the Lord ceases to be concerned about those who forsake His covenant).
 - (2) The specific neglect is the "so great salvation"

What does the author mean by "salvation"?

 - (a) Ellingworth thinks that the "gospel" is in view (so Spicq).
 - (b) BAG (p 801) - a future dimension to "salvation"

"σωτηρία is plainly expected to be fully culminated w. the second coming of the Lord — Ro 13:11; Hb 9:28; 1 Pt 1:5."

Rom 13:11 – "salvation is nearer to us than when we believed"

1 Pet 1:5 – "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (note that vs 4 speaks of our inheritance)
 - (c) Confirmation that the author has in mind a future eschatological salvation:
 - i) First, we should note that the author clearly uses σωτηρία in an eschatological sense elsewhere in the book (Heb 9:28).
 - ii) The preceding context (ch 1) concluded with the thought that the angels are serving those who will (future tense) inherit salvation (comp. Mt 25:31,34). Several matters within the chapter focus on the Son's kingdom to be inherited following His Second Coming (recall notes on 1:2,6,8).
 - iii) In Heb 2:5, the author clearly points out that he has in mind "the world to come," for he adds the words "concerning which we are speaking."
 - iv) The author says that this "salvation" was "at the first spoken through the Lord." When we go back to the gospels, we note that our Lord preached "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand" (e.g., Matt

1:27; 2:1,26; Jos. Ant. 15.5.3; Mek. on Exod 20:18; Sipre 102 on Num 12:5; Pesiq. R. 21; and Strack-Billerbeck 3.554-556. See also the LXX on Deut 33:2, where the LXX adds "angels were with him at his right hand."

4:17; compare Lk 21:31 which associates the kingdom with the Second Coming).

(3) Conclusion

Our Lord Jesus Christ is going to come again, and when He does, He will receive a kingdom that will replace all earthly kingdoms. This kingdom will initially be on earth in the present creation (1000 years), but will continue on into the New Creation to last for all eternity. Believers in Christ have the privilege to share in this kingdom:

"Just as my Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom"

- Lk 22:29-30

Nevertheless, it is possible for us as believers to "neglect" our *great eschatological salvation*. As the remainder of the book will clarify, we can do this by failing to endure in our Christian walk, by falling away from the Lord, and by not living by faith. Such neglect will be to our peril, as there will be negative consequences.

(4) A Lesson for our Life

I am very concerned about each one of you and the future you will have, particularly your future in Messiah's kingdom. That is why this course is so very important. You and I must realize that our future experience in the kingdom is directly proportional to the life we are now living. If I can succeed in impressing this upon you, then this class will have been worth every effort expended.

c. Consequences of New Covenant failure are of two types:

Infractions of the Old Covenant were severely dealt with; so readers should not suppose there are no penalties for infractions against the New Covenant! There is accountability.

(1) Temporal Discipline

This was primarily the nature of Old Covenant "curses." Also, the author is going to make a major address of this matter in chapter 12 when he talks more specifically about discipline.

(2) Eternal Consequences

Although the author does not elaborate on the eternal consequences of neglecting our future salvation in this paragraph, he will do so later on in the book (note carefully Heb 6:11-12). We might fail to inherit future promises if we are not diligent and living a life of faith!

IV. A REINFORCEMENT TO THE AUTHOR'S ARGUMENT (2:3b-4)

In the author's *a fortiori* argument, he has made the point that infractions under the Old Covenant brought about penalties in the form of divine discipline; hence, we should expect the New Covenant to be attended by appropriate penalties. In Heb 2:3b-4, he reinforces his argument.

- A. The message about the *future eschatological salvation* was presented by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, not simply relegated to angels to deliver.

Clarification: I am not saying that individual salvation from sin is not related. Indeed it is. Unless one is born again through faith in Christ, he is totally unqualified for having any part in Messiah's kingdom. Certainly the new birth and regeneration by the Spirit are the "first steps." Hence to preach the kingdom means to include the message of the gospel.

- B. The message about the *future eschatological salvation* was confirmed through the apostolic messengers by divine miracles and the bestowing of spiritual gifts.

1. πνεύματος αγίου μερισμοῖς = "distributions of the Holy Spirit" (NASB = "gifts")

Probably a *subjective genitive* - the Holy Spirit *makes* distributions (i.e., spiritual gifts).⁸

Note the close association of thought in the last phrase "according to His own will" with 1 Cor 12:11.

2. In the early church, the miraculous manifestation of signs and wonders seems to have been a particular activity of those who were apostles (rather than the Christian community at large). But the words "with them" in the NASB are not in the Greek. Here, the NIV is better.

Note Acts 4:33; 5:12; 14:3; and 2 Cor 12:12.

Implication:

There is no excuse for New Covenant failure, i.e., abandoning one's confession of faith in Jesus as God's Messiah and a withdrawal from the Christian community.

V. APPLICATION

A large part of the church today are in neglect of their *future eschatological salvation*. They are living far too much for the things of this world. Their spiritual laziness may have severe repercussions for them. Continuing as they are, they stand in danger of incurring divine discipline from the Lord and the possibility of not inheriting the promises of God. From a pastoral perspective, we can help them by seeing that our churches provide discipleship opportunities (including discipleship training). Don't pastor a church that makes it too easy for believers to "sit and soak."

⁸According to BAG, μερισμος can mean (1) division, separation or (2) distribution, apportionment.