

How Shall We Escape?

Introduction. The second step in the argument for Jesus' superiority shows Him to be infinitely great because of the nature of the salvation He obtained for us. He brought about salvation by tasting death "for every man" (vs. 9); therefore, He is greater by far than any angel. These verses contain the first of five major warnings interspersed throughout the book (3:7-11; 5:11-14; 10:26-31; 12:25-29).

An effective teacher must do much more than simply present biblical facts. He must also warn, exhort and invite. He is not satisfied simply with setting out doctrine and then going on his way. God's word demands response, and a faithful teacher of the word teaches for response (Matthew 23:37; John 5:39-40; Romans 9:1-3; 10:1; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

In Hebrews 13:22 the entire letter is referred to as a "word of exhortation." It requires a response! So, in 2:1-4, the writer inserts a moving invitation, and as with all good invitations, it includes both exhortation and warning -- what to do and what happens if you do not do it.

I. ***The Character Of Christ***

- A. "Therefore" most likely refers to the whole argument of 1:5-14. Since the Son and His message is so far superior to the angels, we should "give the more earnest heed" to it.
 1. This verb means not only to turn the mind to a thing but also to act upon what one perceives (cf. Acts 16:14; 20:28; 1 Timothy 4:13). Inaction in spiritual matters is fatal.
 2. The author does not explain what he means by "which we have heard," but there is no doubt that the whole gospel is in mind.
- B. "Give the more earnest heed" (*prosecho*) is emphatic. We cannot hear this doctrine and let it just slide through our minds. The danger is that we might "drift away."
 1. This verb (*pararheo*) is used of something flowing or slipping past, as of a ring slipping off a finger, an arrow that slips from its quiver or an idea that slips from the mind. It is a vivid figure for the person who lets himself drift away from the gospel.
 2. Both of these words also have nautical connotations. *Prosecho* means to moor a ship, to tie it up and *pararheo* can be used of a ship that has been allowed to drift past the harbor because a sailor forgot to attend to the steerage or to the wind, tides or current.
- C. Jesus was God's voice; to reject Him is to reject God (John 8:26; 12:44-45). Jesus shared many wondrous thoughts and promises with His disciples.
 1. He told them that God loved the world and gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

2. He told them that He came to give abundant life (John 10:10).
 3. He told them that He was the good shepherd (John 10:11).
 4. He told them that His blood was shed for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28).
 5. He told them He was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:1-3).
 6. He told them He was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).
- D. The fact that the Lord Jesus has come and spoken to men will not save us; we must be willing to listen (John 6:44-45; Ephesians 1:13).

II. ***The Certainty Of Judgment***

- A. The word for "if" assumes a fulfilled condition, not a possibility. The meaning in the context is that the word spoken by angels was absolute and steadfast.
1. "Word" means in the first place a word spoken (as opposed to a deed) and then a series of words or a statement. What the statement is varies with the context.
 2. In Hebrews the "word" is usually God's word (e.g., 2:2; 4:2, 12), though it can also be the writer's own word (5:11) or the word the Israelites did not wish to hear (12:19). Here in vs. 2 it is the divinely revealed law.
 3. There are two questions about the word which must be seriously pondered.
 - a) How can we "give the more earnest heed"?
 - (1) Search it (John 5:39).
 - (2) Mediate upon it (Psalm 119:97).
 - (3) Treasure it in the heart (Psalm 119:11).
 - (4) Rightly divide it (2 Timothy 2:15).
 - b) Where can we "give the more earnest heed"?
 - (1) In our assemblies (Hebrews 10:24-25).
 - (2) In our homes (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).
- B. The argument is in the form of "the lesser to the greater," what the Jews called "light and heavy" (Hebrew, *qal wahomer*). If in the Old Testament era every violation of law inevitably received its due punishment (the lighter case), how can Christians expect to escape if they drift away from the faith (the heavy case)?
1. Rabbi Hillel listed this as one of his seven rules of interpretation of the law. According to this principle one proceeds from the fuller conditions in the law to the lesser ones, or from the lesser to the fuller.
 2. The New Testament uses this form of reasoning several times (Matthew 6:30; 7:11; 12:11-12; Luke 13:15-16; 14:3-5; John 7:22-23; Romans 11:12, 24; 2 Corinthians 3:7-11). The author of Hebrews

- also takes advantage of this type of argumentation in several other places (9:13-14; 10:28-29; 12:25).
- C. "By angels" is literally "through angels," which stresses the important truth that the law came from God.
1. Both the Old and New Testaments tell us that angels were at Sinai and were instrumental in the revelation of the law (Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 68:17; Acts 7:38, 53; Galatians 3:19).
 2. Josephus represents Herod as saying to his soldiers, "We have learned from God the most excellent of our doctrines, and the most holy part of our law, by angels or ambassadors" (*Antiquities*, 15.5.3).
 3. If the law came through angels, how much more should respect be given the message that came through the Son!
 - a) The law was "binding," i.e., fully valid. It also had provision for the proper punishment of every transgression or disobedience.
 - b) So the law was never something to be lightly regarded. This makes it imperative that those to whom a great salvation is offered never turn away from it.
- D. Two words are used here for sin: transgression (*parabasis*) and disobedience (*parakoe*). One is active sin, the other is passive, but both are willful and both are serious.
1. Transgression means to step across the line as a willful act. It is an overt, intentional sin of commission: doing something we know to be wrong.
 2. Disobedience deliberately shuts its ears to the commands, warnings and invitations of God. It is a sin of neglect, of omission: doing nothing when we should do something.
- E. The writer is determined to guard against the possibility of falling away. This salvation is distinguished from the many other kinds of salvation offered in the ancient world by calling it "so great salvation."
1. Mystery religions emerged to satisfy the desire for personal guidance, salvation and immortality.
 2. Dionysus, a member of the Olympian pantheon, brought happiness and salvation to those who accepted him peacefully and madness and death to those who did not.
 3. Athena gave Asclepius a magic potion made from the blood of the Gorgon. This blood, if taken from the right side of the Gorgon, had a miraculous effect and was said to be able to bring the dead back to life.
- F. The disaster that threatens is brought on by nothing more than mere neglect. It is not necessary to disobey any specific injunction.
1. The Greek word translated "neglect" also appears in Matthew 22:5, where the guests "made light of" their invitation to come to the

- marriage feast of the king's son. What an outrage that the invited guests should disdain the king's grace.
2. Likewise, how unthinkable that men should ignore their sole means of deliverance. For men who do so, the author declares that God's judgment rests upon them (Hebrews 10:31).

III. **The Confirmation Of God**

A. The old covenant had proved its validity by the condemnation of transgressors. The author assures his readers that the new covenant has no less confirmation. It is guaranteed as trustworthy by a threefold attestation.

1. It was at the first spoken by the Lord.
 - a) The contrast between the law and the gospel is significant: one was spoken by angels, the other was spoken by the Lord (Luke 19:9; cf. 1:69, 71, 77; 2:11).
 - b) It had, therefore, the authority of heaven and earth behind it (Matthew 21:23-27). The title "Lord" adds emphasis to this authority.
2. It was confirmed by those who heard Him.
 - a) The apostles also confirmed the "great salvation" (cf. Luke 1:1-2). Any later preaching must agree with the apostles' preaching; if it does not, it is a "different gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Corinthians 11:4).
 - b) The word "confirmed" is a verb used as a legal, technical term to designate properly guaranteed security. The certainty of the message is guaranteed to us, and there cannot be the slightest doubt about the genuineness of the offer of salvation.
3. God bore witness by signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
 - a) When Jesus claimed to be God and then did what only God could do, He confirmed His divinity and the accuracy of His message (John 10:38; cf. Acts 2:22).
 - (1) Signs.
 - (a) Sometimes signs were of a natural origin.
 - i) The servant of Abraham asked a sign relating to how to choose a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:14).
 - ii) Isaiah's son was named as a sign of impending captivity to Israel (Isaiah 8:1-4).
 - iii) The names of Gomer's three children were a sign to idolatrous Israel (Hosea 1:1-11).
 - (b) However, the signs in Hebrew 2 were supernatural; designed to establish the truth and present evidence to convince people to believe in Christ.

- i) Prophesying was a "sign" to the believer; tongues were a "sign" to the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 14:22).
 - ii) John declared that Jesus performed signs so that people might believe (John 20:30-31).
 - iii) God also gave the "signs" that attested to the apostles' preaching (Acts 14:3; Romans 15:19; 2 Corinthians 12:12).
- (2) Wonders.
 - (a) This word emphasizes the awe and astonishment Jesus' miracles produced. They were such that no mere person could produce them, nor were they explicable on merely human premises.
 - (b) If Jesus' words created wonder (John 7:46; Matthew 7:28-29), how much more the miracles He wrought (Matthew 8:27; Mark 7:37)?
- (3) Divers miracles.
 - (a) These are more properly known as "mighty works" and they pointed to their superhuman source and the mighty power of God.
 - (b) The gospel is not a human creation, and the early hearers were not left in doubt as to its origin.
 - (c) Surely seeing water turned to wine, sight restored to those born blind, and one raised from the dead should be enough to convince anyone that He who wrought such could be believed in what He said.
 - (d) They were not all of one class but were "various" or "manifold," negating the possibility of fraud or deception.
- (4) Gifts of the Holy Spirit.
 - (a) It is not clear whether "gifts of the Holy Spirit" refers to gifts that the Holy Spirit gives (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:8-11) or the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself (cf. Galatians 3:5).
 - (b) The writer probably refers to the nine spiritual gifts which the apostles bestowed by their laying on of hands (Acts 8:18; 2 Timothy 1:6). These gifts continued to convince Christians of the great salvation of Jesus.
- b) God has given all of these according to His own will. God has boldly "gone on record" that He too is a witness to the great salvation found only in His Son: "And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me" (John 5:37).

Conclusion. One need not be violently opposed to the message to suffer loss; one need only drift away from it. Most people do not go headlong and intentionally into hell. Most people do not deliberately, in a moment,

turn their backs on God or curse Him. Most people just slowly, almost imperceptibly, slip away from the harbor of salvation out to eternal destruction.

One writer, building on Shakespeare, put it this way, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at its ebb, leads to victory; neglected, the shores of time are strewn with the wreckage." Drifting is so quiet, so easy, but so damning. All you need to do to go to hell is do nothing (Proverbs 4:20-22).