

The Book to the Hebrews

Remember

The purpose of the book is to encourage despondent, weak believers suffering ostracism and denunciation from the Jewish communities, not to drift away from all that they gained in Christ. Or, to get over the “blues” look up to what Christ in His love provided for you!! The Old Testament saint had to long for from a shadowed distance and wait for what you and I have been given.

I. The Argument of the Book: The Pre-eminence of Christ in His Person and Work, 1:1-10:18

A. The Superiority of Son to the Angels. 1:1-14, 2:5-18

Admonition I: Warning against drifting, 2:1-4

(The path to glory is the way of suffering.)

B. The Superiority of Christ to Moses, 3:1-6

Admonition II: Warning against Doubting, 3:7-4:13

(The path to rest is the way of trusting.)

C. The Superiority of Christ to the Aaronic Priesthood, 4:14-10:18

1. Superior because of a better position, vv. 14-16

2. Superior because of better qualifications, 5:1-10

Admonition III: Warning against immaturity, 5:11-6:20

(The path to growth is the way of obedience.)

3. Superior because of a better order, 7:1-28

4. Superior because of a better covenant, 8:1-13

5. Superior because of a better sanctuary, 9:1-28

6. Superior because of a better sacrifice, 10:1-18

Admonition IV: The Warning against Rejection, 10:19-39

(The path to reward is the way of endurance)

II. The Application: The Implication of the Pre-eminence of Christ, 11:1-13:19

A. Exhortation to Faith: Illustrated, 11:1-40

1. The essence of faith: stated, vv. 1-3

2. The efficacy of faith: illustrated, vv. 4-40

B. Exhortation to Endurance, 12:1-24

The word “endurance” is found in each of the three initial verses of the chapter; it is the theme.

1. The command, vv. 1-2

The passage begins with two inferences that focus our attention on two incentives for endurance.

a. The motivation, v. 1a

The image is that of an arena filled by people sitting on the edge of their chairs in expectancy. It is an athletic contest that the writer uses as metaphoric of our lives as participating in a race. The spectators, Old Testament saints (Heb 11), either are anxious to see what choices we make or are testifying to the necessity of faith (we are being watched!!). "Cloud" is frequently described in Greek literature of a group of people.

b. The commands, v. 1b-c

The words "let us" indicate that there are two commands. One is negative; the other positive.

1) To put away, v. 1b

Continuing the athletic motif, like a runner, we are not to carry extra weight; it makes the goal more difficult than it otherwise should be. The "sin that easily besets us," the needless weight, is unbelief (10:38-39), the counterpart of faith leading to endurance.

2) To take on, v. 1c

Every "runner" must learn the necessity of endurance, perseverance, and discipline.

c. The manner, v. 2

The writer explains how the allegorical race of life is to be run.

1) The attitude, v. 2a

The focus for our "race" is to look away from distractions, even the arena of witnesses, and concentrate on the Lord Jesus.

2) The example, v. 2b-f

a) The person, v. 2b

Jesus is the object of our faith in His atoning work and the one who can bring us to maturity of faith. He is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the cause and perfection in us (see, 2:10). "Faith has several nuances: individual trust in Jesus, Christian teachings, and conformity to the object of faith; I take it to be the latter contextually.

b) His joy, v. 2c

The "joy" of Jesus was what would result from His end of His suffering, shame, and exaltation. The purpose of His death was to bring us into His family.

c) His pain, v. 2d

The path of His joy was through suffering. The text literally reads, "he endured a cross," stressing not the instrument of His suffering but the character of it.

- d) His shame, v. 2e

With the pain came shame, but He “thought lightly of it” because of the greater goal of bringing us to Himself.
- e) His glory, v. 2f

The writer wants us to know that the path to glory is filled with pain and shame at times. There can be no glory without suffering; exaltation (the crown) comes after the pain. Jesus is now enthroned in the heavens Ps.110: 1); in it there should be a lesson for us.
- d. The implication. v. 3

The thought is that without Jesus’ suffering in the will of God there could be no exaltation.

 - 1) The thing to consider, v. 3a

We are encouraged to think of our Lord’s suffering, and then His glory. These people can identify with the pain and shame that can come in obeying the divine will (10:32-34, 13:32).
 - 2) The consequence of considering, v. 3b

What these people need, and Jesus displayed, was a persevering obedience. The exhortation is, “DON’T GROW WEARY!!”
- 2. The explanation, vv. 4-11
 - a. The extent of their suffering, v. 4

Though Stephen and James suffered martyrdom, so the reality did exist, these people had not had to endure it. Their struggles did not originate outside of themselves in adverse circumstances, but inside with their weakness of heart and sputtering faith (circumstances are not causal; such are only solicitations or opportunities).
 - b. The explanation of our status, vv. 5-11

Here is the author’s explanation for the presence of adverse circumstances that often surround our lives. It seems that discipline, the positive often associated with the negative, is that it evidences God’s love for us

 - 1) The meaning from the Holy Scriptures, vv. 5-6

The Bible gives witness that adverse circumstances come to the children of God. Suffering is rooted, at least in part, in a father-son relationship (the word “discipline” is used of child training). Some suffering is disciplinary in nature; it is part of our training to run a good “race,” the race of life. The quotation is from Proverbs 3:11-12.
 - a) The reason for suffering, chastisement, discipline, v. 5

Adverse circumstances should be taken seriously; we should not brush it off but should learn what the Lord might be

seeking to show us. Troubles might be the hand of God to shape and improve us.

- b) The fact of suffering, chastisement, discipline v. 6
God disciplines us as a father does his son, not for punishment or to express cruelty but to prevent further destructive action on our part by helping us to learn that negative action leads to negative consequences (“People who play with fire will get burned;” “Play the fiddle and you will pay the Fiddler’s fee”.)

An illegitimate child in Roman culture meant that they had no right to an inheritance. A child of God without disciplinary curbing is no child at all!

- 2) The purpose of suffering, chastisement, discipline vv. 7-8
 - a) Its presence, v. 7
Suffering, chastisement, and discipline are synonyms. Their presence assures us that we are in a father-son relationship with God.
 - b) Its absence, v. 8
Chastisement, discipline, pain in our lives is evidence that God, as a correcting, instructing father, is in our lives. It is foolish to think discipline is not part of God’s childrearing techniques; it is our assurance that we are children of God. Sonship does not exempt us from suffering; it brings it. Discipline is not punishment. Punishment is payback in pain for the sake of securing justice (it is punitive); discipline is pain inflicted for the sake of helping curb our foolishness (it is remedial or corrective).
- 3) An illustration about suffering, chastisement, discipline, vv. 9-10
 - a) A rhetorical question, v. 9
Here is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If parental correction is a positive thing, how much more divine correction? “Father of spirits” is not about the origin of the immaterial soul, but in the sense of that source of all life. The comparison (and contrast) is between two fathers.
 - b) The answer, v. 10
Parents and the Lord exact discipline for our good. In God’s case, it is to make us like Himself.
- 4) The right perspective on suffering, chastisement, and discipline, v.11
We should accept the training that discipline brings to us; it is for

our good!

3. The obligations, vv. 12-17

a. To encourage endurance, vv. 12-13

Using poetic language, perhaps drawn from Isaiah (35:3) and Proverbs (4:26), the writer exhorts the readers to amend their ways. "Make straight paths" means to stay on the right course. Not only would such a course of action benefit them, but it would also do the same for other weakened saints.

b. To pursue peace and holiness, vv. 14-17

At this point, the writer abandons the athletic metaphor, expressing his ethical thoughts directly.

1) The commands, v. 14

The manner of the pursuit is with eagerness. The presence of the article before holiness suggests the embodiment of all virtue. The absence of the presence of God (that is, peace and holiness) excludes anyone from seeing God ["seeing" seems to be used metaphorically for "understanding"]. Sanctification is not an optional extra in the Christian life; it belongs to the very essence of what it means to have been made a Christian, a Christ-follower. Christian faith without Christian conformity is a delusion, however imperfect in that pursuit we may be!!

2) The caution, v. 15

Failure to obtain the grace of God is found in a "root of bitterness," (the language is taken from Deut. 29:18 where Moses warns the Israelites of the danger of falling into idolatrous practices), a belligerent attitude toward God in not appreciating the blessings of God upon his life. It is used figuratively of a person who causes trouble; the allusion is to Deut. 29:17 (Our writer consistently quotes from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures).

3) The illustration, v. 16

The illustration of a lack of appreciation and rebellion is Esau's sin in not cherishing his birthright but selling it for a bowl of lentil stew (Gen. 25:29-31, a temporal pleasure. He freely gave away his birthright, and he lost his blessing consequently (27: 34-41), though he sought it with tears. He was a vain man subject to the whim of his passions (he was a hunter/stalker type). Esau was not immoral according to the knowledge available to us, but he was profane.

4) The application, v. 17

There is a warning here for all of us in that Esau sought to recover from his error, but it was too late (he did not regret giving

away his birthright, only the consequent blessing). Esau is being cited because he knew God's promises but did not act on them! The issue here is not salvation; it is the loss of blessing. Esau lost the blessing and it was given to Jacob (Gen. 27). His selfishness meant the loss of privilege. To despise privilege can mean the loss of it.

4. The privilege, vv. 18-24

The loss of privilege is illustrated by a comparison. Why would anyone desire to return to a burning mountain when they have gained the heavenly Jerusalem? To make the point, the writer reviews the two great covenants that expand the Abrahamic Covenant in the Bible, the Old Covenant given to the ancient people at Sinai and the New Covenant given from the heavenly Jerusalem (Mount Zion) to us. This passage is reminiscent of a similar analogy delineated by Paul in Gal. 3:21-31 (there, Paul compares the two covenants using Hagar for Sinai [v. 25], and slavery to the Law and Sarah's son as promise and freedom).

a. Negatively, vv. 18-21

The Old Covenant was given in a foreboding context of gloom, darkness, the shaking of the earth, and fear (Ex 19:10-19, Deut. 9:19). The emphasis in these verses is the awesome holiness of God and the fear-filled approach to Him under the Old Covenant.

b. Positively, vv. 22-24

The "but" alerts us to a marvelous contrast about to be made. In the New Covenant, we have come into the presence of God through a superior mediator (not angels or Moses, but Jesus) whose blood is superior to that of Abel's blood. Abel's blood, the first person killed in the Bible, called out for vengeance (Gen. 4:11-12); Jesus' blood brings to us justifiable mercy and grace.

The superior privileges of "Mount Zion," the heavenly Jerusalem, compared to Mount Sinai, a fearful place, are stated in five phrases (each prefaced with the preposition "to").

- 1) We enter in the New Covenant, the very reality the patriarchs longed to see, the very presence of God.
- 2) We join a heavenly chorus, including the angels and saints, singing praises forever (we enter a joyful place, not a dark, foreboding place).
- 3) We come to stand without fear before our righteous judge.
- 4) We share with all believers in every era the hope of the resurrection.
- 5) We possess an intimate relationship with God through Jesus that involves the final solution to the problem of human sin.

The point is that these people should not act like Esau by thinking lightly of the privilege of coming to the heavenly Jerusalem by returning to the doom and gloom of Sinai and the Old Covenant.

Admonition V: The Warning against the Peril of Refusal vv. 25-29
(*The path to holiness is the way of discipline.*)

a. The exhortation, v. 25a

The argument is from the lesser to the greater reminiscent of the argument in the first admonition (2:1-4). As a message from a greater-than-angels is neglected with severe ramifications, so the message from Mount Zion (the heavenly Jerusalem, heaven).

b. The reason, vv. 25b-27

1) Stated, v. 25b

If the message from Mount Sinai brought judgment, how much more would a message from heaven?

2) Promised, v. 26

The point of the verse is that God is now speaking to us from heaven. The earth shook in the giving of the first covenant and a greater shaking of the earth and heavens will come as a result of the New Covenant.

3) Elaborated, v. 27

The second “shaking” of the earth in judgment will result in a kingdom, a place of residence with God by the people of God that will never end.

c. The conclusion, vv. 28-29

The “therefore” indicates that the writer can draw a conclusion from his argument.

1) The plea, v. 28a

We are to receive a kingdom that cannot be taken from us though, for a time, there may be negative repercussions in associating with it.

2) The consequence, v. 28b

Therefore (“thus”) of receiving the heavenly kingdom, we should worship the Lord in a reverent and respectful way. “Reverence” respects God’s holiness; “awe” considers His exalted position as judge and monarch.

3) The reason, v. 29

The reason (“for”) for such an attitude in worship is that our God is a judge of the foolish. He is to be feared as one who is zealous to protect His reputation.

Thoughts:

1. You and I are surrounded by a great array of Old Testament saints who walked by faith and now serve as examples to us. Without the privileges and clarity of the New Covenant, they believed God, trusted in His promises, embraced His values, and looked forward to a better world whose builder and architect is God. Is that a description of you and me?
2. The Christian life is a disciplined endeavor. It can be likened to an athletic

contest requiring immense preparation and intelligent choices to be successful. We must avoid any entanglements that would impede being a good runner. This includes metaphorically numerous encumbrances and weights, most particularly the burdens that unbelief brings. What weights do you need to shed to run more adroitly the race set before us?

3. To run the race well an athlete must have a single focus, a goal above all others. That single preoccupation among all other occupations is Jesus. We are to be focused on Him daily in our thought-life. It will influence our values and determine how we run. To “look to Jesus” means to be centrally aware of his great example of running the race. He did it with joy, though pain and shame were inescapable. In modern counseling theory, we would say that the real solution to our problems is rooted within (self-centeredness), but resolved by displacing thoughts of self with thoughts on one far greater. Shifting our focus off ourselves to one outside ourselves reprioritizes problems. “Looking unto Jesus...” “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”
4. Pain, chastisement, and suffering have two silver linings. First, it is a device that improves us strengthening our character and faith. Second, it is wonderful proof that we are God’s children. If we are without discipline, we are not His children. Chastisement is normal in the Christian life. Why do we run from it, heed its lessons so reluctantly, and think these things are outside God’s incomprehensible and sovereign plans for us?